

B.A. (Programme)

Semester- I

ENGLISH

**DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC CORE COURSE
THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY**

Section : 1-5



**SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING
University of Delhi**

Department of English

THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

SECTION 1: Caste/Class

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Deliverance | P.K. Satapathy |
| 2. Joothan | P.K. Satapathy |
| 3. Kallu | P.K. Satapathy |
| 4. Bosom Friend | P.K. Satapathy |
| 5. Who were the Shudras | P.K. Satapathy |

SECTION 2: Gender

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 6. Shakespeare's Sister | Dr. Anil Aneja |
| 7. The Exercise Book | Dr. Anil Aneja |
| 8. Breaking Out | Dr. Anil Aneja |
| 9. Marriages are Made | Dr. Anil Aneja |
| 10. The Yellow Fish | Dr. Neeta Gupta |
| 11. Reincarnation of Captain Cook | Dr. Neeta Gupta |
| 12. The Highway Stripper | Dr. Neeta Gupta |

SECTION 3: Race

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 13. Black Out | Usha Anand |
| 14. Telephone Conversation | Usha Anand |
| 15. Harlem | Usha Anand |
| 16. Still I Rise | Usha Anand |

SECTION 4: Violence and War

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 17. Dulce ET Decorum Est | Nalini Prabhakar |
| 18. Conscientious Objector | Nalini Prabhakar |
| 19. Naming of Parts | Nalini Prabhakar |
| 20. General, Your Tank is a Powerful Vehicle | Nalini Prabhakar |
| 21. The Dog of Tetwal | Dr. Neeta Gupta |
| 22. A Chronicle of the Peacocks | Dr. Neeta Gupta |
| 23. The Ghost of Mrs. Gandhi | Dr. Neeta Gupta |

SECTION 5: Living in a Globalizing World

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| 24. Toys | Dr. Seema Suri |
| 25. Indian Movie, New Jersey | Dr. Seema Suri |
| 26. At the Lahore Karhai | Dr. Seema Suri |
| 27. Colombe | Dr. Seema Suri |
| 28. The Brand Expands | Dr. Seema Suri |



SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING

University of Delhi
5, Cavalry Lane, Delhi-110007

DELIVERANCE

Prem Chand

-P.K. Satapathy

1. Introduction

This story, *Deliverance* (*Sadgati* in Hindi) deals with caste relationships within an agrarian community. As mentioned in the notes at the end of the story, *Sadgati* roughly means salvation in Death. In other words a worthy death. We see the working of caste laws in this story which results in the death of Dukhi, the tanner. The preceding essay 'Caste Laws' by Jyotirao Phule also dealt with caste laws. But you must have noticed that both the texts are very different from each other. The obvious explanation is that while the first text is an essay, *Deliverance* is a short story. The style and structure of the essay is different from that of a story. 'Caste Laws' by Phule analyses the emergence of the caste system from within a certain historical context and lays bare the inhuman treatment suffered by the Sudra's under the system. On the other hand Premchand's story "*Deliverance*" presents you the working of this system in the story of Dukhi. While the essay is analytical, the story is literary and imaginary. Premchand presents you with a piece of life, an experience, to convey the terrible sufferings of the lower castes under the caste system. We shall discuss this issue a little later.

Premchand, as you know, wrote a very large number of stories and not all of them deal with the caste system. But most of his stories have a rural setting. Premchand suffered great hardship throughout his life. His own experiences in life certainly shaped him as a writer. He saw the exploitation of the poor under the Zamindari system. He not only experienced poverty but saw great poverty all around him. He experienced the corrosive effect of debt himself. All his life he worked hard to pay off his debts. He saw the suffering of the people under British Colonialism. Consequently his writing focused on zamindari, debt, poverty, colonialism and communalism. Often critics moaned the fact that there is much misery and death in Premchand's writing. However, it is not surprising that Premchand chose to write about death and misery. A writer, as connected to the soil as Premchand, could not but write about these issues.

Premchand was very clear about the role of the writer in society. The purpose of literature, for Premchand, was not just to delight, but more important to raise awareness about the various social issues at hand and bring in change. Infact when he chaired the first convention of the Indian Progressive Writers association in 1936, he pointed out that the use of the term 'Progressive' was unnecessary. He said that writers were progressive by nature otherwise they wouldn't be writers in the first place. He went on to elaborate on the social role of the writer and literature in his address. Literature must become the agent of social change. He followed in his personal life and writings what he preached in public. He resigned from his post under the United Province Government and played his part in the anti-colonial struggle. He was a writer and not a politician. Hence he made his contribution through his writings. His first collection of short stories "*Soze-watan*" was considered inflammatory and banned and all the copies were confiscated and burned. He was a committed writer and his commitment shows in his writings when he writes about not just colonialism but oppression and suffering in all its hues. '*Sadgati*' is one such story which captures the poignant death of Dukhi under an oppressive caste system.

2. Deliverance (*Sadgati*)

This story has four sections. We shall discuss each of these sections separately and at the end sum up our discussion.

2.(i) In the first section we are introduced to Dukhi and his wife Jhuriya. Both of them are making preparations to welcome the Brahman. Dukhi is a tanner who in the traditional Hindu social order are untouchables. Their job is to work with hides and remove dead animals. They belong to the lowest strata of the society. Ironically he is named Dukhi(sorrowful) to ward off evil. We see feverish activity in the Dukhi household . Dukhi is sweeping the floor clean and his wife is plastering cow dung on the floor. Cow dung is believed to clean and purify.

Interestingly, the discussion between Dukhi and his wife is centered around making their house fit for the visit of a holy man, the Brahman. We get a glimpse into the social norms prevalent in the village. The caste hierarchies are such that no one would give them even a pot of water if they asked for it. So instead of a cot they decide on making a mat of Mohwa leaves for the Brahman to sit on when he visits. They must also offer the Brahman food as offering but they cannot offer it in their own utensil because it is considered impure. So they decide to offer food on a leaf once again. Jhuri is advised to buy the offering from the village merchant but not to touch anything because the touch of the untouchable is impure. She is advised to take the help of the gond girl who is a tribal girl. The tribes do not belong to the Hindu fold and consequently escape the rigid caste laws. Dukhi makes a list of offering to be made which seems quite impressive considering the status of Dukhi. Finally he leaves for the Pandit's house to invite him with a big bundle of grass as a present.

This section not only introduces us to the main characters and the setting, it also in a very subtle way lays bare the tension and hypocrisy present in a rigid, caste based society. While Dukhi is considered an untouchable, whose touch pollutes whatever he touches, his offering and gifts are accepted by the Brahman. Dukhi lives on the margins of this society. He has no rights only obligations and duties. At the same time Dukhi seems to be a willing partner in the perpetuation of this system. He seems willing because he is kept ignorant and he is made to believe that indeed the Brahman is a holy man.

In the earlier essay, 'Caste Laws' Jyotirao Phule has pointed out the very same problem. Brahmin's with their cunning not only cornered all the privileges but also made the other castes believe that they were inferior to the Brahmins. The Brahman's were supposed to have come out of the mouth of Lord Vishnu whereas the Sudra's came out of his feet. Hence the Sudra was created to serve the Brahman. The Sudra was not allowed to study the scriptures hence he had to believe what was told to him by the Brahman. The Brahmins, thus, through a combination of myth making and denial of education, kept the Sudra oppressed. This situation prevails even in the twentieth century India (Sadgati was written in 1931). But Premchand has allowed us a glimpse of the holiness of the Brahman through the eyes of Dukhi. This Brahman seems to be very religious. "You know what a stickler he is about religion and doing things according to the rule". But he seems to have a terrible temper too. "He flies off the handle very fast". And when he does get angry he spares no one including his wife and son. He beat up his son so badly that it resulted in a broken hand for his son. Some holiness indeed.!

2(ii) The second section brings us to the house of Pandit Ghasiram. After a short account of Pandit Ghasiram's devotion to God and rituals we witness the meeting between Pandit Ghasiram and Dukhi. Pandit Ghasiram on his return from the temple finds Dukhi at his door. Dukhi immediately prostrates himself on the ground. Dukhi on being asked states his purpose for the visit. Dukhi wants the Pandit to visit his house and pick on an auspicious date for his daughter's betrothal.

Pandit Ghasiram sensing an opportunity to get some work done for free immediately sets him off on errands. He orders Dukhi to plaster the floor of his sitting room with cow dung, and

then split the wood and to take out the hay and put it in the barn. Dukhi, conditioned to obey orders of the Brahmins, immediately sets out to work.

Unfortunately, Dukhi had nothing since morning and he was terribly hungry. The Brahmin was not offering him any food. He decides to smoke a pipe instead. But his own house was a mile away. But Brahmins unlike the low castes and untouchables did not smoke tobacco. Dukhi remembers the lone Gond who stayed in the village. He visits the Gond who offers him both a pipe and the tobacco. But Dukhi needs to light his pipe. He returns to the Pandit's house and asks for a light. The Pandit asks his wife to give Dukhi a light. This upsets the Panditayan and she reminds Pandit Ghasiram about the caste laws. The Pandit on the other hand reminds her of the free labour that Dukhi is rendering and goads her to relent. Finally the Panditayan relents and throws a piece of coal at Dukhi. Dukhi smokes his pipe and gets back to work. He works hard at splitting the wood but lacks the experience to do it. The Panditayan feels a little pity for Dukhi because in the act of throwing a piece of coal at Dukhi, she almost synged him. She wonders if they could give Dukhi something to eat. After some deliberation they decide that feeding Dukhi was not worth the effort. So Dukhi keeps working without a morsel in his stomach.

This section focuses on the hardhearted nature of the Brahmin couple, the servile mentality of Dukhi and the exploitative nature of caste system. The Brahmin's holiness is almost entirely constituted in the meaningless rituals that he follows religiously. Ironically the first part of the ceremony of worship consists of preparing Bhang (an intoxicant) and the reward for the rituals is a steady stream of clients at his doorstep everyday. The Brahmin is in the business of religion and it seems quite lucrative too. The Brahmin's meaningless self-decoration and other rituals have very little to do with God or people. But the Brahmin sees it as an investment that generates a fair amount of business.

Dukhi, on the other hand, hardly understands anything about these rituals. But his servile mind perceives holiness in, what appears unremarkable to us, the Pandit's glorious figure. Phule, in the earlier essay, talked about mental slavery. We see that mental slavery acted out here through the actions of Dukhi. His mental subjugation is complete, so much so that the sight of the Pandit fills him with reverence. The sandalwood markings on the rotund figure of the Pandit appears godly to Dukhi and he is more than willing to do the Pandit's bidding.

What we see next is a fine example of the cunning, the greed and the hardhearted nature of the Pandit and his wife. When Dukhi pleads with the Pandit to grace his house and pick an auspicious date for his daughter's wedding, the Pandit immediately seizes the opportunity to exploit Dukhi's labour. Not only does he exploit Dukhi's labour he even fails to relate to Dukhi as a human being. Tired and hungry, Dukhi keeps working but the Pandit does not have the decency to offer him any refreshment. More over his attitude towards Dukhi is inhuman. Dukhi hears the conversation between the Pandit and his wife where the wife's chides the Pandit for allowing a tanner inside the house. But instead of hurt or anger we see him in agreement with the Panditayan's arguments. He has no respect for himself. He reasons that the Brahmins are clean and holy and consequently all unclean and impure people including himself must worship and respect the Brahmins. The extent of Dukhi's mental slavery becomes very clear in this scene. Though abused and humiliated, he refuses to blame anyone except himself and accepts it as his due.

2(iii) Dukhi sets about the job of splitting the wood after smoking the pipe. In the meanwhile the Gond visits him and tells him of the futility of his efforts. The Gond is sympathetic to Dukhi and enquires if Dukhi has had anything to eat. He also helps in chopping the wood for some time before he gives up. He advises Dukhi to give up the work for which he is not being paid and then he takes his leave. Dukhi, for a moment, considers quitting the work. But he is unable to

summon the courage to do it. He starts shifting the hay from the store to the fodder bin. Tired, hungry and exhausted he falls asleep. In the meanwhile the Pandit after a nice nap comes out and finds Dukhi asleep. Instead of being thankful for the service rendered by Dukhi, he starts belittling him and his caste. He also threatens Dukhi with unpleasant consequences if the work is not completed. Dukhi is shaken. After all if the Pandit refuses to pick an auspicious day then the marriage would be a disaster. A mix of awe, respect and fear gets hold of Dukhi and he gets into a state of delirium. He works the axe so hard that after sometime his tired and exhausted body gives up. He is dead.

The death of Dukhi complicates the story a little. Dukhi dies in a Brahman village, save the Gond. Removing the body of the tanner becomes a problem. The Gond's subversive activity complicates the issue further. The Gond tells the tanners in their village that if they touched the body of Dukhi they would get into trouble with the police. Consequently the tanners do not pick up Dukhi's body. Moreover Dukhi wife, daughter and a dozen tanner women go to Pandit Ghasiram's home to mourn. The scene ends in a stalemate. This section, apart from reinforcing the hard heartedness and cunning of the Pandit and the mental servility of Dukhi, introduces a new theme. The possibility of upsetting the caste hierarchies is presented by the Gond. The Gond is an outsider in the sense that he does not belong to the Hindu fold. Though he also lives on the margins of this society he is not mentally enslaved as the tanner. He is able to see things in their perspective and is able to see through the exploitation and meanness of the so called holy Pandit. Chikhuri, contrasts the holy Pandit with the colonial administration and finds the latter better. For, as he says, even if the government forced you to work they at least paid for your labour.

The prodding's of Chikhuri forces Dukhi to contemplate quitting Pandit's work. The Gond had made him aware that Pandit Ghasiram and the caste system was more exploitative than the colonial administration. But Dukhi lacks the courage to rebel against it. Further, Pandit Ghasiram's threat about not finding an auspicious date for the wedding of the daughter forces Dukhi to abandon all thoughts of rebellion. On the other hand Dukhi's pitiable condition evokes no pity in the Pandit's heart. Dukhi, with 'stomach pasted to his backbone', kept axing the wood which was as hard as steel.

Even Dukhi's death does not move the Brahman. It is only an irritant for him. The Gond tries to fan a revolt by asking the tanners to refrain from touching the body. Dukhi's corpse lies in front of Pandit Ghasiram's house in a state which is worse than a dead animal. The utter insensitivity of the Brahmins is revealed when we see them more worried about the pollution rather than trying to give the man a decent burial. This seems even more appalling when we consider the fact that Dukhi died while serving Pandit Ghasiram. The attitude of the Brahman's is made amply clear by the remark of one old woman who says "why don't you have this body thrown away?" Throw away the body of Dukhi as one throws away the carcass of a dead animal.

2(iv) Dukhi's corpse lies in front of the Brahman's house as no one would touch it. The tanner women keep up their weeping and lamentations late into the night. The corpse begins to stink. But for Pandit Ghasiram and his wife this is only an irritant. After an uneasy night Pandit Ghasiram decides to take matter into his own hands. He manages to get a noose tied around the dead man's feet and drags the corpse to the fields outside the village. After he gets back he takes a bath and performs the purification rites. The abandoned body of Dukhi in the fields becomes food for the scavengers (jackals, kites, dogs and crows). The story ends with an extremely ironic comment, 'This was the reward of a whole life of devotion, service and faith'.

There is poignancy to this short concluding section which makes us acutely aware of the inhumanity of the caste system. Dukhi, literally, dies a dog's death. There is a jarring contrast between the weeping and the insensitive, callous attitude of Pandit Ghasiram and his wife. It is

difficult to miss the profound irony of the ending. What Dukhi could not achieve in life he manages to do that in his death. Pandit Ghasiram, who considers the touch of Dukhi polluting, is forced to drag the dead body of Dukhi himself. This subversion was possible, of course, due to the effort of Chikhuri, the Gond. But the price was a dog's death for Dukhi, left in the field to be devoured by scavengers.

Summing Up

You must have noticed by now that though Jotirao Phule and Premchand are writing about similar things (caste laws) they are very different from each other. While Jotirao's essay analyses the caste flaws in terms of origins and practices, Premchand presents an experience through imagination. While Jotirao's essay appeals to our reason, Premchand story tugs at our emotions.

In Deliverance the narrative point of view is that of an observer, who also comments. We also get an insight into the minds of the tanner, Pandit Ghasiram and Chikhuri the Gond. Premchand thus, allows the reader access to look at the situation from the point of view of various characters. Though the controlling voice is that of the narrator-observer, it helps the reader to understand the actions of the various characters involved.

Premchand, in this story, provides a critique of the caste system. He does this by using irony, satire and by setting up contrasting pictures through out the story. For instance Dukhi's description of Pandit Ghasiram provides a jarring contrast to the description of Pandit Ghasiram by the narrator. Thus we see him as a short, bold roly-poly fellow with a shining skull. Coupled with the ridiculous rituals he observes so religiously, this description makes him look more like a buffoon than a godly man. By juxtaposing Dukhi's account of Pandit Ghasiram with that of a disinterested observer, Premchand keeps the reader from sharing Dukhi's point of view.

Premchand constantly uses authorial comments and objective description to influence the readers mind. For instance, Premchand brings out the meanness of the Pandit couple by describing the conversation between them about giving Dukhi a light and later some food. The dialogues between the two reveal the meanness of their characters. When it is suggested that the tanner be given some food the Pandit considers it 'entirely outside the behaviour expected of him'. He goes on to say 'You can never fill up these low-caste people with good bread'. The Panditayan responds with, 'Let's forget the whole thing...I'm not going to kill myself cooking in weather like this'. Thus ends the proposal for feeding a hungry man who has been working for free at their house since morning.

Comments like 'why don't you have his body thrown away?' 'They are all polluted' alerts the readers to the attitude of the Brahmins towards the lower castes. Premchand uses a very subtle form of satire to expose the follies of the Brahmin. He does this by contrasting the simple nature of Dukhi against the greed and cunning of the Pandit and his wife. Thus the Brahmins treat the tanners as less than humans they have no qualms in accepting gifts and offering from them. The Pandit and his wife are extremely rigid about caste laws but allow a tanner inside their house to get their work done for free which otherwise would have cost them four annas.

Premchand, despite his sympathies for the poor and oppressed, was never considered revolutionary enough for the Dalit cause. This assessment stems from the fact that though Premchand presents the possibility of subverting the caste system he never moves beyond that possibility. For instance the possibility of disturbing the caste system is prescribed in the story but it remains only a possibility. The Gond and Dukhi share a sympathetic relationship. Chikhuri being a tribal remains outside the influence of the Brahmins but nevertheless shares the same marginal space with Dukhi. Both of them often end up being exploited by the higher castes. But Chikhuri is bold and is willing to stand up against exploitation. Unlike Dukhi who is

enslaved in his mind and body, he does not consider the Brahman any higher than others. Thus he is able to see the meanness in Pandit Ghasiram. He is the one who presents the possibility of upsetting the hierarchy by a) inciting Dukhi to quit working for the Pandit free b) and then prevents the tanners in helping Pandit Ghasiram out of his difficulties (of removing the corpse of Dukhi). Chikhuri manages to upset the system for a while. In an extremely ironic reversal Pandit Ghasiram is forced to dispose off the body of Dukhi, whom he would have never touched in his life. And what comes as an even greater irony is the fact that Ghasiram disposes the corpse of Dukhi in the fields to be eaten by scavengers, after Dukhi had served him with devotion and faith. Instead of rewarding Dukhi for his services, Pandit Ghasiram has ensured that Dukhi is vilified in death as he was in life. Pandit Ghasiram performs the necessary purification rites and, perhaps resumes his normal life.

JOOOTHAN
Omprakash Valmiki

-P.K. Satapathy

1. Introduction

Omprakash Valmiki's **Joothan** is an autobiographical account of his growing up years as an untouchable in a village in UttarPradesh in the newly independent India of the 1950's. **Joothan**, as I hope you all know, literally means left overs from a meal. In another sense it also means polluted or unfit for consumption by another person. Yet for centuries, the Dalits have been forced, under various circumstances, to eat 'Joothan' for their subsistence. Thus the title of the book **Joothan** conveys the pain and humiliation faced by the author and his community, which has remained at the bottom of the social ladder for centuries. The community has been treated like 'Joothan', to be used and thrown away in the dustbins by the upper castes. Valmiki's account of his early life is an account of the heroic struggle by a dalit boy from the sweeper caste (Bhangi, chuhra) against impossible odds to get an education.

Omprakash Valmiki is an important figure in the Dalit movement in India. His own struggle made him realize that the condition of the Dalits can only change through revolutionary transformation of society and the human consciousness. Under the influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Valmiki and other Dalit writers have tried to build up a critical Dalit consciousness in their writings that allows for pride, self respect and a vision of the future. Valmiki and others felt the need for a separate Dalit consciousness or 'Dalit Chetna' because Indian literature, more or less, had ignored the Dalit voice. Often the Dalits were portrayed as villains of an unjust social system in need of saviours and the sympathy of the higher castes. Even a writer like Premchand, felt Valmiki and others, had failed the Dalits. Through Premchand is extremely sympathetic to the Dalits, he failed to give them a voice or agency. The Dalits in his stories, as you must have noticed in **Deliverence** suffer but hardly ever protest. In other words Valmiki and others felt that even Premchand lacked the Dalit consciousness. His story **Kafan** on the other hand is considered as anti- Dalit because the Dalits in the story are presented as lazy and drunk. It is in this context that the contribution of Valimiki and other Dalit writers assumes importance.

1.1. Dalit Chetna: What then is this 'Dalit Chetna'? Valimiki, in his book **Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundarya Shastra** defines Dalit as people deprived of human rights on a social level. Thus their chetna or consciousness is 'Dalit Chetna'. 'Dalit Chetna' is a revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It strives to make the Dalits conscious of their 'Dalit condition', which is a byproduct of an oppressive caste order. This emancipatory ideology is rooted in Ambedkarite thought. Some of the key features of 'Dalit Chetna' are:

- i) It is based on the welcoming vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the question of freedom and independence.
- ii) It rejects caste system, casteism, communalism and all hierarchies of language and privilege.
- iii) It rejects Brahminism, feudalism and all notions of supremacy.
- iv) It rejects traditional theories of aesthetics as elitist and motivated.

Consequently Dalit critics as well as writers have focused their attention on devoting an alternative aesthetics of Dalit literature. And quite appropriately they begin by examining the location and socio-political stance of the existing literature in relation to Dalits. The focus is on writing that includes Dalit characters, description of Dalit life and experience so that the Dalit is accorded a subject position. In other words the attempt is to have the Dalit writing rather than being written about.

1.2 The Use of Autobiography

One of the objectives of this book (The Individual and Society) is to introduce you to various kinds of writings dealing with, roughly, the same issue. In this section the issue is Caste/Class. The idea, obviously, is to examine the way language and the choice of the genre shapes the presentation as well as the construction of meaning in different kinds of writing. The first text in this section is a polemical essay by Jotirao Phule. The second text is a short story by Premchand. While Phule's essay tries to arouse the consciousness of the dalit by presenting rational arguments against the caste system, Premchand presents the pitiable condition of Dukhi, a Dalit, under an unjust and heartless caste order through the use of irony. Both the texts present a critique of the oppressive caste system in different ways.

Valmiki, on the other hand, uses autobiography to make the same point. Valmiki's choice of genre is quite deliberate. But why the autobiography? Autobiography, as you know, is a conscious literary genre that deals with the varied dimensions of personality of the subject. The author, in this form, is able to convey a sense of not just his whole life but also a sense of what it was like to have lived it at several stages. In other words, the author is able to present a lived experience from his own point of view. He is able to combine biographical facts and experiences from his point of view and at the same time is 'true to life' as well. If you recall our discussion of Dalit Chetna in section 1.1, you will recall that one of the major focus of this movement is to present the lived experiences of the Dalit from a Dalit point of view. In other words the focus is to present authentic Dalit experience from a Dalit subject position. Autobiography then, becomes the most appropriate genre to present Dalit consciousness.

2. Joothan

This short extract is taken from the book **Joothan** by Omprakash Valmiki. Valmiki manages to do three things in this extract:

- a) He gives a brief description of the physical as well as the psychological space occupied by the Chuhras in the village as a matrix of their social existence.
- b) He describes, very briefly, the day to day struggle of the untouchables to arrange two square meals for themselves. At the same time he is able to demonstrate that the economic deprivation of the untouchables is the consequence of the Hindu caste order.
- c) He chronicles his own struggle to get an education in the village school. His story demonstrates that it is indeed possible for the untouchables,

despite the hardships and deprivations, to emancipate themselves by persistent struggle and determination.

The first part of this extract, very quickly, paints the sub-human living conditions of the Chuhras in the village. The Chuhras, Valmiki's own caste, lived across the pond, which acted as a natural barrier between the upper caste quarters and the untouchables. It demarcates not just the physical space occupied by the upper and the lower castes, but the two different worlds of existence. The Chuhras exist among filth and deprivation. The description of the basti gives us a sense of the utter deprivation faced by the untouchable community. There is an all pervading stink and one could see pigs, dogs and children roaming around in the narrow streets of this basti. In short the Chuhras lived in a physical and social space devoid of human dignity, obviously as a consequence of the caste system. Thus Valmiki's early childhood is marked by this utter deprivation and lack of dignity.

The social and psychological deprivation is compounded by economic deprivation as well. Though every member of the Valmiki household worked it was difficult for them to arrange for two decent meals in a day. This economic deprivation is also a consequence of the caste order. The Chuhras did all kinds of works for the Tagas (upper caste people) and often without pay because they dare not refuse the Tagas. Due to their lowly social position they were often abused by the upper castes and made to work for free. They were considered polluted and less than human. Ironically, one could touch animals but not Chuhras. Thus they were regarded as things to be used and abused at the convenience of the upper castes.

It is within this sub-human context that Valmiki's struggle for an education begins. The government schools, though officially open for the untouchables, refused admission to them. It was a generous Sevak Ram Masihi, a Christian, who took Valmiki into his open air school. But after a tiff with Sevak Ram, Valmiki's father took him to the Basic Primary school. After a prolonged period of begging and cajoling, Master Har Phool Singh allowed Valmiki into the school. It is important to remember that all this was happening eight years after India became independent. The practice of untouchability was very much a feature of this school. The untouchables, there were two more of them in Valmiki's class, were made to sit away from the others. What is heartening though is that the three untouchable children, though from different castes, had a bond of solidarity. Despite the humiliation by fellow students as well as the teachers the three of them persisted and continued in the school.

The experience at the school, described in these passages, highlight the cruelty and heartlessness of the teachers and fellow students. It got worse with the new Headmaster Kaliram. They were openly abused in the classroom by the teacher and often beaten up as well. Valmiki takes the opportunity to highlight the fact that the Brahmin teacher in their school used swear words on a regular basis. This is a very effective reply to the critics who frowned upon the use of swear words in Valmiki's stories. He has tried to point out that when swear words are used in real life by people who are supposed to know Brahma (Brahmins) then it is legitimate to portray that reality in creative writing as a true depiction of lived experience.

The experience at the school leaves a lasting impression on the young Valmiki. For instance the image of the guru (teacher) that Valmiki would remember throughout his life is that of a man who would swear about his mother and sister and who would sexually abuse young boys. However the turning point for him as well as his father was an especially humiliating experience forced upon the young Valmiki by the Headmaster Kaliram who seems to be a rabid casteist. He

orders the frail boy to sweep the school compound day after day. Valmiki suffered this indignity for three days. On the fourth day his father discovered him with a broom in his hand sweeping the school compound. In one decisive gesture his father, instead of quietly suffering the indignity, confronts the Headmaster. The courage and fortitude shown by his father is indeed remarkable. Expectedly Valmiki was thrown out of the school. But his father was not going to give up easily. He promised the Headmaster that Valmiki would indeed study in the same school and that he will ensure that more untouchables would follow Valmiki to the school. With dogged determination Valmiki's father, with the help of the village Pradhan 'Chaudhri Saheb', managed to send him back to school thus ensuring that his own son as well as others are not denied education in the village school because of their caste.

3. Summing Up

Joothan, a self conscious Dalit literary text, makes a powerful statement against the oppressive caste system still prevalent in most parts of India. Valmiki's use of autobiography helps him to occupy a vantage subject position from which he presents a Dalit's lived experience. The 'true to life' format of the autobiography helps him to lay bare the brutality inherent in the caste system, which consequently becomes a powerful argument in favour of dismantling this undesirable form of social organization. At the same time, Valmiki's own struggles and success, acts as motivation for others to struggle and achieve their goals. **Joothan** symbolizes the struggle for dignity and human rights and demonstrates that a revolutionary transformation of society is not just desirable but possible as well.

KALLU
Ismat Chughtai

-P.K. Satapathy

Introduction

Ismat Chughtai remains one of the most important literary figures of modern India. She was one of the first Muslim women to write novels and short stories. Tahira Naqvi, a Pakistani critic, considers Chughtai as one of the four pillars of modern Urdu short story, the other three are S.H. Manto, Krishan Chander and Rajinder Singh Bedi. Apart from writing short stories and novels she also wrote articles, essays, and even film scripts.

Ismat Chughtai was born into a middle class Muslim family in 1915. And unlike most of the women, especially muslim women of her time, she had an education, worked at a job, married according to her choice. In short, she led a very unconventional life. She was a rebel not only in life but in death as well. She was, as per her expressed desires, cremated and not buried. She had begun writing short stories when she was a student at Aligarh Muslim University. But she was published only years later in 1939 and shot into prominence with the publication of 'Lihaaf' which dealt with the theme of women's sexuality. By this time she was a prominent member of the Progressive Writers Association. 'Lihaaf' created a storm not just in literary circles but also in the public sphere as well. She was charged with obscenity and tried along with another famous short story writer of the time, Sadat Hasan Manto. The trial lasted for four years and both Chughtai and Manto were cleared of the charges of obscenity because the judges could not find a single four letter word in their stories. Chughtai was mentored, earlier on, by Rasheed Jahan who she had met at the Progressive Writers Association conference in 1936. Rasheed Jahan, perhaps the first Muslim women writer, was one of the founding members of the Progressive Writers Association. She was largely instrumental in shaping Chughtai's early literary career.

Chughtai, for most part of her working life, lived in Mumbai and worked as the Principal of a girls college. She met her husband Shahid Latif at Aligarh and married him in 1942. Shahid Latif was deeply associated with the Mumbai film industry and encouraged Chughtai to associate herself with the film industry. Chughtai wrote a number of scripts for films and some of her stories were also made into films. She herself wrote the script and acted in the film 'Junoon' (1978). Her story 'Garam Hawa' which was made into a film was a part of the new wave cinema and won a lot of acclaim all over the world. But her relationship with the film world was tenuous and full of complexities. She wrote many stories where she tried to expose the hypocrisy of the film world but was not very successful at that. She was at her best when she wrote about ordinary people and especially women. Consequently much of her writings deal with women's lives within middle class society and their concerns. Some critics do accuse Chughtai of being unidimensional. But then that was what she was best at. She had a keen eye for detail, and had an intuitive understanding of the concerns of women in the smaller town of Uttar Pradesh. Her writing is marked by understanding and compassion for these women. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 1975 for her contribution to Urdu literature and she died on 24th Oct 1991.

2. Kallu

Kallu is the story of a poor young boy who is sent by his mother to stay with a well-to-do family in the hope that Kallu, with the help of this family, will be able to make something of himself and improve his position in life. But, ironically, Kallu finds himself in very unfavorable

circumstances. He is made to work like a servant, exploited (he worked for only two rupees a month), ill treated by this family, especially Mumani. Kallu bears all the indignity and hardship with a smile. Kallu has no time to play. But Kallu takes a liking for Salima bi, the youngest daughter of Mumani and the feeling seems to be mutual. One day Kallu while playing with Salima bi, asks her, in all innocence, if she would marry him to which Salima bi innocently says yes. Mumani, who is within hearing distance of the conversation goes into a rage and throws a sandal at Kallu which finds Kallu's nose and he starts bleeding. Kallu's mother who was visiting her son then, sees a bleeding Kallu and creates a furore about it. Mumani throws both mother and son out of the house immediately. Kallu, like all servants before him, is forgotten very soon.

But Kallu returns, years later, to the same town as a young and handsome Mr. Din, the Deputy Collector. Once again the relationship between Kallu, now Kalim Saheb for the family, and his earlier masters is renewed, but on altered terms. Ironically he is accepted back into the family for precisely the same reasons for which he was thrown out in the first place – for expressing his desire to marry Salima bi.

The Story illustrates the rigid class hierarchies that govern social intercourse in an Indian society. The story also hints at the complex relationship between caste and class in our social structures. Kallu, despite his lowly social position, is able to improve his position in society, perhaps due to the fact that he is a 'Qureshi', a higher caste among Muslims. When Mumani learns of Kallu's appointment as the Deputy Collector she reacts with incredulity. But she is immediately reminded by the narrator's mother "Amma" that after all Kallu was a 'Qureshi' which was a good caste. Though the Muslims do not have a caste system, the actual ground reality was a little different. Omprakash Valmiki in his 'Joothan' points out that Taga's, the Muslim equivalent of the Tyagi's did behave in certain ways like caste Hindus.

The story, as you must have noticed, has two parts. The first part of the story details the early life of Kallu in the narrator's house. Kallu is kept busy the entire day running errands for the household. The poor boy ends up doing the work of an adult. The irony of the situation is that Kallu is sent by his mother to the family with the fond hope that Kallu will be able to improve his position in life. But Kallu ends up as a servant of the household. Though Kallu is the errand boy, he is treated differently by different members of the family. While 'Amma', the narrator's mother, treats Kallu with sympathy, Mumani Jan is harsh on Kallu and looks down upon him. 'Amma' seems to be indulgent towards Kallu. Once Kallu is asked in a lighter vein, who he was going to marry. Kallu, in all innocence, expresses his desire to marry Salima bi, Mumani's daughter. Mumani's response to Kallu's innocent answer reflects Mumani's attitude. She not only abuses Kallu but also boxes his ears as well. Mumani rejects the idea of Kallu getting married to Salima Bi because of Kallu's social status.

The Second part of the story presents an entirely different situation. In the course of life the social status of Kallu as well as the narrator's family has altered. Kallu, now, has achieved a higher social status than the narrator's family. He is the deputy Collector. On the other hand the narrator's family has witnessed a declining social and economic position. In this altered scenario the family's response to Kallu's new social status is also fractured; while 'Amma' is happy with Kallu's rising fortune, Mumani Jan is indignant. Mumani is unable to accept the new Kallu, who has retained his love for Salima Bi. When 'amma' reminds Mumani Jan of the ill-treatment she had meted out to Kallu, she is even more indignant. But this indignation is also mixed with guilt and anxiety as well. But Mumani is unable to accept the altered situation because it entails an admission of her guilt. However Kallu makes it easy for Mumani Jan by restoring the former

hierarchy. He pleads with Mumani Jan for Salima bi hand in marriage and addresses her as Dulhan bi, the way he used to address her when he worked in their house. Once the former hierarchy is restored at least in a symbolic way, Kallu is accepted by Mumani jan and she is addressed as 'Amma bi' by Kallu. Thus, in a symbolic shift, Mumani jan is turned from the master 'Dulhan bi' to mother (Amma bi).

BOSOM FRIEND

Hira Bansode

-P.K. Satapathy

Introduction

Like all Dalit Literature Dalit poetry constitutes another dissenting collection of voices that try to articulate the silent anguish, pain as well as anger of the Dalits. For them, like most other Dalit writers and thinkers caste is much more real than class. Consequently their articulation revolves around the experiences which spring from the humiliating caste equations of the Hindu society. Dalit poetry has tried to rework a new aesthetic, different from the mainstream literature, by exploring areas of experience neglected by the mainstream poetic tradition. Dalit poetry marks itself by rejecting values of the mainstream poetic tradition like propriety, balance, restraint and understatement. They often challenge even notions of patriotism. The diction used is often deliberately subversive which challenges middle class notion of linguistic decency.

On the other hand Dalit women poets have primarily focused on women experiences within as well as without. Dalit women's experience seems to be qualitatively different. As has been often observed Dalit women are like drums, beaten on both the sides. Or one can say that thus they are 'twice Dalit'--- Dalits in the larger social scheme and Dalits within their own community as well. Thus their poetry tends to be more introspective and less given into sloganeering and abuse. It is more mature, sober and larger in its concerns. Much of Dalit women's poetry is conscious of form, less angry and complaining. There is even a time of celebration of Dalit identity in their poetry.

Hira Bansode is one of the more celebrated and better known Dalit poets. She had managed, with encouragement from her husband and her father-in-law, to acquire higher education and even managed to secure a government job with the Indian Railways. Her poetry, as you must have noticed in this poem, tends to be gentle and understated. Yet with a subtle irony she is able to express the pain and anguish of the Dalit existence which is marked by constant deprivation.

Bosom Friend

'Bosom Friend' forms a part of a collection of poems called Phiyad (1984). As the title suggests this poem is about a very good friend, a woman friend, who accepts the poet's invitation for dinner and visits her for the first time. The first paragraph expresses the poet's surprise as well as her admiration and gratitude for this friend who seems to have broken through the caste and traditional barriers to reach out to her untouchable friend. This friend, who obviously is from a higher caste, surprises the poet because women, who are actually the worst victims of oppressive traditions, are often the most orthodox defenders of the same traditions. The poet is overwhelmed by this magnanimous gesture and the courage shown by her friend. Her own small existence is marked by her pocket sized house. *"but you came with a mind large as the sky to my pocket size house."*

But the optimism, the expectations raised by this apparent magnanimity of the friend is belied in the second paragraph. The poet is grateful that her friend has reached out to her, bridging the chasm of social norms that has kept them apart till now. The emotional and psychological divide, products of the caste and social divide, are bridged, at least for a moment, between the two friends. The poet's gratitude for this gesture from her friend is beautifully

captured in the image of Shabari, the tribal woman who, in her devotion to Lord Rama, tasted each of the berries she offered him to ensure that they were indeed sweet. The poet's love, devotion and gratitude is, perhaps, naive like that of Shabari. But her expectations are shattered the moment she offers food to her friend. The friend smirks at the way the food is arranged and promptly reproaches the poet for her inability to serve food the way upper caste people do.

***You still don't know how to serve food
Truly, you folk will never improve***

This heartless reproach reopens the chasm that was bridged for some time with the friend's visit. This us and them divide, it seems, has much deeper roots. Identities which are built up on the notions of pure/impure need much more than a visit to be merged into one human identity. The poet now turns inwards with this reproach. The poet's out-stretched hands, which had touched the sky of freedom, freedom from her caste bondage, find rejection. She feels ashamed. A further reproach from the friend for not serving buttermilk makes her sad and speechless. The sky, a symbol of hope and freedom, which was within reach a moment ago recedes back. The hurt, almost a betrayal, stirs up memories of loss and deprivation.

***I was sad, then dumb But the next moment I came back to life. A stone dropped in the water
stirs up things on the bottom.***

The poet wakes up to the reality of her existence which she had forgotten for a moment in a state of heightened expectation, triggered by the visit of this friend. Though she now leads a middle class existence, her past is marked by deprivation and struggle.

Dear Friend-you ask about buttermilk what/how can I tell you ?.

An existence marked by much deprivation leaves its mark on the mind and shapes habits of thought which are difficult to shake off. This is something that the friend cannot understand because she is far removed from this experience due to her privileged position in society. There is a slight reproach along with a sense of hurt in the poet's tone in the third paragraph.

***You know in my childhood we didn't even have milk for tea much less yoghurt or
buttermilk.***

The last few lines, in an ironic shift talk about habits of mind. But this line is about the friend who, while pretending to treat the poet as an equal, still, treats her as an unequal. The friend's reproach that '***Truly, you folk will never change***' turns back on her in an ironic reversal. Though she had accepted the poet's invitation and visited her house, in apparent disregard for caste or tradition, she still carries the baggage of her tradition in her mind.

***Dear Friend-you have not discarded your tradition
Its roots go deep in your mind***

Though this friend has crossed the physical threshold of caste she still carries it in her mind. She has recreated the emotional and psychological divide once again within the poet's house. The 'you' in her phrase 'you folk will never improve' once again imprisons the poet within a predefined psycho-social space and simultaneously redefines her self in opposition to the poet's identity. She denies the poet's essential humanity by formulating her in a fixed

communal identity. And all this because, *'Today the arrangement of food on your plate was not properly ordered'*.

The poem ends with a couple of theoretical questions.

Are you going to tell me what

Mistakes I made ?

Are you going to tell me my

Mistakes ?

These questions carry within them a reproach as well as a challenge. These questions also put this visit in its real perspective. Friends visit each other to share, to be together in an emotional and social bond and not to find faults. This friend makes the visit but retains her sense of superiority. The attitude displayed by this friend is symptomatic of a larger problem that simply cannot be resolved by empty gestures like this visit. The chasm of caste that divides people, that sets people up in a hierarchy can only change when we change habits of thought. This divide can only be bridged in a spirit of accommodation and understanding, by accepting alternate realities and alternate identities.

WHO WERE THE SHUDRAS?**Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

*-P.K. Satapathy***1. Introduction**

It is only appropriate that a section dealing with caste laws must have an essay by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. He is the intellectual and ideological fountain head from which the Dalit movement in India draws its sustenance. You have already read an essay by Jotirao Phule. His essay, 'Caste Laws' also dealt with a similar issue. Although Phule had pioneered the Dalit movement in India, he was not a thinker and a scholar like B.R. Ambedkar. Jotirao Phule was a crusader and you must have noticed it in the tone and tenor of his essay. B.R. Ambedkar was also inspired by the work of Phule. And the admiration he had for Phule is amply evident in the dedication in the book 'Who were the Shudras'. He dedicates the book to Jotirao Phule, who was 'The greatest Shudra of Modern India, who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule'. Its no wonder then that the slogan 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' became the catch phrase of Ambedkar's fight for justice for the depressed classes in India.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, unlike most of the Dalits, was fortunate to have an education. His father, who was serving in the British Army, was very keen to educate his son. After completing his graduation in 1912, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar went to Columbia University with the help of a scholarship from the Gaikwad of Baroda. While working towards his Ph.D. at Columbia University, he was already thinking about the caste system in India and its disastrous consequences for the Dalit. In 1916 he wrote an article "Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Growth and Development" for an anthropology seminar. By this time he was convinced that the caste system was an elaborate hoax perpetuated by the Brahmins to corner all the privileges for themselves and to reduce the shudras to the status of slaves. He continued his further studies in economics and law in England with a short break in between during the war years. When he finally finished his studies and came back to India in 1923, he was one of the mostly highly educated men of his times. He considered himself fully equipped, now to fight for the rights of the Dalits.

After his return he immediately started working on his mission by establishing the Bahishkrut Hitkari Sabha in 1924. Apart from providing legal help to the depressed classes, Dr. Ambedkar, through this organization led a number of non-violent movements against inhumanity and the caste system. His strategy was to awaken the masses and subvert the orthodox practices by leading the untouchables into Hindu places of worship. Two of the more prominent examples were entering the Kalaram Temple and securing the rights of the untouchables to use a common water source, the Chowdar Tank, after a long and protracted legal battle. If you look closely, you will notice that Dr. Ambedkar was following in Jotirao Phule's footsteps in his fight against the caste system. Later he went on to demand a separate electorate for the Dalits which brought him into conflict with Mahatma Gandhi.

Dr. Ambedkar was convinced that the Dalits would never get justice under the existing social system. Thus his primary concern during the later part of the freedom struggle was to secure as much autonomy for the Dalits as possible. Thus it was imperative not just to educate them but also to organize them politically so that they were able to get their due in an Independent India. At the same time it was important to reform the society and get rid of the caste system by

creating public opinion national as well as international against the evils of this system. Thus Dr. Ambedkar wrote a lot of articles and books about the caste system. By the time of the Second Round Table Conference at London, where he had raised the demand for a separate electorate for the Dalits, he had become very unpopular with the congress as well as dominant Orthodox Hindus. But Dr. Ambedkar's conviction was hardly ever shaken by this rising unpopularity. In fact his opposition to this evil system was so strong that in 1935 at Depressed Classes Conference he declared that though he was born a hindu he did not intend to die one. Later on in 1956, he converted to Buddhism and 3,80,000 men converted along with him. Though he ensured that untouchability was outlawed by the constitution of India, much of his dreams remain to be realized even now. He passed away soon after his conversion to Buddhism in 1956. But his writings and ideas remain central to and have inspired the Dalit movements in India.

2. Who were the Shudras?

This book was published in 1946. And this particular extract is taken from the preface to the book. A preface as you know is written by the author where he explains what the book is all about and also explains the reason why he wrote the book. The reason for writing this book, according to Dr. Ambedkar, was to challenge the orthodox conception of the four castes and to prove that prevailing condition and social status of the shudras was the result of a cunning manipulation of the original Varna system by the Brahmins.

In the preface Dr. Ambedkar identifies five kinds of Hindus and their characteristics. They are:

- a. The orthodox hindu who believes that there is nothing wrong with the hindu society, and the caste system.
- b. The Arya samajists who believe in the primacy of the Vedas and the permanent and eternal nature of the Vedas.
- c. A class of hindus who agree that the caste system is wrong but see no reason to attack it. They believe that since the law does not recognize the caste system, it is a dying, if not a dead, system.
- d. The political hindu who believes that swaraj is more important than social reform.
- e. The rationalist hindu who considers social reform more important than swaraj.

This extract primarily deals with the antagonism shown by the orthodox hindus to his own ideas and the likely response that the present book might elicit from this group of Hindus. In the first paragraph Dr. Ambedkar spells out in very clear terms that the book is a challenge to orthodoxy and that no amount of angry and violent reaction from the orthodox hindus can deter him from attacking the orthodoxy and fabrication in the Sacred Books of the hindus. He expresses his surprise over the fact that the orthodox hindu, who otherwise presents himself as meek and non-violent can become extremely intolerant and violent when someone attacks his Sacred Books. And what is even more surprising is the fact that the so-called highly educated hindu occupying high positions, instead of displaying a free and open mind tend to join the orthodox Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar, also makes it clear that he is determined to attack and expose the duplicity and politics in these Sacred Books by producing evidence from these books. This attack, he clarifies, is not inspired by any personal animosity but by common good. The guiding principle of his work is the pursuit of historical truth and to highlight the fact that these Sacred Books were responsible for the decline and fall of this great country. Thus in the first paragraph, in a very concise manner, Dr. Ambedkar tells us what the book is all about and the motive behind writing such a book. The tone is combative and the style is declamatory and rhetorical.

In the second paragraph Dr. Ambedkar talks about the rationalist hindu to whom he has addressed his argument. He points out that it is undesirable to postpone seeking a solution to the inherent problem of communalism that we find in the Hindu social organization. The Hindu social organization, is an exclusivist form, which excludes the majority of the people from privileges and dignity thereby making the system inherently unstable which, sooner or later, is bound to break apart unless immediate measures are taken to correct these imbalances.

In the third and fourth paragraphs he provides justifications for attacking the Sacred Books of the Hindus and for not displaying enough respect that the Sacred Books demand. He offers two arguments in his defense.

- a) Historical research has only one objective and that is the pursuit of truth. It does not make any distinction between the sacred and profane. Historical research treats all literature as belonging to the people and hence must be examined and tested by established rules of evidence.
- b) Respect for Sacred Books is a product of various social factors. Much of it has to do with the belief structures of a society. Thus what is Sacred for one may not be so for another. For instance it is natural for a Brahmin scholar to have an uncritical reverence for the Sacred Hindu literature which was exclusively produced by the Brahmins to protect the privileged and superior position enjoyed by the Brahmins. On the other hand it would be unnatural for non-Brahmins to respect and uphold a body of literature which is responsible for their social degradation. The fact that Dr. Ambedkar is not just a non-Brahmin but an untouchable would then explain his lack of respect for these Sacred Books.

In the next two paragraphs Dr. Ambedkar alerts the readers to the fact that an extreme position on either side, the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins could be extremely harmful for historical research. While the Brahmin scholar, over the ages, has strongly defended the Sacred Books at the cost of truth, it is quite possible that a non-Brahmin scholar could go to the other extreme and discredit the entire body of literature at the cost of truth. The Brahmin is, of course, driven by self interest. Consequently the Brahmin scholar, in his desire to maintain the status quo from which he derives his privilege and authority, has done very little original work. On the other hand the non-Brahmin scholar, driven by the desire to free himself from the clutches of this stifling system might be tempted to discard sincere and impartial enquiry and try to examine history from the perspective of non-Brahmin politics. Dr. Ambedkar goes on to reassure his readers that he has, in this book, kept away from extreme positions and has focused on the issue at hand purely from a historical perspective. He assures the readers that though he is associated with a non-Brahmin political movement, he has not allowed himself to be swayed by his politics while writing this book.

The concluding paragraph, as is usual in a preface, explains some of the faults of this book, one of which is long quotations from the sacred books, though in English translation. The book, he says, is designed to serve the interests of the shudras who for historical and social reasons are ignorant of the Sacred Books. The didactic purpose is made clear in the concluding line. Dr. Ambedkar believes that the shudras by tolerating this inhuman system and because of their ignorance, have been instrumental in sustaining the caste system. Hence it is only the shudras who can overthrow this system. But before they can do that they need to educate themselves about the truth of caste system.

THEME: GENDER

-Dr. Anil Aneja

Introduction

Chapters 7-15 of the textbook prescribed in your course, namely, *The Individual and Society* are clubbed under the heading Gender. The study materials on this section of the book have been prepared with a view to help you better understand some of the key issues, which have been focused upon in the prescribed pieces.

History is a witness to the fact that most societies and communities throughout the world over a period of centuries have been patriarchal in nature and have tended to practice the principle of male superiority. Such a practice has resulted in the constant and prolonged suppression of nearly one-half of the world's population, the women. Despite the technology age of the 21st century in which we live, tendencies consciously or unconsciously aimed towards the marginalization of women still prevail and find various manifestations. Further, it is important to note that these tendencies are not just due to a physical difference between men and women. Rather, these are the outcome of a more deep-seated psychological element of male superiority as well as a result of the social and cultural upbringing.

You do not have to look too far to observe gender discrimination. Most of you may have observed that in your particular family or community men get a preferential treatment over women. Whether it is the birth, the education, the career or the marriage, society often practices different standards for boys and girls. Many-a-time you may have even wanted to rebel against such a discrimination, but your voice was not heard or given due importance just because you are a woman.

The pieces prescribed in your course under the heading "Gender" are expressions of protests on issues concerning discrimination against women, protests the voice of which is often crushed in reality. While issues related to individual pieces are discussed in detail later in the study material, we may at this point observe that studied together the nine pieces prescribed in your course under the heading "Gender" present various forms of discrimination against women in their multiple and complex dimensions. The selected pieces are written by Indian as well as foreign writers, men as well as women. These cover many representative voices of protest against gender discrimination asserting the feminist view point with which many writers and thinkers of the twentieth century were preoccupied.

A dictionary of literary terms defines Feminist Criticism as "a mode of critical discourse that emphasizes culturally determined gender differences in the interpretation of literary works". The basic thrust of feminist criticism and gender issues related to it has been to "condemn male attitudes towards women, charging that men have historically imposed their will on women in order to convince them in their inherent inferiority."

If "Shakespeare's Sister" and "The Exercise Book" highlight the intellectual potentials and creative aspirations of women by a male-dominated society, "The Girl" presents to us the difficulties of a growing up girl who is being conditioned in the typical image of a woman by her mother. It will be incorrect however to say that all the writings prescribed in your course are about suppression only. In "The Breaking Out" we see that the girl is able to break the rod which

terrorized her, and the “Yellow Fish” in Ambai’s writing gets back her life by being thrown back in the sea.

So, to conclude, we may say that feminism is not just about discrimination and marginalization of women, it also includes the challenging of such a suppression and possible victory over it.

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER*Virginia Woolf*

—*Dr. Anil Aneja***Introduction**

Virginia Woolf, an eminent writer of Twentieth Century literature, is well known for her use of modern techniques in novel writing, and her views about the position of women in society. Her essay titled “A Room of Ones Own”, which appeared in 1929, became famous as a piece of modern feminist writing. The essay in your course, “Shakespeare’s Sister” is an extract taken from “A Room of Ones Own.”

In “Shakespeare’s Sister”, Virginia Woolf explores the plight of women in society in England during the 15th and 16th centuries. Through a subtle analysis, Woolf raises certain concerns regarding discrimination against women in a male dominated society, such as denial of education to the girl-child, violence against women, the need for freedom of expression in women, and the right to human dignity and equality.

Textual Analysis

Para 1: The extract begins with the writer’s disappointment on not being able to find concrete reasons for the poor plight of women. Instead of being flooded by a variety of views that do not help her arrive at a conclusion, she decides to narrow down the inquiry. Woolf seeks answers to her questions from the historian, who is known to record facts. She endeavours to find out from the historian the conditions under which women lived, turning her attention to women who lived in England during the time of Queen Elizabeth, 1.

Para 2: The writer is puzzled by the observation that there were no known women writers in an era in which so many men wrote songs, sonnets and other works of literature. Using the analogy of a spider’s web, Virginia Woolf points to the close association between fiction and life. Even when the link between the two is not very obvious, it still exists, she maintains.

Para 3: The writer turns to Professor Trevelyan’s *History of England*, a well known book of history. In her quest for the position of women in society, she was appalled to read in this book that “wife-beating was a recognized right of man, and was practiced without shame by high as well as low.” As we know, the concept of feminism supports women’s rights on the grounds of equality of the sexes. So Virginia Woolf is shocked to know about the real plight of women from Professor Trevelyan’s historical records. Disturbing facts about the status of women came to light as the writer continued reading Trevelyan’s book: such as, girls who refused to marry a person of her parents’ choice were locked up and beaten. In the fifteenth century, marriage was not a matter of personal feelings, but of family interests. Thus, the interests of the women concerned were primarily ignored. The position of women did not change much even two centuries later, according to this history book. Even in the seventeenth century, women of the upper and the middle class rarely chose their own husbands. Both in terms of law and social customs, the husband was the “lord and master,” and the wives had a subservient position. However, women in literature (such as Shakespeare’s female characters) and biographical accounts (such as the seventeenth century memoirs of Verneys) have strong personalities and distinct characters. Virginia Woolf agrees with this observation of Professor Trevelyan, and then

adds that women had displayed strength of character in the works of poets from the beginning of time. She cites many characters as examples, such as, Antigone (of Sophocles' drama), Clytemnestra (of Aeschylus' play), Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Rosalind and Desdemona of Shakespeare's plays, and Tolstoy's Anna Karenina among several other examples. All these women characters have dynamic personalities. Thus, women in fiction or in works of literature are endowed with strong personalities. But, in reality, the rights of women were trampled upon and they were "locked up, beaten and flung about the room", as Professor Trevelyan points out.

Para 4: Thus, an odd picture of woman comes to light. In terms of imagination or creative literature, women receive high importance. But in practical terms or in terms of real society, women are down trodden and of no significance. In poetry, the woman is a predominant and inspiring figure; in the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction she has great significance; her speeches in literature reflect great thoughts. But, on the other side of the coin, in reality a woman became a slave of any man her parents chose for her, in real life a woman could hardly read or spell, she was virtually illiterate and was regarded as a property of her husband, always subject to his will.

Para 5: *A strange picture like that of an odd monster of a woman would come to the fore, if one were to read the historian's view of women first and that of the poets' afterwards.* The writer regrets the scarcity of detailed facts about women in recorded works. There are no detailed substantial facts about women. There is hardly any mention of her in history. This fact points to her insignificant stature in society.

Para 6: In an attempt to find women's role or significance in history, the writer turns our attention to Professor Trevelyan's concept of history. To this historian, history incorporated many things such as, methods of agriculture, the Crusades (that is medieval military expeditions made by Europeans to recover Holy Land,) the University, the House of Commons (a part of the parliament in England) etc. However, apart from mentioning a few ladies of great stature such as Queen Elizabeth, there is no mention of women. Not a single middle class woman could have been perceived to have participated in historical events or in great movements, which comprise history. Even the famous seventeenth century English diarist John Aubrey does not mention her. The writer is shocked at the complete lack of records about women. Lack of availability of information and reading material regarding the female sex is a clear pointer to the gender bias. Not only do historians and diarists fail to write about women, even women themselves have added to their obliteration by not writing about their own lives or maintaining their own diaries. Virginia Woolf points out the great necessity for a mass of information about women, and wonders why some brilliant scholar does not supply it. The feminist writer feels that history could be re-written by including information about women, or, at least a supplement could be added to history books about women. Looking at the book shelves, she finds it shockingly regrettable that there is no information about women before the eighteenth century. The writer had begun her exploration with the question of discrepancy between men and women, which is manifested by the utter lack of women's writings in a prolific age of literature like the Elizabethan age. But she failed to find a satisfactory answer to such basic issues, such as, education and literacy of women, and how they occupy themselves in their daily lives. Apparently, they had no money of their own, and were married off at a very young age without their consent being taken into account. All the probings of the writer about the condition of women are indicative of her concern for the basic rights of women. The writer is reminded of an old deceased bishop whose opinion about women was so low that he asserted that it was impossible for any woman to have the genius of Shakespeare whether in the past, present or

future. Such an attitude points to the suppression of women to the extent that her identity, genius, intellect are completely denied by men.

Para 7: Through an imaginative reconstruction, Woolf wonders what would have happened to a talented woman if she were born in the age of Shakespeare. Since facts about women were difficult to obtain, the writer reflects upon what what would have happened if Shakespeare had a highly gifted sister. Woolf names the hypothetical sister as Judith. Shakespeare, being a man had the privileges of education and entertainment. He went to seek his fortune in London. He worked in the theatre, became successful as an actor, and lived in the center of activity in the famous city of London. In the meantime, his highly talented sister, one may suppose, stayed at home. Judith was as imaginative and adventurous as her famous brother, but being a girl, she was discriminated against and not educated. So, unlike Shakespeare she did not have the privilege of studying grammar and logic or studying Latin. Being a gifted person, she was interested in reading books, and used to sometimes pick up her brother's book perhaps. When her parents came to know of this, they told her to take care of "womanly" things such as cooking and stitching. Being talented, she probably wrote something, but knowing the strict restrictions imposed on women, probably hid her writings or set them on fire. As was the custom of her times, she was engaged to be married at a very young age. When she refused to get married, she was badly beaten by her father. Then her father stopped using such corporal punishment, and tried to emotionally coerce her. Driven by such external pressures, Judith ran away from home to London. She had good music sense as well as a taste for the theatre like her famous brother. When she expressed her desire to act, men laughed at her, because she lived in an age whereby a woman's individual talents were greatly suppressed, and she was expected to be confined to the four walls of her home. Her literary genius did not wish to be rebuffed by such ante-feminist attitudes in a male dominated society. An actor-manager named Nick Greene became friendly with her'; and she found herself pregnant. A woman of genius in Shakespeare's time was prone to exploitation by men. Judith was ultimately led to commit suicide, as she was a woman of talent, out of synchronization with the times she lived in.

Para 8: Woolf's imaginative reconstruction of Judith's tale highlights the plight of a woman of genius born in Shakespeare's age. Social and cultural exigencies made it impossible for talented women to have existed and expressed themselves in Shakespeare's times. Yet, the writer continues to think that genius must have existed among women as well as amongst the working class, even though it could not come to light. The writer cites Emily Bronte (a nineteenth century woman novelist) and Robert Burns (a working class Scottish poet) as examples of genius. Woolf feels that when a person reads about a witch, or of a woman possessed by devils, or about an outstanding man who had a mother --- these may be taken as indicators of the existence of a lost woman novelist or a suppressed female poet whose talents did not find any limelight.

Para 9: Reflecting upon the story of Shakespeare's sister, as the writer had made it up, Woolf reinforces the point that any woman who had extra-ordinary talent in the sixteenth century, would have either gone crazy, or committed suicide, or lived in isolation outside the village. Isolated because of her genius, she would have regarded as a half-witch, half wizard, and people would have either feared her or made fun of her. Even nineteenth century women writers had to adopt male pseudonyms, such as Currer Bell, George Eliot and George Sand. Adopting the name of a man and assuming anonymity by women were customs greatly encouraged by men. As Pericles, the Athenian statesman and orator of fifth century BC had said, publicity in women

was a hateful quality. Thus, we see from Virginia Woolf's exposition, how women were suppressed, their rights and fundamental identity denied.

Para 10: In the concluding section of the essay, Woolf says that Judith, the talented poet who could not express herself in writing and was buried in the crossroads, still lives on. With deep empathy for women whose rights are denied, the writer says that Shakespeare's sister lives on in women of today, and in women who efface themselves to nurture their families. The opportunity to empower such women is soon coming within our reach. The writer believes that in times to come, if women are given space and freedom, and have the courage to express their opinions in writing, if they view life objectively, if women are able to look beyond Milton's perspective (that Eve was morally and intellectually lesser than Adam), then the opportunity will come when Shakespeare's sister (or women of talent) will have a tangible identity of their own. If we create a conducive environment, Judith can come in our midst and freely express herself.

Critical Comments

Lack of women writers in a particular age and lack of historical records regarding women are silent indicators of the suppression of the voice of women in society. In her subtle exploration of the status of women in society, Virginia Woolf exposes appalling facts about the condition of women during earlier centuries in England. Gender bias was strong in Elizabethan England: men and women were not treated as equals. We are shocked to know that "wife beating was a recognized right of man". Also, girls were denied education in England upto the eighteenth century.

Women in real society were completely different from the inspiring female characters that we see in great works of literature. In reality, according to social dictates, women were subservient to men. The complete lack of information about women before the eighteenth century in England, shows the extent of discrimination against women on the basis of gender and their low position in society.

By means of imaginative reconstruction, Virginia Woolf explores what would have happened to a talented woman if she had been born in Shakespeare's times. Through this method, the writer raises fundamental issues concerning gender bias such as denial of education to the girl-child, denial of expression of the self and ones talents, and denial of choice in personal matters. Suppression of identity of women in the patriarchal society of sixteenth and seventeenth century England was so severe that any woman of exceptional genius of those times would have been led to commit suicide, become crazy, or live in utter isolation—Woolf concludes.

In the concluding section of the essay, Shakespeare's hypothetical sister Judith emerges as a symbolic figure of a woman of genius, seeking to come to life in a conducive atmosphere for appropriate self-expression. The writer calls for a change of attitudes in society, whereby one can find parity between men and women, whereby women find space, courage and liberty to express themselves.

GLOSSARY

avalanche:	an overwhelming amount
lava:	hot molten rock
distractions:	things that prevent full attention

perennial:	lasting for a very long time
incorporeal:	without a physical body or form
avarice:	extreme greed for wealth or material things
chivalrous:	polite and gallant, specially towards women (here used ironically)
beacon:	A light acting as a signal for ships or aircraft. Here, a shining example
suet:	hard white fat used in making puddings, pastry etc.
dissolution:	the formal closing down or ending of an official body or agreement
agrarian:	relating to agriculture
poached:	to take illegally or secretly from private or protected areas
wool-stapler:	A dealer in wool
poodles:	A breed of dog with curly coat
the Elephant and Castle	A tavern situated at a busy cross road in London. Suicides were buried at cross roads.
Emily Bronte:	A 19 th century woman novelist
Robert Burns:	working class Scottish poet in the 18 th century
Edward Fitzgerald:	a 19 th century English poet and translator
Curer Bell, George Eliot and George Sand:	male pseudonyms of some women writers.
Pericles:	A Greek statesman and orator of 5 th century B.C.
Milton's bogey:	Milton's view that Eve was normally and intellectually inferior to Adam.
obscurity:	the state of being unknown

THE EXERCISE BOOK*Rabindranath Tagore*

—*Dr. Anil Aneja***Introduction**

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) hailed from a well-to-do and talented family in Bengal. He was an outstanding poet, who won Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. Tagore is also known for his short stories, plays and essays. He was trailblazer in the field of education, and founded Shanti Niketan. During the nationalist movement and struggle for India's independence, Tagore emerged as a great thinker.

His visit to England at the age of 17 for a period of two years, gave him an exposure to Western culture and life. He saw the wide gulf between the social conditions and gender equations of the two countries. Some of his writings raise issues about the position of women in Indian society, education of the girl-child, child-marriage and the plight of women in a male dominated society.

Tagore's short story, "The Exercise Book", centers around the life of a girl-child in Bengal, named Uma. Her joys and sorrows, and her innocent and justifiable aspirations (chiefly her desire for reading and writing in an age which suppressed education of girls), her life as a child-bride --- these form the crux of the story.

Textual Analysis

The very first sentence of this short story highlights the attitude of the family towards the girl-child. Girls were not expected to be educated in Tagore's times. Rather, they were thoroughly discouraged to read and write. The story is narrated from the point of view of a little girl called Uma and poignantly reveals her desire for education.

Little Uma was considered a troublesome person by her family when she started learning how to write. She scribbled on every wall of the house with a piece of coal words from a Bengali nursery rhyme. Finding a copy of the novel Haridas's Secrets, she wrote a phrase "Black water, red flower" on every page. She wrote on the pages of the family almanac, as well as in her father's account book.

Initially, she was not scolded or checked for writing here-and-there. But one day Uma made the mistake of writing on her brother Gobindlal's essays. Gobindlal used to frequently write for newspapers. Though he did not appear to be capable of deep thought, nor did he use much logic in his writing, nevertheless, using the power of rhetoric, he often wrote and published.

Uma's brother was beside himself with rage He beat her and then took away from her writing tools. Deeply hurt and humiliated, Uma wept and rightly felt that the punishment she received was much more than she deserved.

After a period of time, Gobindlal returned her writing tools and also gifted her an Exercise Book. From that day, this exercise book assumed great importance in Uma's life. Many of her individual thoughts, lines from poems and prose found a place in this exercise book.

Very soon however, such opportunities for reading, writing and quietly expressing herself came to an abrupt end when Uma was married off at the tender age of nine to Pyarimohan, a friend and literary associate of her brother. Child marriage was a prominent social evil of the times. The parting advice that Uma received from her mother and brother was to refrain from reading and writing. Such statements point to a clear gender bias in society at the turn of the nineteenth century in India, when literacy in females was considered an offence. The child-bride's heart was full of fear and misgivings as she left her parent's house. Her trusted servant Jashi accompanied her to her in-laws house, and stayed there for a few days to settle Uma in a new environment. The days Jashi returned to Uma's parents' house, Uma shut the door of her room and poured out her heart in her previous exercise book: "Jashi has gone home, I want to go back to mother too". This little act reveals several facets of the girl-child's plight --- shutting the door shows how much a simple act of literacy was forbidden for girls, that is why she had to write secretly. Also, her longing to go back to her parents as soon as her servant went back, shows how little emotionally and psychologically prepared was this child for marriage. Through such a presentation of a child-bride's point of view, Tagore exposes the social evil of child-marriage and holds it up for social scrutiny and reform.

Her heart-rending outpourings in the exercise-book, such as, "If Dada comes to take me home just once, I will never spoil his writings again", "Dada, I beg of you, take me home just once, I'll never make you angry again", demonstrate the child's deep longing for her parents as well as for her parental home, and the curtailment of the child's freedom and basic human rights.

Writing the exercise book became a source of creative self-expression for Uma. Being literate was virtually a taboo for women in those days. One-day Uma's three sisters-in-law observed her through a crack in the door when she was writing. Reading and writing amongst women was so frowned upon at the turn of the nineteenth century in India that the writer ironically comments, "The goddess of learning Saraswati, had never made even so secret a visit to the women's quarters of their house." Uma's husband was duly informed about her "misdeed". Pyare Mohan, the typical male chauvinist, was very disturbed to know what had happened. He believed in the viewpoint that education was solely the prerogative of the male sex.

After the scolding and mockery she received from her husband, Uma did not write in her exercise book for a long time. However, one autumn morning, when she heard a beggar woman singing an "Agamani" song, the homesick little girl was so emotionally moved that she could not restrain herself from writing. According to Hindu mythology, goddess Durga visits her parental home once during autumn. A traditional Bengali song called "Agamani" is sung to welcome her. Uma identified her longing to be with her mother with the goddess Uma's (another name of goddess Durga) reunion with her mother. Calling the singer to her room secretly, she wrote down the words of the song in her exercise book. Her sisters-in-law again observed what she was doing through the crack in the door and, despite Uma's pleadings to the contrary, her husband was informed about it. Pyare Mohan took a very serious view of what was regarded as a grave offence by the community. He snatched the exercise book from her and humiliated the little girl by mockingly reading aloud from it while his three sisters laughed.

Subsequently, Uma did not receive her exercise book back. Pyare Mohan too had an exercise book in which he wrote his lopsided views about life. But, says the writer regretfully: “there was no benefactor of human kind to seize that book and destroy it.” In other words, the gender bias against women in society gave men the prerogative to demand and snatch away a woman’s writing (which was a mode of intelligent self-expression). But there was nobody to snatch and destroy a man’s writings, which may be full of nonsense and prejudices.

Critical Moments

You have already read Virginia woolf’s essay “Shakespeare’s Sister”. Although written in different cultural contexts, Woolf’s essay and Tagore’s short story The “Exercise Book” voice similar concerns. Both authors --- one writing about sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and the other writing about late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal, India--- raise similar issues. Both, in different ways demonstrate the hollowness of a male-dominated society, where women’s education and women’s basic rights are ignored, their self expression and identity suppressed.

Rabindranath Tagore strongly felt the need for social reforms, particularly in the areas of education, gender equality and child marriage. The short story exposes inequality between men and women in pre-independent India. Women were denied education and treated as being intellectually inferior to men. They were expected to stay at home and have no say in the outside world.

This short story explores the impact of a prejudiced patriarchal society on the life of a sensitive and intelligent girl with a creative bent of mind. Narrated from the view point of the girl-child Uma, who was pushed into child-marriage, denied education and self-expression, “The Exercise Book” highlights the emotions, thoughts, feelings, hurts and pain of a child caught in the shackles of social prejudices. The exercise book became a source of expression of the little girl’s individual views and freedom of writing. As Tagore traces the longings, fears, disappointments and anguish of a girl-child less than the age of ten, he eloquently portrays a situation that he deplores, even though he has not personally suffered under it.

As against the imaginative talent of Uma, we see the mediocrity of men like Gobindlal and Ppyaremohan. Uma, being a girl was suppressed, whereas her brother and husband, despite their mediocrity found great opportunities to express themselves in writings that were published and acclaimed by the reading public.

GLOSSARY

nuisance	A person causing botheration, annoyance or difficulty
obliterated	to blot out or efface
almanac	A calendar giving important dates and information such as the phases of the moon
thrilling rhetoric	exciting and persuasive language that is empty or insincere
demolishing	to pull down

misconception
confiscated
assuage
declaim
reprimands
Dada
Boudidi
ambit
Agamani song

Charupath, Bodhoday
anguish
benefactor of human kind

mistaken ideas
to take away or seize
to make an unpleasant feeling less intense
to speak or recite in a dramatic way
expressions of disapproval
elder brother
sister-in-law
scope or extent of something
traditional Bengali song to welcome
goddess Durga (also known as goddess
Uma)
school primers in Bengali
severe mental or physical pain or suffering
philanthropist, or a person who performs
good deeds for others

BREAKING OUT

Marge Piercy

—*Dr. Anil Aneja*

Introduction

Marge Piercy, a well-known novelist and poet, was born in U.S.A. in the year 1936. During her childhood, her family went through very difficult times, due to Post-War Depression, a long and severe slump in the nation's economy. Marge Piercy, a person with intellectual outlook, studied at the University of Michigan. She has been involved in various movements such as civil rights, feminism and ante-Vietnam war. She emerged as a famous writer and has published seventeen volumes of poetry, as well as an equal number of novels.

“Breaking Out”, which first appeared in 1984, raises the issue of human rights of the girl-child. The protagonist reminisces as the first person editor. The narrator is keenly aware of the oppressive conditions under which girls and women lived. In her own way, she retaliates against the oppressive forces.

Textual Analysis

Lines 1-7

The narrator recalls her first political act. She calls it “political” because it is her first act of rebellion against the oppressive forces of which she is a victim, and her consciousness of her rights to set herself free. The girl-child is a victim of physical abuse—she is often beaten badly by her parents. The narrator views her parents as two open doors that always keep tabs over movements. A machine known as “mangle” used for ironing damp clothes stood at the scene of reminiscence. The narrator feels that an unnecessary amount of clothes were expected to be ironed.

Lines 8-18

The narrator sees a parallel between her personal situation and external objects. An old-style vacuum-cleaner with a clothe bag attached to it became dilated with air as dust was sucked into it. This clothe bag is referred to as a “sausage bag” here. The narrator compares herself with the sausage bag that deflated with a deep noisy sigh. The words “gusty sigh” and “deflated” emphasize that the vacuum-cleaner was as fed up of household work as the narrator herself, who swore never to dust or sweep. The first person narrator's mother is over burdened with daily chores. The narrator did not like to see her mother daily removing the industrial waste that form deposits in her home from neighbouring factories. In school, the girl-child reads about Sisyphus, a figure in Greek mythology whose punishment was to endlessly roll up a large stone to the top of a hill, only to see it roll down again. The narrator compares her mother's situation with that of Sisyphus, seeing a parallel between the two's futile and endless labour. The girl's mother was daily down on her knees as the ash emitted by the factories formed daily deposits in her home.

Lines 19-28

There was a heavy wooden yardstick with which the narrator was beaten by her parents. She compares the yardstick with the stork as this bird has a heavy long bill, and the stick was heavy like the stork's bill. As an instrument of unwarranted punishment it was naturally a nasty object. It is possible that economic pressures prompted the parents to pour out their frustrations on the girl-child in the form of corporal punishment. Whatever be the reason behind such a measure, such beating amounts to physical abuse and violation of the rights of the girl-child. By vividly exposing the painful effect of physical abuse, the poet highlights the theme of violence against the girl-child and the question of human rights. When she was severely beaten she roared in pain like a "locomotive" or a noisy powered railway vehicle.

The narrator recalls that the beatings she received from her mother were more fierce than those she received from her father. Her father wielded the stick for a longer period of time. In her agony, the young girl would twist her head and inspect the marks in the mirror.

Lines 29-36:

The narrator used to examine the red and blue marks imprinted on her back by the beatings, and think of becoming free when she grew up.

One day, at the age of eleven, she smashed the stick to pieces after a beating. She could hardly believe that the instrument of her punishment was weaker than her. While the young girl survived many beatings, the rod was broken.

Lines 37-42:

This act of smashing the rod into pieces was a significant and a symbolic one. Through this act of defiance she stood up for her rights. By destroying the rod that was the instrument of her oppression, she became mature; she was no longer a child. This was her first "political act", whereby she asserted her right as a human being.

The narrator ends by stating that her narration was not a story of lost innocence, but rather, of power gained. By becoming aware of her rights as a human being, and more specifically as a woman, she rejects the path followed by most downtrodden women. Unlike her mother, she refused to be doomed to futile labour and bondage like Sisyphus. She was determined to break things that limited her and oppressed her.

Critical Moments

In the previous three writings on gender bias that you have read, that is "Shakespeare's Sister", "The Exercise Book" and "Girl", the girls and women who suffered were passive victims of a male-dominated society. By contrast, the protagonist in Marge Percy's "Breaking Out", is an assertive person: she does not take the violence and negatives heaped upon her lying down. She breaks out of the image of the meek, submissive woman who is a victim of injustice, and assertively takes a stand.

By breaking the rod of punishment, and thereby defying the powers of her oppression, she took a stand for her human rights. She became aware that “there were things that I should learn to break”. One can see that this protagonist will grow up to be a person who will come against forces of injustice and violence and assert her rights as a woman of dignity.

GLOSSARY

Mangle	Machine used for ironing damp clothes
Deflated	to let out air
gusty	like a strong rush of wind
sludge	dirty oil or industrial waste
Sisyphus	a legendary Greek King. He was doomed eternally to roll up a boulder to the top of a hill from where it always rolled down again

MARRIAGES ARE MADE

Eunice De Souza

—*Dr. Anil Aneja*

Introduction

Born in 1940, Eunice De Souza was educated both in India and abroad and by the time she retired from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, Eunice De Souza had firmly established her identity as a teacher, thinker and writer.

One of the key issues that find a constant voice throughout her writings is the plight of the Indian woman in various contexts. In the present poem prescribed for your course we see that the protagonist Elena is to be married. The marriage however is not a happy occasion for her, but rather, it is the time for her to be subjected to numerous humiliations to prove herself worthy of being married. Interestingly, the protagonist of the poem Elena belongs to the Goan Catholic society, the social background to which the writer Eunice De Souza herself belonged.

Textual Analysis

Lines 1-10

The occasion of the poem is the marriage of Elena, a cousin of the narrator of the poem. The poem is narrated in an ironic tone, and in the passive voice indicating that the girl concerned has no say in the matter. The “formalities” that have been completed are actually a series of humiliating and embarrassing scrutiny: first her family history is examined to ensure that there is no case of T.B. or madness in the family. Further, detailed enquiries are made to find out whether her father is in a financially sound position or not. As it happens in Indian marriages, the identity or the feelings of the girl who is to be married are not taken into account at all. Rather, she is regarded as a commodity, or an object or a tame animal that needs to be clinically examined. While her inner feelings are ignored, her physical aspects are focused upon (presumably by the elderly relatives of the prospective groom or the middlemen who are trying to form an arranged matrimonial alliance). They suspiciously scrutinize her eyes to ensure that they are perfectly normal and there is no squint in her eyes. Even her teeth are checked to rule out the possibility of cavities. With heavy sarcasm the poet says that even the stools of the prospective bride are examined to rule out the possibility of worms.

Lines 12-21

Those conducting the negotiations of this matrimonial alliance are forces which uphold the principle of a male-dominated society. The groom is presumed to be good in all respects, and, the poem seems to suggest, it is not necessary to conduct any kind of enquiry or examination regarding him. This clear gender bias is typical of a patriarchal society, a society where men hold most of the power.

In Lines 12-18, the girl's physical appearance is taken into account. She is neither considered to be suitably tall, nor shapely. However, her fair complexion makes up for her so-called lesser attributes. Thus, Elena is chosen as an appropriate bride for Francisco Noronha

Prabhu, a “good” match from a Goan Catholic community. The expectations of “rightness” and “justness” on the part of the groom’s family highlight the predominant attitude of male superiority and gender injustice, whereby it is always the girl who has to live upto high expectations, whereas none considers it necessary to think of equality between the genders and dares to question the traits of the groom and his family.

Critical Comments

Marriages are made by social forces that deny the dignity and true worth of a woman. A girl’s identity and worth does not lie in the external details of her outward physical attributes and family history. Elena is yet another passive victim of a male-dominated society, whereby the voice of the woman, who is about to form the closest human bond, is simply not heard.

GLOSSARY

solvent
squint

having more money than one owes
a permanent condition in which one eye
does not look in the same direction as the
other

THE YELLOW FISH

Ambai

-Dr. Neeta Gupta

About the Author

Ambai or C.S.Lakshmi was born in a large middle-class Brahmin family in 1944. Her parents hailed from Palghat, which was a constituent of the Madras Presidency but is now a district in Kerala. It had a predominantly Brahmin population. The family had settled in Coimbatore. Ambai was the third child of her parents, the eldest being a son while the second was a daughter. When the third child too happened to be a daughter the family was visibly upset. More so because it was an unplanned pregnancy and Ambai's birth was an accident. In fact Ambai recalls in an interview how for many days her father did not even cradle her in his arms and always called her 'blackie' because of her dark complexion. 'Blackie' was however named Lakshmi for two reasons, firstly because her maternal grandmother's name was Lakshmi and secondly because she was born on a Friday. Prejudice against the girl child in Indian society is a well-known fact and Ambai was to some extent a victim of this prejudice being the second daughter. Her first photograph was taken when she was four years old. Before that nobody ever thought of taking a snapshot of hers.

Ambai was put in a Tamil medium school as against the English medium one to which her elder siblings went. According to her own admission 'In my family I am the only one to write in Tamil. The others write even their personal letters in English.' Despite these minor irritants, Ambai's childhood was a happy one and she remembers fondly the many enjoyable vacations spent at her maternal grandmother's house with innumerable cousins who became her playmates. Ambai was greatly influenced by her grandmother who was a self-taught Tamil scholar and who cultivated an interest in the young girl for Tamil literature. In addition to her grandmother, Ambai's own mother too was another constructive influence on her and who became at many points in her life the pillar of support she needed to stand on her own two feet.

Ambai read avidly all the Tamil magazines and journals her mother subscribed to and grew up on the conservative, tradition bound often-romantic writings that these magazines encouraged and perpetuated. When Ambai first began writing at the age of sixteen, she wrote in a style similar to the one she had soaked up from those magazines. As she comments on her early writings she says: 'Most of my initial stories had very rigid and orthodox views of sexuality, femininity and life in general. The widows in my stories, after a speech full of symbolic metaphors always refused to remarry and my heroines married idealists who were combinations of Tagore, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.'

Ambai had already published two novels before she turned twenty. At sixteen she had won the first prize in a competition organized by the journal *Kannan*. Her entry *Nandi Malai Charalile* (At Nandi Hills Falls), a novel, was published shortly after she won the competition. This novel appeared under the name 'Ambai', the pseudonym that she had used for the first time on this occasion and was to continue using it thereafter for all her creative writing. Her first short story *Gnanam* (Knowledge) was published in the journal *Ananda Vikatan*. She published many more stories in this magazine in the coming years. But her early writings were modeled on traditional concepts of womanhood and chastity. Her world was still limited to her home and there was a tacit rule limiting her interaction with the world outside. She therefore naively went along believing in the prevalent concepts, which required women to be chaste, pure, submissive

and docile. To believe that a modern woman was one transgressing the bounds of morality was merely an extension of these conventional concepts.

Ambai struggled to break free. A rebel at heart she knew that there was a different and wider world beyond the confines of her walled existence. Thus her decision to move to Madras came about. Subsequently she secured a UGC fellowship and took admission in JNU for her Ph.D. and moved to Delhi in 1967.

Ambai's literary career aptly reflects the various stages in her development both as a writer and as a person. From her early idealistic writings like *Andhi Malai* she moved to writing stories with new concerns but still wrote in the conventional style. Moving to Delhi, however, was the bold step she took to venturing into women centered stories that questioned the paradoxes of their suppressed existence. From writing in the conventional style she moved to experiment with new forms, new themes and looked at old subjects from new angles. According to her 'Be it feminism, Marxism – whatever it be, it ought to contain its potency before it touches you. Stories that have a lot of feminist ideas go unappreciated if they lack an engaging style.' Herein lies the germ for Ambai's desire to evolve new forms and a new language for expressing her ideas in her writings.

The Yellow Fish: A Discussion

Introduction

Ambai's short story 'The Yellow Fish' forms a component of the section on ***Gender*** in your text book. This immediately alerts us to the fact that this particular story will surely contribute to our understanding of gender and might deal with some aspect of a woman's experience. Ambai's fiction is known for its emphasis on issues concerning women and in the Tamil literary scene her voice is one to be reckoned with as far as feminist self-affirmation is concerned.

Ambai known for her innovative narrative techniques experiments in the present story too a quick reading leaves us with an impression of the story being a collage of images - almost surrealistic images. The narrative content is not much and can be distinctly divided into three sections.

- ❖ In the first section we are given a description of the fishing boats returning ashore. A discarded fish's struggle to survive reminds the narrator of a similar struggle she witnessed some time back.
- ❖ We take a leap into the recent past and are transported to the next section of the story where we get to know that a couple – Anu and Arun – have recently lost a new born child whom they had called Jalaja. The child's ashes have been immersed in the sea.
- ❖ In the third section the narrator Anu, understandably depressed, helps a discarded yellow fish to survive and returns it to the sea. There is no obvious linkage between the two events except for the fact that both form part of the experiences of the first person narrator Anu.

A detailed and analytical look at the story reveals the thematic connections between the two events and helps us understand that Ambai is here dealing with larger issues at a micro level. Issues that are close to a woman's heart because they form an integral part of her struggle to survive in a hostile world.

The story begins with a vivid description of a scene of the fishing boats returning to the shore. It is high summer and the sand is hot. Images of the sea and water are predominant. There is a juxtaposition of colours against the background of the ‘faded blue and ash-grey sea’. The bright colours of the fisherwomen’s clothes stand vibrant against the white boat and the bodies and hands of men darkened by the salt wind; the dry sand, the brown wood of the boats, the white bellied fish. As Ambai writes it is “an extraordinary collage of colours, on the shores of the wind-swept sea. A composition that imprints itself on the mind and memory.”

The Imagery

The sea and water are life-giving forces in this story. Even the livelihood of the fisher folk depends on them. But suddenly our attention is drawn away from the din of the fisher-folk and their boats. ‘A yellow fish is thrown away on the sand’. The line captures all our attention because Ambai makes it stand by itself.

It is almost as though it is physically drawing our attention towards itself.

The Point of View

The first person narrator, enters the narrative as the ‘I’ of the narrative and fixes the perspective and point of view of the story. We now know through whose eyes we are watching the events. The narrator’s name however is not revealed yet. The detail of colour follows as the narrator looks at and observes the details about the yellow fish. The fish is of the palest yellow that comes before the withering and falling of leaves. A further detail is that it has black spots. The narrator stoops to watch it and the fish begins to shudder and gasp for breath on the hot sand and opening and closing its mouth its mouth opens and closes and it is this image that wrenches another from the narrator’s memory when she remembers a similar gasping for breath – that of Jalaja.

A Shift in Narrative

For a second time Ambai makes a sentence stand by itself. “Like Jalaja’s mouth” - stands alone making us stop and think about the abrupt change from one sequence of events to another. With the mention of Jalaja’s name we are taken into the next section of the narrative that tells us about the ‘too hasty infant’ Jalaja who was probably born premature and had to be kept in the incubator. Once more the narrative is in the form of images showing rather than telling what happened. The first image is that of the narrator standing outside Jalaja’s room constantly watching her struggle to survive. The next image is that of ashes being brought home in a small urn and the narrator’s insistence that the mouth of the urn be opened and then the somber line that the ashes were immersed in this very sea. In this section we also learn that the narrator’s name is Anu and Arun is her husband. From the two images put before us we surmise that the infant Jalaja was their daughter who had ultimately lost the struggle to survive. The small urn contains Jalaja’s ashes which are immersed in the sea.

The image of the sea brings us back to the present moment and this time the narrator observes the yellow fish struggling to survive. Anu the narrator calls over a fisherboy and asks him to put the yellow fish back in the sea. With a snort of laughter the boy complies and holding the fish by the tail runs towards the sea and puts it on the crest of an incoming wave. The fish splutters and flounders for a few seconds and then with an arrogant leap it swims forward into the blue grey-white sea.

The Theme

The two sections of the narrative – that of the yellow fish and the infant Jalaja apparently unrelated are thematically linked with a deft use of images and metaphors. In both instances we

witness an astounding struggle to survive which becomes the theme of the story. The image of the tiny mouth gasping to breathe forges a link between both the events. Jalaja loses the struggle while the yellow fish survives with help from the narrator.

The yellow fish is discarded and thrown away as useless. The connection with Jalaja implies that Jalaja too was probably unwanted. Was it because she was a girl child? Gender issues emerge from the implied precept that girls are as unwanted as the yellow fish though both may be beautiful.

Gender differences emerge from the difference in attitude of the narrator Anu and her husband Arun who fails to understand why Anu wants the mouth of the urn to be opened. The “loud racking sobs” hint at the intense grief till now buried in the narrator’s heart. We have seen her helplessness earlier as she stands outside her child’s room and just watches her struggling to survive. In trying to get Arun to open the urn’s mouth it is almost as though Anu is trying to help her child to breathe now as she couldn’t earlier. The degree of insensitivity in the male outlook is evident in Arun failing to understand why his wife wants the mouth of the urn to be opened. For him it is “just ashes” whereas for Anu it is her daughter inside whom she wants to liberate.

All the pent up feelings of helplessness, grief and the fact that she could do nothing to save her daughter resurface when the narrator watches the yellow fish thrashing about on the sand, gasping to breath and leaping hopelessly towards the sea. Her decision to help the yellow fish is prompted by Jalaja’s memory whose ashes lie in the very sea from where the yellow fish had come and where it wanted to return. Anu was helpless in saving her infant daughter Jalaja, but she could try and save the fish. She does this by enlisting the help of a fisher-boy.

Gender differences surface once again when the fisher boy snorts at the narrator’s request for helping her take the gasping yellow fish to the sea. Insensitivity in the male outlook is reinforced.

Anu manages to save the fish and return it to the sea. The arrogant leap of the fish once it reaches the sea at the end of the story can be metaphorically interpreted and can have a variety of meanings.

Firstly it could mean that there are endless possibilities if opportunities to thrive are provided.

Secondly and more importantly it could point towards the overriding theme of self-liberation in all of Ambai’s writings. It is almost as though Anu too has leapt towards freedom along with the yellow fish. Anu’s freedom is a freedom from the bondage of ideologies, It is a freedom from grief; a liberating move that takes her towards self realization. Ultimately this emerges to be the theme of the story and links up the narrator’s life with the two instances narrated by her.

REINCARNATION OF CAPTAIN COOK

Margaret Atwood

-Dr. Neeta Gupta

About the Poet

Canadian poet, novelist, and critic Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a widely recognized literary figure known for her bold explorations into the depths of the human consciousness especially from the feminist perspective. Her novels, including *Alias Grace* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are widely known for their feminist subject matter, and one finds the same powerful themes within her poetry. Her poem "Spelling," for example, is a tribute to the power of words and it depicts 'the victimization and powerlessness of women without language.' A woman's search for identity and her struggle against male oppression is definitely a dominant theme in Atwood's writings. At the same time she constantly explores Canada's search for an identity of its own and its constant fight against the English and American colonizing influences.

Margaret Atwood the second of three children was born on November 18, 1939, in Ottawa, Ontario, to parents from Nova Scotia origin. Her father was a forest entomologist. Part of her early years Atwood spent exploring Canada's rough country along with her father in northern Quebec which explains her fascination with the Canadian wilderness. In 1946 Atwood's family moved to Toronto. She was eleven before she attended school full-time. Atwood graduated from Leaside High School in 1959. She then studied at the University of Toronto where she met and was influenced by Northrop Fry's myth criticism and Jungian ideas. She won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and became a graduate student at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, receiving her M.A. in 1962. Atwood continued her studies of Victorian literature at Harvard but left the program before completing her Ph.D. She worked for a market-research company in Toronto and taught English at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver (1964-65). She has held a variety of academic posts and has been writer-in-residence at numerous Canadian and American universities.

As a writer Atwood made her debut at the age of nineteen with *Double Persephone* (1961), a collection of poems. Numerous collections of poems, novels, essays have made Atwood one of the most prolific writers on the Canadian literary scene. Her themes are thought provoking, controversial and bold. Among her well known works are her novels *Alias Grace*, *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale*; her controversial critical studies *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* and *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. Her works include Collections of Poems and short stories as well as numerous essays on various topics.

After two unsettling engagements and a marriage that lasted just five years, Atwood finally settled down with the Canadian writer Graeme Gibson in 1973. Having lived at various places in the world Atwood has established her permanent residence in Toronto and has a daughter Jess Atwood Gibson.

Introduction

Two words in the title 'reincarnation' and 'Captain Cook' by implication hint at the possibility that the poem is concerned with an exploration of some kind. Just as Captain Cook had explored and found new lands so also, some one in the poem is probably going to undertake a similar exploration. However, Captain Cook's expeditions had resulted in the colonization and

thereby subjugation of indigenous people. It remains to be seen whether Atwood's poem is a celebration or critique of Cook's enterprise. It is a well known fact that Atwood was extremely critical of the English and American influences that were submerging the Canadian identity. Being a Canadian she was keenly conscious of the effects of colonialism on the colonized state and subject. In all probability therefore Atwood's poem may be a critique rather than an endorsement of ideas contained in the image of Captain Cook. While reading the poem we shall have to be careful to understand from whose perspective the poem has been written. Is it the colonizer or is it the colonized who becomes the first person speaker in the poem.

Furthermore, Atwood's poem has been included in the section on *Gender* in your textbook. On reading the poem we note that it does not talk of any woman-specific experiences nor is it made clear that the first person speaker of the poem is a woman even though it has been written by a woman poet who is a known crusader for women's rights. This should raise a few questions in your mind.

- ❖ How is 'gender' to be understood in the context of the poem?
- ❖ Is there a dual perspective in the poem?
- ❖ Can it be read from the point of view of a woman, a Canadian, a Canadian woman?

Understanding Gender

Before you read the poem a few details ought to be kept in mind that will facilitate your understanding of the poem. As a general rule the term 'gender' is used in the social sciences to describe 'socially constructed categories based on sex.' Gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors expected from a female or male by society. Gender roles are learned and can be affected by factors such as class, race, education or economics. In patriarchal societies women have been victimized, oppressed and put in a state of subjectivity on the basis of sex. Their experience of powerlessness however is shared by all who are similarly discriminated against on the basis of class, race, education, economics etc. irrespective of biological anatomy. Since gender is a social construct rather than a biological one, by corollary such discriminated sections of society also become gendered subjects raising similar expectations and facing similar representations. 'There was a call for experiences of gender, colonial domination, class and race to be treated as interpenetrative.' (*Articulating Gender*, page 21). The question of identity is thus politicized.

If Atwood's exploration or quest in the poem is one for identity then it can carry within it a plurality of perspectives.

The Reincarnation of Captain Cook: A Discussion

'Reincarnation of Captain Cook' was included in *Selected Poems* that came out in the year 1976. Atwood's preoccupation with the question of identity, both as Canadian identity vis-a-vis the colonial influences and as female identity vis-a-vis the male dominated world, becomes the thematic focus of the poem. The first question that springs to mind is why does Atwood use the name of Captain Cook? We all know that he was a British navigator and a cartographer who discovered New Zealand and the East coast of Australia. Not only was he a noted explorer but also carried a strong stamp of the colonizer in all of his expeditions. In addition he represents the quintessential male ideal according to stereotypical expectations.

An Ironic Inversion

The sense of a speaker and a reader is established in the first line of the poem itself when we meet the 'I' of the poem.

Who is this first person speaker?

If we assume that the first person speaker is the poet speaking then by implication it means that Captain Cook, the noted explorer, the prototypical male, almost a symbol of masculinity is being reincarnated as a woman in this poem and that too a Canadian woman. It is obvious that Atwood is aiming for an ironic inversion here in more ways than one.

- ❖ Firstly she is reincarnating Captain Cook as a woman thus inverting the male stereotype.
- ❖ Secondly if we assume that the speaker is the colonized subject then Captain Cook the colonizer is being reincarnated here as the colonized inverting the image a second time over. Atwood is challenging conventional perceptions by reincarnating Captain Cook as a colonized subject rather than the colonizer and also implying that it could even be a woman. We shall have to constantly interpret the poem from the perspective of both.

It emerges from the context of the poem that whoever the speaker is, he or she is someone who is struggling to find an identity of one's own. For the same reason the reincarnated Captain Cook wishes to discover a land 'cleaned of all geographies' and go into hitherto uncharted territories.

The first person speaker begins by saying how even before she could learn 'the maps had been coloured in.' When she pleaded she was told by no less than the kings that there was nothing left to explore. She set out anyway only to find that histories had already been written. The mark of the colonizer is evident not only in the image of the 'historians, wearing wreaths and fake teeth belts,' but also in the presence of 'cairns and tourists.' Even the caves have not been left untouched and carry 'inscriptions quickly scribbled in the dark.'

- ❖ On the literal level the comparison is between an explorer like Cook and someone who wants to discover new lands just like him only to find that nothing remains to be discovered.
- ❖ On the metaphorical level the analogy is with stereotyped roles that women have to either live up to or fight against.
- ❖ In the context of Canadian history and culture, the metaphorical interpretation points towards an Americanization of Canada and the speaker's search for an identity that would be free of the influences of the colonizer.

Images

The images used in the first three stanzas of the poem point towards the fact that even before the first person speaker could make an attempt at discovering something new, geographies had been frozen, maps had been coloured and histories had been written. In other words roles had been written and one had to live by the book. Stereotypes that are impossible to break had been set.

If we look at the history of the Women's Movement in Canada the image of historians and cartographers assumes a much deeper meaning. Women suffragists questioned the discipline of history and its claim that it represented universal facts objectively. Women found hardly any representation in the history of the nation that they had helped to build. There was a vociferous

demand for Canada's history to be re-written. Why does it have to be history? Why can it not be her story? In other words women fought to find their place in the nation's history and also challenged their own literary representations.

You may recall that Virginia Woolf had tried to look for information on Elizabethan women in *A Room of One's Own* and had drawn almost a blank:

One knows nothing detailed, nothing perfectly true and substantial about her. History scarcely mentions her. And I turned to Professor Trevelyan again to see what history meant to him. I found by looking at the chapter headings that it meant –

The Manor Court and Methods of Open-Field Agriculture . . . The Cistercians and Sheep Farming . . . The Crusades . . . The University. . . The House of Commons. . . The Hundred Year's War . . . The War of the Roses. . . The Renaissance Scholars and so on. Occasionally an individual woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth, or a Mary, a queen or a great lady. But by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past.

The fact that historians have thus been apathetic to the contribution of women cuts across geographical boundaries and different cultures. Women are faceless having no space of their own, no language of their own and no identity of their own.

Significance of 'names'

I could never arrive' says the first person speaker of Atwood's poem. 'Always the names got there before.' The line effectively means that the possibility of being a pioneer in a field was always thwarted because others had always been there before.

- ❖ From the feminist point of view this line could hint at the gendered expectations from a woman. Even before a woman can think of doing something new, the stereotyped expectations always thwart her aspirations.
- ❖ In the context of the poem the 'names' assumes a significance directly related to the subservient position of women. A name is an important part of the identity of an individual. Rather than having a name of her own a woman was known as either the wife of someone or as a mother, a sister, a daughter of someone who was of course always a male. If we delve deeper 'names' that always got there could also suggest how various occupations and official positions were closed to women on the basis of sex. It is interesting to know that it was only on October 18, 1929, that the Privy Council in London declared that Canadian women were indeed persons.

The Structure

The poem is distinctly divided into two sections. In the first section the presumption is that the speaker is young and raring to learn and do something new. In the second section however, the perspective is set straight with the stanza beginning "now I am old ..."

The speaker rightly says that her mistake was in acknowledging the maps. In other words, acknowledging and accepting gendered formulations of the stereotypical woman.

"The eyes raise tired monuments," – again suggests age old conventions and stereotypical expectations since monuments are a testimonial to the past. The eyes here are in search of something new and refreshing. They are tired of seeing the same old things day in and day out. What is needed is change.

The concluding section provides an answer to the dilemma of the first person speaker. The answer lies in revolt, in rejecting the determined roles, in refusing to accept the traditional, in going to a land cleaned of geographies. Thus the speaker shouts “burn down the atlases” and lodges a protest by waving a black banner.

A Changed Mindscape

Is that land ‘cleaned of all geographies’ so near as to be ‘just across the street and beyond the corner’?

If it is not too distant as far as physical space goes then the implication is that it is within us inside our minds. By implication it means that we need to change the way we think about certain things. We need a fresh perspective.

Going past the cenotaph signifies a movement beyond the given past. The changed landscape involves a changed mindscape too. “The land cleaned of all geographies” suggests a mind free of all prejudices.

- ❖ In the colonial context it can even point towards a time when the indigenous people were free; when the colonizers had not yet reached to overtake their land. In the same context “Beach gleaming with arrows” would probably mean that the natives have been successful in keeping the colonizers at bay. It again points towards a pre-colonial time.
- ❖ From the feminist perspective however, the ‘beach gleaming with arrows’ could also indicate a male dominated world that the speaker has to contend against.

The concluding idea is that even in the changed landscape the path will not be smooth.

THE HIGHWAY STRIPPER

A.K. Ramanujan

--Dr. Neeta Gupta

The Poet

A scholar, a poet, a critic, a folklorist, a linguist and a translator, A.K.Ramanujan was a multi-faceted and multi-talented personality. He was born in Mysore on 16 March, 1929 and studied literature at the University of Mysore and then migrated to the United States in the year 1959 to pursue a doctorate in folklore and linguistics from Indiana University. Later he began teaching at the University of Chicago in 1963 and continued to do so for the next three decades until his sudden and untimely death in 1993, at the peak of his career. His literary genius was recognized and he was awarded the Padma Shri as early as 1976 and the McArthur fellowship in 1983. He was also elected Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1990.

A renowned poet in English, Kannada and Tamil, Ramanujan is also renowned for his translations from Kannada and Tamil. *Speaking of Siva* and *Hymns for the Drowning* are two of his brilliant translations. While *Siva* introduced the readers to the Virshaiva literature, *Hymns* made it possible for readers to enjoy poems to Vishnu by the ninth century poet Nammavar. Apart from two of the above mentioned widely read works, Ramanujan has numerous other works to his credit. His literary, critical and theoretical contributions span across many disciplines. Some of his major works include *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral tales from Twenty Two languages* (1991) and *A Flowering Tree and other Tales from India* (1997). *The Collected Essays* published posthumously in the year 2000, amply demonstrates the amazing genius of this man. 'Is There an Indian Way of Thinking' is one of his most widely read essays. *The Collected Poems* were also published posthumously in 1995 and yet there was too much still waiting to be published. Another anthology of his critical essays, poems and interviews was brought out by his editors and was given a rather 'unusual and enigmatic title' ---*The Uncollected Poems and Prose: A.K.Ramanujan*. In a way Ramanujan continued to publish even after his death and it has been observed that he remains a 'living voice' in the world of literature especially of Indian Poetry.

Having his roots in India and having lived half of his entire life in America, Ramanujan's poetry is replete with themes of 'hybridity and trans-culturation.' In fact, Bruce King calls him along with two other poets, 'Indo-Anglian harbingers of literary modernism.' Published in 1986 in *The Second Sight* 'The Highway Stripper' is more quintessentially American in terms of its imagery and its context but ends with a strong hint of the Indian concept of the Ardhnareeshwar that translates into a desire for androgyny in this poem.

The Poem

Published in 1986 in Ramanujan's collection of poems entitled *The Second Sight*, 'The Highway Stripper' has been called a 'quintessentially American' poem in terms of its setting, its context, its imagery and its content as well. There is nothing specifically Indian about it but rather everything American right from the battered Mustang to the highway to Mexico, to the kind of clothes that come flying out of the car right down to the football (not cricket) match on

the radio. What the poem initially focuses on however, is not something specifically American but rather general. In one critic's view the poem sums up more intensely than anything else, 'the

intensity of the erotic viewer's experience.' The ending however, belies the expected climax to the erotic buildup. It takes us from a mere erotic experience to a realization of a possibility that exists within all of us as well as a possibility that one can strive for in the spiritual world. It hints at a union of the male and female energies within a single human being but also indicates a possibility of a union with the Supreme Being. We transcend the world of factual reality to move into a world of possibilities and realizations and also of questions that arise out of those possibilities.

Critical Analysis

The poem begins with the first person speaker recounting an experience he had while travelling on a highway to Mexico. The entire poem is a narration of that event and is written in stanzas of very short lines thus giving the poem an almost breathless quality, matching the speed at which the speaker is travelling on that lonely highway.

Stanza 1

The speaker begins by telling us that once while travelling on a highway to Mexico he happened to be driving behind a 'battered once-blue Mustang' which had a lot of dust on its rear window. The name Mustang is almost synonymous with masculinity. As your textual notes tell you, the Mustang was a sturdy car named after a small hardy wild horse of the North American plains. This particular Mustang travelling in front of the speaker is obviously old and well used since it has a 'battered' look. It is probably dented and looks beaten up and even its colour has worn off for the speaker describes it as 'once -blue.'

There is nothing unusual about the situation. In the United States a Mustang is a popular car and someone could be travelling to Mexico just as the speaker is. As the two cars speed along however, all of a sudden the speaker sees a woman's hand come out of the side of the car in front of him and begin throwing a number of items of women's clothing one after another. Along with the speaker we too are shocked and taken aback.

What is significant in these lines is the fact that the hand that has come out of the side of the car is described as a woman's hand but at the same time we are told that it has a wrist watch on it. Normally one would expect a woman's hand to have a bangle or a bracelet on it. The hand wearing a wrist watch becomes significant only in retrospect when we reach the end of the poem. For the moment we brush aside this question that has come up and move on to read what happens next. The words 'whirling' and 'hurtling' aptly describe the speed at which the cars are travelling.

Stanza 2-4

The next three stanzas provide the details about the clothing items that come hurtling out of the car. A straw hat, a white shoe, a heavy pleated skirt and a fluttery slip (which is faded pink), a leg-of-a-mutton blouse follow one after another. The speaker increases his speed to minimize the distance between his car and the one in front. Then follows an ordinary, used and off white bra which whirls off the window and gets stuck on the barbed wire around a farmer's

field of yellow-green wheat-grass. The last item to come out of the window is a pair of bright red panties that hit the speaker's windshield and are gone, swept aside.

A few assumptions can be made based on the above description:

- It seems that there are at least two people travelling in the Mustang. One is obviously driving the car at great speed while the other is busy taking off all clothes. The former may be a man but the latter is certainly a woman for the speaker has seen only women's clothing come hurtling out of the Mustang.
- The items of clothing are western which is in keeping with the geographical context of the poem.
- The speaker is obviously a very keen observer. Even in split seconds he is able to notice that the faded slip has frayed lace edges; the bra is for smallish breasts and the red panties are laced with white. He can even hear a few of these items swish!
- Noticing the kind of objects that emerge from the window of the Mustang one can safely assume that whoever the woman in the car, she belongs to the middle or lower middle class. One can take a further guess and assume that she is probably a hooker, out with a client, who has asked her to strip on the highway. The title of the poem therefore makes sense. In fact in the next stanza the speaker calls her as much for now he too is 'excited and curious, to see the stripper on the highway.'

The Possibilities

Having described the striptease without describing the stripper the speaker has managed to grip the attention of the readers. It has even been observed that this particular poem 'sums up the intensity of the erotic viewer's experience.' It is not so much a description of the stripper or the striptease. It is more a description of the experience of a man who while driving on a highway happens to see items of women's clothing being flung out of a moving car traveling ahead of him.

Stanza 5 - 8

The poem even at this stage is more about the speaker than about the highway stripper. Excited and desperate with curiosity he longs to see what is going on inside the car. His imagination runs wild. He thinks that the stripper by now is probably naked with her lover or more than one lover in the car. Just thinking about the possibilities of what might be happening inside the moving Mustang arouse all erotic desires in the speaker and we as readers stand along side him – all keyed up and curious as well.

Frustrated by the dusty rear window of the Mustang the speaker steps on the gas and finally overtakes the car to take a peep inside. With this peep however, the mystery about the highway stripper only deepens further.

The Anti-climax

The stanza describing what's happening inside the moving Mustang comes as an anti-climax to the whole erotic build-up. The speaker describes:

In that absolute
Second

that glimpse and after
image in this hell
of voyeurs, I saw

only one at the wheel
a man
about forty,

a spectacled profile
looking only
at the road
beyond the nose
of his Mustang
with a football
radio - on.

There is no sign of a woman or any other occupant in the car -- just a lonely, fortyish man, staring at the road ahead, listening to a football match on the radio.

Along with the speaker we too are confused! What could possibly have happened? Where has the stripper vanished? What about the clothes that had been flung out of the same car only a few moments back? Is the driver of the Mustang having some kind of an identity crisis? Is he a case of the 'third sex' a trans-sexual? Is that the reason why he had dressed up as a woman? Has he thrown away his women's clothing because he is driving towards a city and would soon be leaving the anonymity and the loneliness of the highway behind him? A number of such questions come to our mind as we read. The 'hand with a wrist watch on it' now makes sense. All along it has been the hand of a man and not of a woman. The speaker has to steady his pace 'against the circling trees.' He is almost reeling with shock at not finding what he had expected to find. His repeated looks in the rear view mirror only confirm what he has already seen. There is no stripper in the Mustang – only a middle-aged, lonely man. We are still trying to grapple with this sudden shift in development when another one occurs in the next stanza giving an entirely different perspective to the situation.

Stanza 9

Seeing only a man and no woman inside the Mustang the speaker questions:

had he stripped
not only hat
and blouse, shoes and panties
and bra
had he shed maybe
even the woman
he was wearing,

The items of clothing that have been flung out of the car have all been those of a woman. Yet all along it has been a man who has been throwing those clothes from the car. The poet's question is whether in shedding the women's clothing that man has even shed the 'woman he was wearing?' Is there some kind of an identity crisis going on here? Has that man come to terms

with his own identity on that highway? It almost seems to be so. Having shed 'the woman he was wearing' the man at the wheel of the Mustang seems to have overcome the struggle for identity within his own personality. Yet the stanza ends only with a comma and the continuation of the last line leads us into the concluding stanza which takes us much deeper into this ever going

struggle transporting us ultimately to a synthesis between not just masculine and feminine but between being and nothingness, between created and creator, between the worshipper and the worshipped.

The Issue of Gender and identity

The poet's questioning in this stanza has immediately taken us to the issue of gender and the question of identity related to it. If we talk of gender, we know by now that it is a social and cultural construct. Physical anatomy is not the final determinant for making males and females into masculine and feminine. In fact it is a well accepted truth that in every human being there is a certain balance of the masculine and feminine energies.

In his poem Ramanujan provides yet another perspective on the issue of gender. Being an avid reader as well as translator of the *bhakti* poetry he was all too familiar with the concept of the 'Ardhnareeshwar' in the Indian *bhakti* tradition. This popular and well accepted concept perceives God as half man and half woman – Shiva and Shakti – both together representing the synthesis of the masculine and feminine energies in one body. Through his poem Ramanujan is probably trying to say that we may be perceived as male or female but the other set of traits is present deep within in each one of us. Those of us who are perceived as males would also have a feminine side to our personality and those of us who are perceived as females would have a masculine side to our personality. Of course the same may not be overtly visible.

Stanza 10

'Or was it me,' asks the poet, 'moulting, shedding vestiges, old investments, rushing forever towards a perfect coupling with naked nothing in a world without places?'

The perspective shifts dramatically. It is no longer the poet watching the driver of the Mustang. It is the poet watching himself. It is a self projection. It is almost as though he has stepped outside his own self and now stands looking at it, observing it, analyzing it from a distance. The concluding stanza imparts an almost surreal quality to an otherwise very realistic poem. It also takes us away from its 'quintessentially American' character into the realm of the Bhakti tradition where we find an exploration of similar ideas with regard to the relationship between the devotee and the devoted.

The Indian influence

The multi-faceted Ramanujan was an avid scholar of the Indian Bhakti tradition and had translated many verses from the Virshaiva tradition. The same had appeared in his volume entitled *Speaking of Siva*. He had studied and researched many Bhakti poets from the Tamil literary scene. His views on this tradition shall help us understand the concluding stanza of our poem 'The Highway Stripper.'

In an interview to the magazine *Manushi*, Ramanujan freely expressed his views about the bhakti movement. According to him in the Bhakti tradition 'feelings are more important than learning, status and privilege.' To experience God one has to cast away all privileges. Being male is one such privilege. In fact maleness is 'an obstacle in spiritual experience, in attaining true inwardness.' Speaking further Ramanujan says:

Power entails the seeking of more power; power and privilege need defences. Men have to overcome the temptation of this kind of seeking. They have to throw away their defences.

In the context of the Bhakti tradition, a throwing away of clothes is a 'throwing away of concessions to social conventions, defences and investments. Nakedness signifies being open to the experience of god.' The poet wonders whether he is undergoing a similar movement towards the ultimate union with god.

Power, privilege, pride, in fact maleness itself are all obstacles in the path of a true spiritual experience. To attain oneness with god one has to overcome all these obstacles, throw away all defences and privileges to be ready for a true inwardness, a true experience of god.

Speaking of male saints in the bhakti tradition, Ramanujan says:

One of the last things they overcome in these traditions is maleness itself. The male saints wish to become women; they wish to drop their very maleness, their machismo. Saints then become a kind of third gender. The lines between male and female are crossed and re-crossed in their lives.

The desire for Androgyny that has surfaced in the poem can thus be contextualized in the Bhakti tradition and understood as being a step towards a true experience of God which can happen only in a world without boundaries. The poet mentions a 'world without places' where such a union can occur. This signifies the fact that once you are ready for a oneness with god physical 'place' becomes irrelevant. Once one is able to transcend all physical boundaries that one has set for oneself the entire world becomes one, 'a world without places.' In the metaphorical sense the highway thus assumes an added significance. It becomes a part of that 'world without places.'

Conclusion

The concluding stanza transports us ultimately to a synthesis between not just masculine and feminine but between being and nothingness, between created and the creator, between the worshipper and the worshipped.

The speaker's perceptions and preoccupations thus undergo a major change during the course of the poem. From being an erotic viewer trying to describe a striptease and desperately trying to get a glimpse of the stripper, the speaker finally becomes a seeker of true inwardness, of an ultimate union with the Supreme Being. The 'perfect coupling' to which the speaker aspires can therefore mean not only the ultimate synthesis of the masculine and feminine forces symbolized in the Bhakti tradition in the image of the Ardhnareeshwar, but also the worshipper's final union with the worshipped – a true experience of God.

BLACK OUT
Roger Mais

-Usha Anand
Caribbean Cause

The section on Race in your textbook begins with **Blackout**, a short story by Roger Mais (1905-1955), a Caribbean brown writer. The introduction gives you a number of details about his literary activities and his sympathy for the Black underprivileged who are the inspiration behind his work.

However, a little information about the West Indies and the nation's freedom struggle would help us to understand the context of the story which is set in the period of World War II.

Its nationalist movement began in 1938 with the Labour Rebellion and Mais became a writer for the weekly newspaper *Public Opinion* which was associated with the People's Nationalist Movement in Jamaica. He wrote an anti-British column "Now We Know" and suffered imprisonment on charges of sedition. It was in prison that his work of social protest was conceived. He was one of the first Jamaican writers to examine the wretched living conditions endured by the country's poor.

He was born into a middle-class family and received a good education so his sensitivities were reasonably developed. He supported the nationalist movement in the 1930s and 1940s and travelled to Europe. Earlier too, there had been attempts to create a self-governing federal state consisting of the ten British colonies of the West Indies. Under the assumption that each of these islands was too small to become independent on its own, plans and campaigns for the creation of a federation had emerged in the 1920s and were discussed with greater urgency after World War II. After eleven years of extensive negotiations, the Federation finally came into being in 1958. It consisted of the larger colonies of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, as well as several small others. However, it was wrecked by the ambitions of the oppositional movements in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, which successfully sought to increase their own popularity through appeals to patriotism. The two island states were released into independence in 1962 while the other eight resumed closer ties with Britain as semi-colonial 'associated states'. All of them (except Antigua and Monstserrat) gained full independence by 1980.

This detailed account might help you to understand the setting of the story "Blackout"—against the Second World War. Even in that setting, burning issues of race, gender and class manifest themselves powerfully.

About the Short Story

Roger Mais's short story is a piece that requires utmost attention, a focusing of the mind on each detail in order to realize the final fullness of effect. The title itself is loaded with symbolism, "black" connoting different things to different —people the most obvious being the black/white divide. For artistic effect, the story depends on concreteness, on sensual impressions that deliver their meaning without waste. It is a lean narrative which does not tolerate any digression holding the reader's attention by its sinewy strength.

The action of this story is compressed within a short continuous time frame and space. It is the twilight hour and the episode takes place at a bus-stop, a public place. Both the characters

are simply revealed, not developed. So they are, in the language of criticism, flat rather than round characters. They do not grow in any significant mental or psychological or emotional manner in the course of the narrative. The background and setting are implied; not all the details are spelt out. Yet there is no confusion in the reader's mind about the moments of tension in the story the appearance of the black man from the other side of the street, his lighting a cigarette, her throwing away her cigarette, and the man's refusal to go away. They all build up towards the climactic exchange between the two. And this exchange is extremely powerful though understated and low key. Mais's command over subtle dialogue is remarkable.

Point of View

Stories can be told from various points of view. There is an omniscient point of view, the direct observer's point of view, the first person narration (an insider's point of view and narration) or the third person intimate where one character, detaching himself from a group, tells us about all the others. This story is told by a direct observer.

The Story

Your textbook informs you that the story is set on a West Indian island city during the Second World War, and describes an encounter between a black West Indian man and an American girl. It was the era of segregation with separate schools, buses, restaurants for blacks and whites.

Right from the title onwards, the term "black" emphasizes the racist tension in a society where colour prejudice is widespread. The street lights being off points to a relative lack of safety but "the atmosphere of exclusive respectability" conveys that the girl is in a relatively safe zone where suburban householders live. She is confident and feels that if there is trouble, "one good scream" can bring a number of people to her rescue.

The first inkling of black-white tension is given when Mais states that the slinking black shadow materializing out of the darkness did not initially disconcert her. When it grows into a conventionally dressed black young man, she is "intrigued". What further ruffles her smugness is his asking for a match as he has observed her smoking. As she doesn't have a matchbox, she lets him use her cigarette to light his. The racial divide seen in juxtaposition with her hesitating offer to allow the use of a lighted cigarette (in use) to light the black man's stub, actually generates a tension of its own. The vividness of this description is striking against the backdrop of "partial blackout". There is also a contrast between the race, gender, class divide which separates the two, and the relatively intimate gesture of allowing someone to light a cigarette from that which one is using. The tension assumes a dimension of gender – man versus woman. The black man's steady gaze affects her momentarily. It breaks her resistance. She allows him to light his half a cigarette from hers. Apart from this, the potential negative energy of a tiny spark (of fire) keeps coming to mind in this delicate situation with dangerous possibilities.

It is then that an unthinking act on her part leads to a dramatic move in the story. Instead of returning her cigarette to her lips, she casually throws it away and the black man sees this happen. He looks at her "with cold speculation". As it turns out he was interested in the cigarette she had thrown away. But his gaze does unnerve her. So we can see the race and gender issues at work. The American girl doesn't like his insolence and he apologises for making her waste a whole cigarette. In spite of her cold and rather indifferent and unprovocative behavior, the American girl still manages to evoke a confrontational response in the black young

man. They get into an unpleasant exchange and the language the man uses is one of understated threat.

When the man says “This isn’t America” we need to know that the West Indies were a British Colony. Politics enters the language of gender—“In this country there are only men and women, you’ll learn about it”. He seems to be talking about issues of equality as well as of democracy which were a major concern among blacks in those times. (“Is he talking in the universal context of mankind we ask ourselves”). This is the language of the mob although the young man denies any indecent intentions. Meanwhile, the bus arrives and the American young woman leaves.

The black young man, strong, aloof and proud to have shaken her supreme confidence, picks up the discarded cigarette she had thrown away. The class divide has also manifested itself in the swift, hungry movement of grabbing the leftover. The beauty of the story lies in the intensity of interest that is sustained throughout this socially and politically relevant piece as it touches livewire issues of race, gender and class.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Wole Soyinka

-Usha Anand

About the Poet

Soyinka was born in 1935 at Abeokuta near Ibadan in Western Nigeria into the family of a teacher and a social worker. Both his parents were Christians but the generation before were medicine men and people who believed in tribal mores, occult, magic rites etc. Soyinka thus felt connected to primitive African culture and its rich and complex heritage. This identification is reflected in his drama which in language, form and content is intertwined with the mores of Yoruba Culture.

Soyinka also wrote poetry which was initially avantgardistically sophisticated. But with involvement with the civil war in Nigeria and his imprisonment in the 1960s it took on a more serious, even tragic character. He was the first black author to be awarded the Nobel prize for Literature in 1986.

Introduction

Amongst his best-known poems, this is a poem about an African's search for an apartment in colour conscious Britain. Having initially studied at Ibadan, Soyinka moved to the University of Leeds where he later got a doctorate. He spent six years in England and was a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theatre in London. As such he was reasonably well versed with its cultural life and this familiarity is evident in the poem. The speaker tells us about a telephone conversation regarding a property that he intends to rent from a white landlady.

The Poem

Soyinka's technique in **Telephone Conversation** is to allow the bantering surface tone to lightly spread over the graver implications underneath.

Without a physical interface, through something as impersonal as the telephone, the speaker is able to strip a faceless landlady of all hypocrisy inculcated by "good breeding". At the same time, his own feelings of shame, even humiliation are exposed although he covers them up with his wit, his tremendous command over language and imagery and even manages to strike a blow at the lady's imagined sense of propriety by talking of his "raven black" bottom.

He begins in a seemingly objective, levelheaded way, judging the location and price of the property. The advantage was that the landlady said she stayed off the premises. In other words, she would not be there to interfere with or comment upon the author's use of the property. So the speaker being a self-respecting man, thought he would let her know he was African. He knows he is living in a racially conscious society where colour prejudice is rampant. As is mentioned earlier in the material black-white confrontation in the west has proved to be the bitterest, most tortuous and most prolonged racial confrontation. And the most visible physical marker of this difference is colour. And colour is what almost all black writing is about. The speaker here is a victim because of his colour. Colour is the man, so to say for the white landlady. His humiliation has its origin in his being a black (no matter light or dark). When he says, "I hate a wasted journey", he means that he doesn't wish to wait till the last moment for her to see that he is African and then find excuses for sending him away. His announcement is met with silence, and silence, they say, can speak louder than words. That her genteel status had

caused her silence is powerfully conveyed by the speaker's observation that silence can be a substitute for an unpleasant or unpremeditated response -“silenced transmission of pressurized good breeding”. When she does speak, she wishes to know how dark he is or rather, how light complexioned or how dark.

The idea of the colour of one’s skin being put into a slot A or B or whatever robs one of the feeling of the richness of human personality. In these days of power dressing and make-up, we are all aware of the variety of inputs that make one's skin colour and tone what it is. In fact, it might be difficult to find two equally, identically, fair or dark persons. The effacement of personality is emphasized further by the phrase, “hide and speak”, which is exactly what a telephone user does. He or she is not visible to the listener. And in the case of a public telephone booth, it is literally a cabin out of which one talks. The repeated use of “red” is significant. It could refer to anger or embarrassment.

But don’t forget that the lady is upper class. After the initial silence, she speaks; her query is clinical and insensitive. And the speaker’s response, describing his skin colour as West Africa Sepia, silences her for the second time. This time he imagines that she is mentally scanning the entire range of possible human complexions. Spectroscopic is derived from spectrum meaning range. We know that even among fair people and among the blacks there are varied shades of complexion. The lighter the complexion, the better a coloured person feels. And when the white woman can’t seem to locate “West Africa Sepia” she has to ask.

Of course, the poet’s outburst is stunning and has a sardonic humour to it. Talking of his face, his palms the soles of his feet, he goes on to say that his bottom is “raven black”. Of course she slams the receiver. The poet can almost feel it about his ears and concludes with a befittingly insulting “wouldn’t you rather/ See for yourself.”

Concluding Comment

The poem is a resounding satire on racial prejudice in so called civilized societies and gives vent to black anger in such situations. This is apartheid in action and after reading this poem, even you can gauge the degree of resentment it generates.

HARLEM
Langston Hughes

- Usha anand

About the poet

Harlem is the title of Langston Hughes's poem included in your text book. So let us first take a look at both the place Harlem which is synonymous with Black culture and Langston Hughes who is one of the earliest and most prominent Black poets in America.

Harlem is a residential area of New York City, USA, a political and cultural focus for African Americans. The Centre for Research in Black Culture is located here, next to the Countee Cullen Library, an historic meeting place for writers since the 1920's.

The Harlem Renaissance was a period of creativity, particularly in literature, among African-Americans in the 1920's. Like all great writers and poets of the community, Langston Hughes, 1902-1967, imbibed a sense of indelible racial pride, largely because of his upbringing in his grandmother's household with the tradition of oral storytelling. He went to grammar school in Lincoln, Illinois, where he was designated class poet. He later said this was because of his race as African Americans were stereotyped as having rhythm. After graduating high school in 1920 he returned to his father hoping to convince him to pay for an education at Columbia University. But his father refused to finance a writer's education and for a year Langston studied to be an engineer. He left us 1922 because of racial prejudice within the institution and his interests revolved around the Harlem neighborhood and he continued writing poetry.

Hughes was often in conflict with the goals and aspirations of the Black middle class and felt they were adopting and accommodating eurocentric values and culture for social equality. He depicted the low life i.e. lives of blacks in the lower socio-economic strata. He wrote of the superficial divisions and prejudices based on skin colour within the Black community. He wrote, "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind". He stressed the importance of a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism absent of self-hate that united people of African descent across the globe.

He was drawn to communism and went to the Soviet Union in 1932. Hughes wanted to record and interpret the lives of the common black folk, their thoughts and habits and dreams, their struggle for political freedom and economic well being. In the 1940s he declared himself a social poet as distinct from a primarily lyric poet, thus giving formal recognition to a bias his earlier work hinted at.

Socio-Political Context: A major aim of his work, he said, (Phylan, 11 No. 4 Winter 1950) p.307 was to interpret and comment upon Negro life and its relation to the problems of Democracy. Taking the American Dream as his cue, Hughes had developed his poetic metaphor of the dream, a concept which was to become a strategic theme, a major artery running through the body of his work.

The dream is transmitted along two channels: first as an assortment of romantic fantasies and desires, including the desire for a life rich in love and adventure. Secondly, as the dream of political freedom and economic well-being. The latter is an extension of the former, and it is this

latter that is the “dream deferred” of the black man and black race. To 'defer' is to postpone, to put off for a future time. So, for the Blacks, it is a cruelly long wait for what they desire. The theme of the “dream deferred” finds its fullest expression in his social poetry.

Duality: When you read “Harlem” a poem of just eleven lines, you can observe a certain dual aspect in its imagery. To understand this, let us take note of a special feature of black culture, its music which is often referred to as “the blues”. Hughes wrote poetry which he saw as the literary equivalent of Blues music. Ralph Ellison stated that the blues “at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit”.

These two aspects of the Black experience are reflected in the images of rottenness and disease being juxtaposed with those of sweetness.

Analysis of the Poem: The images in Harlem are sensory, domestic, earthy, like blues images. The stress is on deterioration-drying, rotting, festering, souring on loss of essential natural quality. The raisin has fallen from a fresh juicy grape to a dehydrated but still edible raisin to a sun-baked and inedible dead bone of itself. The Afro-American is not unlike the raisin, for he is in a sense a desiccated trunk of his original African self, used and abandoned in the American wilderness with the stipulation that he rot and disappear. Like the raisin lying neglected in the scorching sun, the Black man is treated like a thing of no consequence. But the raisin refuses the fate assigned to it; it metamorphoses instead into a malignant living sore that will not heal or disappear. The metaphor is rather long drawn out but is symptomatic of a serious disorder. Its stink is like the stink of rotten meat sold to black folks in so many ghetto groceries; meat no longer suitable for human use, deathly. And while a syrupy sweet is not central to the diet, it is still a rounding off dessert. But that final pleasure turns out to be a pain.

The elements of the deferred dream are like the raisin, sore meat and candy, little things of no great consequence in themselves. But their unrelieved accretion packs together considerable pressure. Their combined weight is too much to carry. The longer it is carried, the heavier it gets. And if it is dropped, it might explode from all its strange, tortured, compressed energies.

In short, a dream deferred can be a terrifying thing. Its greatest threat is its unpredictability.

Further Reading

Jennie, Onvickekwa, Langston Hughes: An Introduction to the Poetry; New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

STILL I RISE
Maya Angelou

-Usha Anand

About the Poet

Maya Angelou born on April 4, 1928 is a famous black American woman poet. The introduction in your textbook gives you a lot of information about her.

In her thirties, Maya became a distinguished social activist author. Also her commitment to promote black civil rights strengthened. She began to examine the nature of racial oppression, racial progress and racial integration.

For many readers, she personifies the Afro-American female writer with a wide range of experiences and interests. On the one hand, she is heir to the slave narrative; on the other she is sister to the women authors of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's.

In one of her autobiographical works '*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing*', published in 1969, she says.

“The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance”.

Again she says,

“The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all the common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power”.

Maya Angelou's poetry seems to be conjured out of her by the soul of her people, in particular, women; her journey towards selfhood is a metaphor of their lives. Her primary concern is the human capacity for survival, redemption and transcendence. She maintains a confident and positive attitude about the possibilities of life not by denying pain and sorrow in her life but rather by focussing on the sense of humanity and self worth that have helped her transcend these experiences.

In a newspaper interview with David Frost, published in The New Sun Newspaper, she said, “growing up is very painful, almost impossible; growing up is admitting there are demons you cannot overcome----. The greatest of all virtues is COURAGE”.

Surviving inspite of these demons is what **Still I Rise** is about.

The Poem

The poem has a raw energy and is addressed to a hostile world.

The first stanza draws attention to the fact that accounts of the lives of an exploited, suppressed, enslaved, racial group or community are invariably biased by colour prejudice, such a strong cultural factor in western society. The phrase, “bitter twisted lies”, actually expresses the bitterness of the poet herself. And her indomitable spirit refuses to be trod on, crushed. Like dust, it still rises.

As the poem progresses, she uses new images to assert her spirit of survival; sassiness is rudeness, a lack of respect. If a black woman's sassiness upsets people, so be it. If it makes them gloomy, that is a victory for an oppressed group – black women. When she talks of oil wells, she is referring to access to wealth.

Her amazing self-confidence is reiterated in her psychological security reaffirmed by images of the certainty of the moon and the sun and the tides caused by the moon. The rising tide is hope springing high.

She does not lose sight of the fact that people would not like to see her so confident. 'Broken with bowed head, and lowered eyes' is not how people will get to see her. Nor will they see her with drooping shoulders, defeated and demoralized. She is bold, even arrogant, and can laugh as if she has goldmines in her backyard. And the wealth represented by oil wells and gold mines is not just material; it is an emotional and psychological resource, the source of strength.

All the hostility described in Stanza VI cannot upset the speaker.

That there is an undeniable physical dimension to sexuality is emphasized in Stanza VII. To “dance like I've got diamonds/ At the meeting of my thighs” is to revel in one's sexuality rather than deny it.

From line 20 onwards the mood of the poem becomes philosophical. The brazenness is left behind. It is almost a recollection of the racial past of a whole community. The “hunts of history's shame” refers to the horrible past of victims of the slave era – the torture, humiliation and suffering described in all slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

She talks of the pain her ancestors endured. Her own life is rooted in pain but she transcends all to stay afloat to survive; “black” in line 33 is meaningfully used. So is the image of the ocean. Significantly, the individual speaker here is herself the ocean which contains/bears the welling and swelling of the tide, rather than being lost in the ocean. Other poets often see the ocean as one of the unconquerable forces of nature. Here, the poet herself is the ocean unlimited power personified.

Another natural image which follows is that of daybreak. The night of fear and terror ends to give way to a beautiful clear day. And the poet faces this beautiful new day with 'gifts that my ancestor's gave'. This phrase refers to the intense racial pride in African culture and ancestry which all blacks see as a source of strength in their struggle for survival against heavy odds.

When the slaves, powerless and crushed, dreamt of a future, surely they must have dreamt and hoped for future generations free of bondage, happy and assertive. She in an ascendant mood is the fulfillment and embodiment of that imagined dream of several past generations of her ancestors.

You observe that from line 29 onwards, as the poet shifts mentally to her racial past, the rhythm of the lines becomes different. The long-drawn out suffering represented by long lines culminates in the powerful brief assertiveness expressed in the repeated use of I rise, I rise, I rise (7 times). This is reinforcement and reassertion of a triumphant self – the black poet.

THEME: VIOLENCE AND WAR

Introduction

Human history is replete with wars. Wars were/are waged primarily for conquest of land and subjugation of the conquered peoples. The heroes and warriors of various wars since the ancient times, have been the stuff of legends, folktales and ballads. They occupy a dominant place in the psyche of the people of various cultures. Literature which is a cultural product has not been indifferent to this eulogizing aspect of war. The earliest of literature has had for its subject-war. The Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, Greek epics the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* and the Roman *Aeneid*, all have for their subject war, and ponder upon the question of honour and disgrace, love and hatred. An ancient Chinese Sun Tzu authored the first book on military tactics and strategy *The Art of War* which adorns the shelves of many modern military officers.

Martyrdom- the honour of dying for one's motherland has been thought of as the most honorable death an individual can ever aspire for. War rhetoric no matter which side one is on, is full of glorification of its purpose. The two world wars in the twentieth century, partially altered this perspective. Due to rapid technological advancement which resulted in a vast scale of destruction, questions began to be raised about the folly of war. "We must remember not only that the battle casualties of W.W. I were many times greater than those of W.W.II, wiping out virtually a whole generation of young men and shattering so many illusions and ideals; but also that people were wholly unprepared for the horrors of modern trench warfare. W.W.I broke out on a largely innocent world, a world that still associated warfare with glorious cavalry charges and the noble pursuit of heroic ideals". *Norton Anthology of English Literature (1891)*. Protests of various kinds against war tried to expose the emptiness and jingoism of war rhetoric. However, the sad truth remains that almost every part of the world today is embroiled in some form of violence or the other. Our own nation is beset with various kinds of warfare and violence. Communal violence, ethnic violence, caste violence, terrorist violence is a reality we all are coping to live with. Things have come to such a pass that it is now deemed necessary to wage war to combat violence.

The selection of poems, essays, short stories given for your study draw attention to the horrifying aspects of war and violence. The subjects of these pieces are not Generals and warriors but the common man or the common soldier who suffers the consequences of the war the most. The focus of this course as also this particular section is not the writers. This course has been prepared with a view to encourage students to form "insights" into the various themes that emerge from the text(s). The focus therefore is on developing skills of textual analysis, paying attention to the literary techniques and devices at work in the text.

The section *Violence and War* raises some very pertinent questions about the nature of war and violence. In a world ravaged by various kinds of violence, this section is not only very topical but also very necessary.

DULCE ET DECORUM EST

Wilfred Owen

-Nalini Prabhakar

The Poet

Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) was a British Soldier during W.W.I. He fought in France from January 1917 as a second Lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment. He spent several days in a bomb crater with the mangled remains of a fellow soldier, because of which he suffered 'shell-shock'. He was sent to a war hospital in Edinburgh to recuperate. It is here that he met Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves who encouraged his poetry. Owen returned to the front in 1918 and was killed in combat on 4th November 1918.

Owen is perhaps the finest of the war poets. Most of his poems were published posthumously. Owen's poetry shows an eyewitness account of the brutality of war, to a world that still believed in "heroic wars". In the preface to a proposed volume of poems he wrote, "My subject is war, and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity".

Summary

Originally the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" was written as a personal letter to Jessie Pope. Owen later decided to address his poem to the wider audience of all supporters of the war. This is a powerful anti-war poem which emphasises the brutality of war, thereby undermining the conventional notions of honour and glory associated with wars. The poem describes a soldier dying from poison gas. After combat at the Front, the narrator and his troop of exhausted soldiers are making their way back to the base, when a Gas shell is fired at them. A soldier is fatally gassed and he is dying slowly, eaten away from inside, drowning in his own blood. The horrifying image of the dying soldier permeates the narrator's dreams making him live the nightmare over and over again.

In this poem a line from an ode by the Roman poet Horace "Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori" (It is sweet and proper to die for one's country) is being challenged by Owen. Owen does not use the entire line in the title. He stops at "Its sweet and proper to die". He then proceeds to paint a picture of death--brutal death. The manner of death described seems to suggest that there is nothing that can justify this manner of death. After all there is nothing sweet and proper about a man drowning in his own blood--"guttering, choking drowning "white eyes writhing" "blood...gargling from froth corrupted lungs". The meaning of the poem is firmly established at the end when the narrator says, "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory / The old lie" Dulce et Decorum Est Pro patria mori". The title then is extremely ironical and the irony is sustained through the entire poem.

Critical Analysis

Poetry is poetry because of the presence of certain elements such as metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration and imagery. A poem usually has more than one image, but all the images should cohere and work together.

The opening words of the poem "bent double" immediately catch our attention. The two similes in the first two lines of the poems heighten the sense of drama. In the first, the soldiers are like "beggars" and in the second the soldiers are like "hags"--sexless, old, associated with witchcraft and death. By lines 5 & 6, the soldiers move from the state of "being like" beggars, hags, to "being" blind, drunk and deaf. The narrator uses "cursed through sludge" to suggest the

movement of the marchers, and this figuratively also suggests the state of mind of the marchers. The initial lines with alliterating sounds create a claustrophobic march of exhausted soldiers. Note the use of alliterating sounds "t"/"o"/"m"/"l" in the following lines.

Till on the haunting flares we
 turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest
 we began to trudge
Men marched assleep. Many had
 lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went
 lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even
 to the hoots
Of gas shells dropping softly behind.

In the above quoted lines you will also note the accumulation of specific details. The phrases used beginning from "Men marched" are also short and sharply declining as in "Men marched asleep. All went lame, all blind". The first three phrases "Men marched...blood shod" describe the physical appearance of the soldiers. The next three "All went lame...behind" describe the total destruction of physical movement and physical senses---"lame", "blind", "drunk" and "deaf".

Owen breaks up the iambic rhythm of the lines with the use of punctuations; commas in the middle of lines, dashes, hyphens, exclamations. He deliberately attempts to break the rhythm, to emphasize that war is not a rhythmic dance. This is further accentuated by the images of stumbling, fumbling, staggering dying man. The pretty language of the poetry of his day is substituted with brutal images of the reality of war. By these images Owen illustrates the poem's ultimate irony which lies in its title "Dulce et Decorum Est". There are four clusters of images in this poem:

1. Sleep or dream images--"haunting", "rest", "men marched asleep", "tired", in all my dreams", "smothering".
2. Drowning images--these are found mostly in the 2nd and 3rd stanza. "Floundering", thick green light", "under a green sea, I saw him drowning", "guttering choking, drowning", "gargling".
3. Images of physical breakdown--"Bent double", "knock kneed", "lame", "limp", "drunk", "fumbling", "clumsy", "stumbling", "writhing".
4. Images of breakdown of senses--"blind", "deaf", "helpless sight".

The men who enlist are innocent children who wish for desperate glory but the experience of war will make them learn the truth, the truth inherent in "white eyes writhing", "face like a devil's sick of sin "(although the soldier unlike the devil has not sinned) and "blood gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, Bitter as the cud of vile incurable sores on innocent tongues".

The truth that all war is brutal, ugly and inhuman.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

Edna St. Vincent Millay

-Nalini Prabhakar

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) :

Millay was born in Rockland, Maine. Her early life involved movement from town to town with her two sisters, relying on the kindness of friends and relatives. Though poor, her mother Cora, traveled with books and read them to her children. The family finally settled in Camden in a small house on the property of Cora's well to do aunt. It was here that Millay wrote the first of her poems which brought her recognition and fame on the strength of her poem, "Renescence" (1912). She was awarded a Scholarship to Vassar College. After her graduation, she moved to Greenwich Village in New York. Millay was known as much for her poetry as for her unconventional, bohemian lifestyle and her many love affairs with men and women. The poem "Conscientious Objector" was written in 1917 during W.W.I. and was published in the collection "Wine from These Grapes".

Analysis:

The title of the poem gives us a clear indication of the theme. The Conscientious Objector is a person who refuses to be a part of the armed forces for moral and ethical reasons. Thus, by inference war itself is being considered as immoral. War is immoral because it militates against life and facilitates death. This poem Conscientious Objector then, is a statement against the immorality of war as well as death which follows in its wake.

The poem begins with the recognition that death is inevitable, life and death being the two sides of the same coin. The affirmative tone of "**I shall die**" is followed by an equally vehement denial "**But that is all I shall do for Death**". Though she knows Death is inevitable, she refuses to aid Death in its designs. The personification of Death in the opening line serves to heighten the sense of struggle. The resistance offered here is not against death as part of the cosmic design, but Death as a consequence of man's mindless actions in mindless wars.

The poet offers a passive non-cooperation as a method of resisting this pointless death.

The following lines (lines 2-5) capture the urgency in the situation beautifully. Death like a hunter is preparing to set about his business in places like Cuba and the Soviet Balkans, which are in the grip of civil war and strife certain of finding many victims. Death is leading his horse out of the barn in a hurry – "**I hear the clatter on the barn-floor. He is in haste.**" However, the business in Cuba or the Balkans is not the handiwork of Death. The civil war and strife is engineered by man and Death is reaping the benefits of man's folly. The resultant suffering and death, the poet seems to suggest is avoidable only if man refuses to invite death and chooses life instead. The poet on her part shows the way by refusing to assist Death-- "**But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth. And he may mount by himself; I will not give him a leg up.**"

In the next line "**Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him which way the fox ran**", Death is presented as a hunter who is killing not for prey but for sport. The fox obviously stands for the people who are the innocent victims of war. The image of the hunt, once again reinforces the idea of war as a meaningless cruel game of Death. A subtle irony in these lines alerts us to the fact that war is a sport for people, who see death only as a

spectacle. Yet, at the same time, the hunt would not be possible without the active participation of the hounds, or in other words the foot soldiers. Hence the foot soldiers are in a significant way responsible for this game of Death.

This theme of Death hunt is carried forward in lines 12-13, as well, but this is another kind of hunt. The poet points out the essential inhumanity of the hunt by referring to the sordid-history of slavery in America. In this Death hunt, black men, women and children were brutally hunted down by the white masters. The brutality is captured in the poignant image of the terrified black boy hiding in the swamps to save his life. The first part of the poem ends once again with the resolve that, although death is inevitable, the poet will not do anything to aid Death. The poet's passive resistance in the face of imminent physical pain and torture, (**flick my shoulders with his whip**", "**hoof on my breast**") is a measure of the poet's pacifist beliefs.

The second part of the poem, from lines 16-24, continues the theme of resistance but this time in the face of inducements. The poet promises to protect not just her friends but her enemies as well against Death – "**I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends nor of my enemies either.**" In this part, she presents a world view which is not only pacifist but inclusive as well. She refuses to be "**a spy in the land of the living**" She refuses to "deliver men to death" The poet in a very quiet way, through consistent denials asserts life. This quiet determination born out of the poet's pacifist world-view, is her response to the militarist environment of the first World War. The concluding lines of the poem marks a movement outward. While re-affirming her resolve to resist death, she tries to reach out to others and instill the same resolve in them. These lines take us back in time and remind us of all the betrayals which aided Death in its designs. This reminder is also a warning not to fall into Death's trap. There is also, in these lines a passionate appeal to all those men who have become the agents of Death to affirm life. The poet assures the people that she would resist Death at all costs. Through her own example, she is perhaps urging the people to become "Conscientious Objectors".

NAMING OF PARTS

Henry Reed

-Nalini Prabhakar

The Poet: Henry Reed (1914-1986) was born in Birmingham in England. He is known mostly for his work in Genres other than poetry. He has been prolific in creation of plays, especially radio plays. Reed translated a number of Italian plays of playwright Ugo Betti and adapted them for radio broadcast and stage production. Reed has written or adapted more than forty plays for British Broadcasting Corporation.

As for his poetry he is known primarily for “Naming of Parts” and “Judging Distances” which together with three other sections appeared under a single title “Lessons of War”. Reed served in the Royal Army with the foreign office in World War II. His military training inspired the poems in “Lessons of War”.

“Naming of Parts” is a humorous poem that emphasizes the futility of war. The setting of this poem is a military training camp.

The instructor as part of the training is giving a part by part description of a rifle and this gives the young recruit a lot of ammunition for sexual puns.

Introduction

“Naming of Parts” is section one of a five section sequence called “Lessons of War”. It is a poem of World War II. This poem raises the same issues as the other poems/prose pieces in your selection – the beauty of life and the waste that is war – but it does this in a remarkably different style. The style is humorous with a lot of puns and double entendres adding to its ironic humour.

The young recruit is being taught how to handle weapons, in this particular instance the Lee Enfield Rifle, but his mind is elsewhere. His mind is on spring, renewal and also sex. In other words he is thinking of life, whereas the war lesson is teaching him how to destroy this very thing, life.

The poem has two voices – the voice of the instructor and the voice of the recruit and it works by juxtaposing the matter of fact, repetitive droning voice of the instructor with that of the sensuous, longing tone of the recruit.

Analysis

Each stanza has two distinct parts. The first three lines of each stanza except the final stanza present the instructor’s lesson on how to assemble and fire a gun. The second part is the voice of the recruit and marks a sudden shift to the world of nature represented in this instance by a garden. Each stanza therefore contrasts the world of the military camp with the world of nature. In keeping with this the rhythm of the poem alternates between the hard practical discourse of the instructor and the sensuous emotional response of the recruit.

The gun whose parts are being named by the instructor is in many ways like the army camp. In the first instance, a gun is a piecemeal thing, composed of many parts and has to be

assembled together. The army camp is also mechanically composed and controlled. The natural world on the other hand is a composite whole, where the life processes are in a continuum. This aspect is emphasized by the manner in which the language of each part is structured. While naming the parts of the gun, short phrases and sentences are used. The words are also dry and mostly technical; but when the recruits voice takes over words flow into long musical sentences evoking sensuous images of colour and elegance. The following lines from the poem illustrate this point.

Instructor

- a) "Today we have naming of parts/yesterday. We had daily cleaning."
- b) "This is the lower sling swivel and this/ Is the upper sling suviel."
- c) "This is the safety-catch, which is always released/with an easy flick of the thumb."
- d) "And this you can see is the bolt."

Recruit

- a) "Japonica/glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens/ And today we have naming of parts."
- b) "The branches/hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures/which in our case we have not got."
- c) "The blossoms/Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone sec/Any of them. Using their finger."
- d) "And rapidly backwards and forwards/ The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers/They call it easing the spring."

In the 2nd stanza there are two parts (upper and lower sling swivels) named but we do not know what function they serve ("Whose use you will see, when you are given your slings"). More over these guns here have not got the slings and piling swivels, which effectively means the recruits would not know how to carry and stack the guns. In the last stanza too, we are told that the soldiers do not have the "point of balance" (Which in our case we have not got"). The irony here is in not having. So what is it that the soldiers do not have? The soldiers are shown to be lacking in all that the garden represents. The garden is a symbol of life and beauty, at once "silent and eloquent" where the Japonica "glistens like coral" and the blossoms are 'fragile' and motionless."

Then there are the bees in the garden. Like the soldiers they are highly structured and regimented but the comparison here is ironic because the bees are intimately related to the flowers and are an integral part of the natural order of things whereas the soldiers are not related to anything, least of all to the guns they are being instructed on.

In the third stanza while naming the parts of a gun, body parts such as thumb and fingers are named in the same mechanical fashion. In the military scheme of things it is only a part without a body attached, and is important only in a functional sense. This emphasizes the point made earlier that the body is fragmented into functional parts and therefore not a whole. The emotional quotient does not figure in this scheme of things. It is not surprising therefore that the wandering senses of the recruit respond to the sensuality of the spring activity in the garden. This emotional response to the fumbling bees assaulting the flowers makes the recruit all the more conscious of that which "he does not have".

With the “bees are assaulting and fumbling he flowers” the language of sexuality enters the poem. It is developed through the pun on “easing the spring” which is at once a part of the gun and also a sexual reproductive activity. The bolt and cocking piece of the gun and the breech that goes backward and forwards – all actions with reference to the gun – have sexual implications and refer to the sexual activity of the garden. In the case of the gun, all the aforementioned actions lead to death and destruction, whereas in the garden they all lead to the fertility and regeneration of life.

In the first four stanzas the two voices are distinctly different yet connected. The recruit takes one or the other instruction and relocates it in the context of the garden thus giving meaning and life to the otherwise sterile words. This relocation which is only partial in the earlier stanza is made complete in the final stanza with the line, “They call it easing the spring”. The alternating voices fuse into the single voice of the recruit. The voice of the instructor is muted out but his instructions freely intermingle with the lyrical phrases of the recruit. This representation of the instructions in the ambience of the garden alters their meaning and infuses them with the energy and life of the garden.

Notes

- 1) Japonica – A tropical shrub with Bright Orangy Red Flowers.
- 2) Piling Swivel – It is a metal C-shaped bracket, mounted on the nose cap toward the end of a rifle barrel. It facilitates the making of a pile by allowing 2 or 3 rifles to interlock.

The instructor is demonstrating using an older, outdated rifle which retains the superfluous piling swivel – but the recruits have the new model which does not have it. The piling swivel was discontinued from standard issue during the latter years of W.W.-I. The rationale behind this was cost cutting and more important the modern trench warfare did not permit the luxury of storing weapons in a neat pile-nor the time to untangle them.

GENERAL, YOUR TANK IS A POWERFUL VEICHL

Bertolt Brecht

-Nalini Prabhakar

Brecht was born in Augsburg, Bavaria and was raised in a comfortable middle class home. He was forced to flee Germany in 1933 because of his leftist beliefs and his opposition to the Nazi regime of Hitler. He spent 14 years in exile in Scandinavia and United States. He returned to Europe in 1947. Two years later he moved to East Berlin and remained there until his death in 1956.

As a creator Brecht is many sided; poet, dramatist, theoretician, director critic. As a dramatist, Brecht has been highly influential in the 20th century. As a poet his contribution comprises of more than 1500 poems collected in several volumes. His poetry is a faithful chronicle of his times, and has for its subject the common man-the worker, the peasant, the soldier in the trenches.

Introduction

“General, your tank is a powerful vehicle” is from Brecht’s “A German War Primer”. This is a simple poem and the meaning that it conveys is simple yet profound, and it does this with a directness which is both touching and thought provoking. In “Hymn to Communism” Brecht writes “It is the simple which is so difficult”. This in a nutshell is Brecht’s principle on Art, and the simplicity is both of expression as well as thought. To get a feel of this poem let us look at some other parts from “A German Primer” which express a similar anti-war sentiment as the “General...”

1. Those at the top say This way to Glory. Those down below say This way to Grave.

The War which is coming
Is not the first one. There were
Other wars before it
When the last one came to an end
There were conquerors and conquered.
Among the conquered the common people
Starved. Among the conquerors
The common people starved too.

When it comes to marching many do not know
That their enemy is marching at their head
The voice which gives them their orders
Is their enemy’s voice and
The man who speaks of the enemy
Is the enemy himself.

Analysis

The poem is addressed to the Generals of war and each stanza begins with General. This is interesting because the Generals hardly ever lead at the front. They are perhaps those that least risk their lives. They plan attack strategies but are distanced from the sordid business of fighting in the war. It is only right that this poem should be addressed to them as it makes a powerful statement against war.

Let us first sum up the poem. The first stanza deals with the powerful tank which ‘Smashes down forests and crushes hundred men’. Although it can do this, it is nonetheless powerless, because it cannot propel itself. It needs a driver.

The second stanza deals with the powerful bomber that “flies faster than a storm and carries more than an elephant”. The bomber too, like the tank suffers from the same defect. It needs a mechanic to fly. Note the ironic use of the word “powerful”, in both these stanzas. The last stanza states that man is useful for he is the one who converts the otherwise powerless tanks and bomber into powerful instruments of destruction. But then even man suffers from one defect. This defect is his ability to think. The use of “defect” in this stanza is highly ironical for this defect is not really a defect but the crowning feature of human beings.

Brecht’s concern whether in his plays or his poems has been to encourage the audience/reader to think. He once said “Nothing is more important than learning to think crudely. Crude thinking is the thinking of great men”. Brecht in this poem is suggesting that if only man begins to think, he can render all machines/weapons of destruction powerless, and put an end to wars by refusing to co-operate with war-mongers.

THE DOG OF TETWAL

Manto

-Dr. Neeta Gupta

About the Author

In the world of Urdu Short Stories, one name that stands towering above all others is that of Saadat Hasan Manto. The sheer intensity of his stories, particularly those on the Partition of India, leaves one almost gasping for breath as it were. Manto lived through the experiences of the Partition and like many other writers who belonged to that period of time, re-lived the horror and the incomprehensible violence and brutality of that year through his writings on the theme. What was different about Manto's stories was that he wrote dispassionately and objectively, taking no sides and pronouncing no judgements. He was deeply wounded by the sudden savagery leashed upon man by man, upon brother by brother, on neighbour by neighbour, upon one community by the other.

Manto belonged to a middle-class Kashmiri family of Amritsar. He was born in Sambrala (which is some miles from Amritsar) on the eleventh of May 1912. His short life span saw him migrate to Pakistan after the partition, where he died in Lahore in 1955 at the age of forty three.

Manto's father, Maulvi Ghulam Hasan, was a well educated man and worked as a government official in Sambrala. Soon after Manto's birth he shifted to Amritsar and set up residence in Kucha Vakilan. He retired as Additional Sessions Judge. As far as formal education is concerned, Manto failed to make his mark. He could clear his school leaving examination only in the third attempt and it is highly ironical that one of the subjects which he was unable to pass was Urdu. He entered The Hindu Sabha College in Amritsar in 1931 but failed in the first year itself and so dropped out. A few years later, in 1934, following the advice of a school friend in Amritsar, he took admission in the famous Aligarh Muslim University. But the story got repeated all over again and Manto did not do well.

It was around this time that he met Bari Alig, the man who put him on the path of becoming a writer. Bari was himself a writer and journalist and immediately sensed Manto's bent of mind, his talent and his fascination with the idea of bringing about a revolution. He introduced Manto to Russian and French literature and set for him the task of translating Victor Hugo's play *The Last Days of a Condemned Man* into Urdu. Manto finished it in an incredibly short time of two weeks! This translation was published and was followed by a translation of Oscar Wilde's *Vera*. Having successfully completed these tasks Manto was easily persuaded to try his hand at creative writing, writing original stories in Urdu. Here too Manto proved to be a man truly gifted with the power of creative expression. He could write out his stories in an incredibly short span of time and rarely needed to revise his drafts. How much the massacre at Jalianwallah Bagh had impressed upon the mind of the seven year old Manto is evident from the fact that one of his first short stories to be published in a magazine was about the tragic incident and he returned to the bloody memories in a later story written almost in the last years of his life when he wrote 'It Happened in 1919'.

Around 1935 Manto spent about three months at a hill station in Bataua to recover from tuberculosis. When it was found that he was suffering from no such ailment, he returned to Amritsar and then moved to Lahore where he took up his first regular job with a magazine called *Paras*. Disillusionment soon followed and he gave up the job and moved to Bombay in 1935

itself, this time to work as editor for a film magazine *Mussawar*, at forty rupees per month. Manto stayed in Bombay from 1935 to 1947, only to leave it for one and a half year in between when he went to Delhi to work with All India Radio.

All along Manto continued writing stories, plays and essays. The first collection of his stories appeared in 1940 and was followed by a volume of essays in 1942. In his one and a half year stint with All-India Radio, he wrote more than a hundred plays. Not being very happy in Delhi, Manto moved back to Bombay to take up his old job at *Mussawar*. He soon branched off into free lancing for various film companies as their screenplay writer. He worked for Saroj, Movietone, Hindustan Cinetone and Imperial Film Company. In 1943 he joined Filmistan for which he wrote a number of films most notable among which was *Eight Days* where Manto himself played a small part. He even wrote the story of the famous film *Mirza Ghalib* but unfortunately this film was made after Manto had left for Pakistan. The screenplay for the film was written by Rajinder Singh Bedi and it was directed by Sohrab Modi. From Filmistan Manto moved to join Bombay Talkies.

Manto met his future wife Safia Begum in Bombay. It was an arranged match and he was taken aback when he was accepted by Safia's family despite his irregular income, ad-hoc nature of job and his habit of drinking. But Manto's life with Safia was a happy one and together they tried to combat their difficult financial circumstances. The couple had four children a son Arif (who passed away tragically at the tender age of one and a half years) and three daughters Nikhat, Nuzhat and Nusrat.

Manto's family was on the other side of the border the day India was partitioned. He was literally torn between the two countries, unable to decide whether to stay or go. All around him was chaos and anarchy unleashed on the world with a sudden ferocity and with so much of barbarity that it was impossible to make any sense of it. Manto was tormented by innumerable questions when he saw the merciless killings and unprecedented violence all around him. Both India and Pakistan were free but, as he observes, 'man was a slave in both countries, of prejudices, of religious fanaticism of bestiality of cruelty'. He was unable to decide which of the two countries he would now call his homeland. His family was in Pakistan and he was in the land where his roots were. Should he cross over the line or not was the question that constantly plagued his mind. Finally he decided to go to Lahore.

Manto lived for seven years in Pakistan in Lahore and died from depression and his drink induced liver ailment on 18 January 1955. These seven years were strife-torn years for a sensitive writer who was uprooted from the land he loved and that he carried with him in his mind till his last breath. He faced extreme poverty and deprivation as he had no steady source of income. In his last days he was reduced to a state of virtual penury and had to take refuge at his in-law's place. But these seven years were very profitable from the point of view of Manto the writer as he wrote one hundred and twenty seven short stories during this time apart from various essays, sketches and memoirs. The nightmarish reality of the horrific division of the subcontinent was transformed into great literature as Manto wrote one story after another on the theme. *Siyah Hashiye*, a collection of short sketches on the Partition, is notable for its grim humour and utterly detached tone that becomes a powerful tool for recreating the horror without any sentimentality or perverse, obsessive indulgence in violence.

The Partition

Partition of the subcontinent into two separate geographical entities was that calamitous event in its history that changed not only its physical boundaries forever but also altered the lives of its people in an irrevocable manner. The horror, the madness, the bestiality, the violence, arson, looting and rape that followed in the wake of the political decision was unprecedented. Suddenly, overnight, all those secure walls of a shared tradition, shared culture, shared history came crumbling down. People of different communities, who till then had led a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, now turned into enemies. Reason was the first casualty and fear and then rage were its first outcome. Neighbours who till yesterday would have died for each other now thirsted for one another's blood simply because they belonged to different communities. Scenes of senseless carnage were witnessed everywhere. A communal frenzy, a hypnotic obsession with violence overtook the people on both sides of the dividing line. It was ironical that the people of the same country, who had set an example of winning a struggle in a non-violent manner, following the ideals of Gandhi and had thrown off the yoke of British subjugation, would now turn against each other. Certainly these were demented times when people had no consideration for either young or old, child or woman and all suffered a horrifying fate. If any managed to escape physical violence or torture, the memory of what they witnessed scarred their minds forever and none emerged unscathed from the holocaust.

For writers who wrote around that time it became almost an inward compulsion to write about the Partition of the country. For most of them the memory of what they had suffered or witnessed was too recent to allow for objectivity in their writings about it. There was an obsessive preoccupation with violence as they had been sufferers, eye-witnesses and tragic participants in the horrendous events. The horrors suffered and witnessed had become a part of their experiential world. They were too near and too much involved in the holocaust. The stories that were written immediately after the Partition therefore, tend to recreate the horror in all its details without many attempts at objectivity or an imaginative rendering of the events being described. These stories could not even offer any historical explanation nor see any political necessity for the suffering. They are marked by a sense of rage and helplessness and also a sense of incomprehensibility of it all due to its utter meaninglessness. Writers like Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chander, Bhishm Sahni, Ibne Insha, Kamleshwar, Umm-e-Ummara, Kulwant Singh Virk, Sant Singh Sikhon, Khushwant Singh, Ibrahim Jalees, S.K. Vatsayan and many more; all gave expression to their tormented souls through the medium of fiction. History thus entered the realm of Fiction but a rendering of the same event brought into focus the human face of the tragedy. What were merely some figures and statistics in the historical chronicles of the time now assumed human identities through the works of these creative writers. Instead of just numbers so many dead, so many wounded, so many raped, so many homeless-these fictional historical narratives tried to show the actual suffering that lay behind each face, each number. For a historian the holocaust of 1947 can perhaps be covered in two volumes of objective recording. For the fiction writer, however, the sad event threw up unlimited possibilities of delineation and treatment as there were innumerable faces of grief and an equally limitless number of questions that erupted from the sudden barbarism and bestiality of man to man. The writers tried to grapple with their fractured psyches with the basic question 'why'? Why did the shared social, cultural, traditional and historical fabric collapse? Why did we turn killers and violators? Why did we forget the past? Why did we give in to rage rather than reason the questions are endless. The fictional writings took up these questions in one story after another, in one novel after another, looking for answers but failing to find any.

Fictional historical narratives about the Partition developed basically on two lines. There were those who re-evoked the senseless carnage, the horrifying brutalities and the numbing meaningless violence that the different communities perpetrated on each other. Then there were those narratives that focused on the fear, the agony, and the insanity which resulted from the sudden dislocation of people, uprooting them cruelly from places which had been home to them for generations, only to be thrown into a strange alien land and told that henceforth this was their home. The suffering and anguish that resulted from being wrenched away from familiar surroundings forever, is sensitively delivered in these stories.

In 1948, India and Pakistan went to war over territorial boundaries, principally which nation would govern Kashmir. The war, however, spread all along the frontier. This tragedy was the impetus for “The Dog of Tetwal”, which gives a microcosmic view of the hateful struggle. The unfortunate division between the people of the two countries is a legacy of the Partition. Although nature continues in harmony in the story's mountain setting, the Pakistani and Indian soldiers who face each other there cannot be at peace. The friendly dog who is unable to comprehend the changed circumstances becomes a helpless and innocent victim of the tension between the two. The manner in which it is first befriended and then killed by the soldiers effectively brings out the irrational hatred that had led to unprecedented violence during the partition and that continues to mark the relationship between the two communities.

The Dog of Tetwal: A Discussion

‘The Dog of Tetwal’ is a story that is set in a time immediately after the partition of India. The hateful struggle about which country would govern Kashmir had led to a war that had spread all along the frontier. This ongoing war forms the background to the story and the very first words of the story tell us that there are ‘two sides.’ In a purely matter of fact way we are told that one can hear ‘occasional bursts of firing’ but ‘never the sound of human shrieks.’ These two sides are of course those of Hindustan and Pakistan and in the immediate context we have two mountain peaks being defended by both respectively.

The Natural Scene

As against the man-made calamity Manto gives us an idyllic description of the natural world which goes about its business ‘oblivious to the battle.’ The tranquility of the mountains pervades in spite of the tension. Manto gives us an almost poetic description of the peace and harmony in nature. In the world of Nature, peace is palpable. Flowers continue to bloom, bees go about their business of sipping nectar, birds are singing, and fluffy white clouds sail lazily in the skies. The occasional shot strikes a discordant note in the peaceful scene.

What do you think is Manto’s purpose in giving us this idyllic description? Is it not ironic that even the serenity of the physical world is unable to bring peace into the world of humans? By pitting the battle against this idyllic natural scene Manto further heightens the fact that man and his struggle for power disrupt the natural order of things.

The Question of Identity

Men have created insurmountable barriers between themselves; barriers that are based on the differences of culture, community, religion and more recently nation. The sense of difference percolates through the use of words like ‘the two sides’, ‘Hindustan’ and ‘Pakistan’, ‘Sikh’ and ‘Musalman’, ‘this side’, ‘that side’ and so on. Identity in Manto’s story is now being determined and defined by one’s belonging to a particular nation. Geographical boundaries which determine a nation’s identity now by extension determine the identity of those who live within those

demarcated lines. One should not forget the fact that for India as well as for Pakistan the concept of a separate state was a new and recent phenomenon. The sense of a shared culture however, comes as a reminder in the song being sung by a Hindustani soldier. The tales of Heer Ranjha were equally beloved of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. Thus when Banta Singh begins singing a 'Heer' in a melancholy voice, he is committing no treason or crime since he is drawing on a deep repository of a shared culture between the two countries that goes back hundreds of years. Manto places other similar indications within the story – the smoke from fires on both sides rises and mingles in the air; Subedar Himmat Khan can read as well as write Gurmukhi - all pointing to the fact that till very recently the warring sides had belonged to one and the same country. A geographical division however seems to have divided the hearts of the people as well. In 'The Dog of Tetwal' Manto explores the concept of a nation as understood, defined and enforced by the state machinery and exposes the rigidity and senselessness behind it through his poignant description of a dog's fate at the hands of those who protect the physical boundaries that define the nation.

Boundaries extend to the Animal Kingdom

In Manto's story the national boundaries seem to extend to the animal kingdom as well. The dog that strays into the Hindustani camp is given a Hindustani name and the point is reinforced by the label the soldiers put around its neck pointing to the fact that it is a Hindustani dog. The dog however is merely a dog, an animal and has no understanding of such divisions between humans. It wags its tail for both. But the way it meets its end exposes the animosity that lurks beneath the surface lives of the people on the two sides and also the senselessness of the violence that such animosity generates. The dog exemplifies the fate of all innocent victims of such violence.

On the dog's first appearance in the Hindustani camp it is affectionately named 'Chappad Jhunjhun' by Banta Singh. Harnam Singh expresses his anxiety that that the dog could be a Pakistani. A soldier who is not named, but whose anger is evident in the way he digs up the ground with the heel of his boot, gives expression to the senselessness of the political decision that had thrust this division on a people who had till very recently had lived shared lives within a shared culture. "Now even dogs will have to be either Hindustani or Pakistani," he says.

The dog being christened 'Chapad Jhunjhun' and being given a Hindustani identity brings an element of cheer in that camp. 'From time to time, each one would affectionately address it as Chapad jhunjhun and cuddle it,' writes Manto.

When the same dog appears at the Pakistani camp in search for food, completely oblivious of the fact that there is a cruel division between the two sets of humans even though outwardly they appear to be the same, it is greeted with familiarity. Obviously the dog had been to the Pakistani camp earlier too. On this visit however it carries a label around its neck which gives rise to some anxiety in the Pakistani camp. Subedar Himmat Khan is prompted to report the matter to his platoon Commander and we learn that the dog had previously stayed at the camp for several days. This time however, its name on the tag and the line declaring 'This is a Hindustani dog' causes a flutter and some consternation in the Pakistani camp. Manto is almost amused at Himmat Khan's anxiety but effectively brings out the paranoia concerning the question of one's identity in the changed times and also the absurd limits to which the same was being taken by both sides.

To counter the Hindustani move the Pakistanis tie another name tag around the dog's neck, this one declaring him to be 'Sappar Sun Sun' and a Pakistani dog at that. The dog is of course ignorant of what's going on. All it wants is food and probably shelter. When it is redirected towards the Hindustani camp it goes without a second thought.

The Story as an Allegory

By now we realize that Manto's story is gradually shaping up as an allegory. An **Allegory** in its simplest form means a piece of writing where characters are not individuals but personified abstractions and the happenings are purely symbolic. 'An **Allegory** is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.' Additionally allegories are designed to teach something – an idea, a moral lesson and in an allegory character and event mean more than themselves. In Manto's story the dog becomes symbolic of all those innumerable refugees for whom the question of their identity had become confused overnight and who had been shunted from one side to the other not being able to find a place they could call their own. Additionally it also becomes symbolic of all innocent victims of violence who pay the price for the cruel acts of others.

In the narrative the dog is shunted from one camp of soldiers to the other where the two camps belong to the two warring sides. The 'two sides' are of course the state machinery of the two newly defined nations and whose arbitrariness, irrationality, but at the same time ruthless power is exemplified in the soldiers of both sides.

It is ironic that the dog is fired at merely because it is approaching the Hindustani camp from the opposite side. Jamadar Harnam Singh expresses his concern: "He's coming our way . . . The rope is tied around its neck . . . but he's coming from there . . . the enemy camp." This is enough to infuriate Harnam Singh and he fires at the dog. It is pathetic the way the poor innocent dog runs to save its life at first towards one camp and then towards the other. The senselessness behind the violence is severe and unmistakable. The dog that had been christened by the Hindustanis as well as by the Pakistanis is killed because its identity is put under a scanner. It had been safe when no such classifications had been thrust on its head.

What do you think is Manto trying to explore and question in this whole story?

Is he implying that man made divisions merely cause strife and turmoil and ultimately lead to destruction?

Is he making a comparison between the dog's fate and the fate of thousands of refugees who had been rendered homeless suddenly and many of whom lost their lives merely because an identity hitherto unknown to them had suddenly been thrust on their heads?

A dog's death?

The dog of Tetwal dies on no man's land and it is ironic that it is killed by those that had made a show of making it belong to their side. The suspicion, the hatred, the fear finds an outlet in a senseless killing of an innocent dog. By calling it 'The Dog of Tetwal' Manto has raised an additional and basic question of the identity of such people whose national boundaries were not yet determined. We need to recall the immediate context of the story at this point. The war is now about Kashmir and at the moment it belongs to neither side. How will the status of such

people be defined, Manto is asking a very valid question here to which there are no easy answers. The dog also becomes symbolic of all such refugees whose fates hung in a similar limbo.

It is ironic that the dog is killed by those who had supposedly given it an identity. The fate of innocent victims of violence is symbolized in the senseless killing of the dog of Tetwal. Violence has many faces but it always has one beginning. It begins with a failure of reason; it is lodged in senselessness, it is perpetrated by irrationality and it is always mindless. Manto's poignant story about the dog successfully illustrates the irrationality behind acts of violence. The soldiers who had affectionately cuddled the dog finally kill it in a senseless rage. The worst part is that they take pleasure in inflicting pain. Manto is clearly pointing a finger at the dehumanizing effects of violence and its dangerous outcome.

Ultimately the dog of Tetwal lies dead on no man's land. For one warring side it had died a 'martyr's death' while for the other it has met a 'dog's death'. Whichever way you look at it, the dog remains an innocent victim of the senseless brutality that hides beneath the surface lives of the two communities. Additionally, by making a dog the protagonist of his story Manto is able to universalize the idea of innocent victims. The image of the friendly dog who had wanted nothing but food and shelter and who had wagged its tail alike for the two sets of soldiers ultimately being shot to death is a profoundly moving indictment of all forms of violence. It does not understand, cannot retaliate, it cannot even save itself. It is merely a mute victim of the brutality of those whom he had trusted. It therefore becomes symbolic of all such victims of violence who are abused and assaulted for no fault of theirs.

A CHRONICLE OF THE PEACOCKS

Imtiaz Husain

-Dr. Neeta Gupta

An Analysis

Imtiaz Husain (b 1925) is one of the most prolific and talented of Pakistani writers. He was born in India but left his hometown and migrated to Pakistan in 1947. The Muslims who migrated to Pakistan were called Mohajirs, an honourable label that was applied to the migrants who had accompanied Prophet Mohammed. But very soon they were made to realize that they were unwanted outsiders and the term Mohajir itself came to sound like a pejorative. Imtiaz Husain, being doubly disadvantaged as a Mohajir and a Shia in a predominantly Sunni land, could find no sort of a substitute for his lost home and continues to haunt it like a ghost.

Best known to his Urdu readership as a master of short story, he has also experimented with novels, novellas, biographies, and plays. He has won numerous literary awards in both India and Pakistan. He is a columnist for Dawn, Pakistan's largest circulated English daily.

Introduction

'Morenama' or 'A Chronicle of the Peacocks' was written in 1999. 'Nama' means Chronicle and is of special significance in Urdu literature. As your textual notes inform you, 'nama' generally describes the life of a well known person, as in *Babarnama* or *Akbarnama*. Husain's use of the word is ironic because he is writing a chronicle not of any known personality but of the peacocks. In writing his chronicle of the peacocks Husain takes us on a journey through troubled times of past and present and draws on myths, legends and contemporary history to drive home the point that war only leads to destruction, dislocation and environmental degradation. It is ignited and stoked by a total collapse of reason and rational judgement.

The idea of a legacy of violence that is explored by Manto and Amitav Ghosh in their respective pieces is examined by Husain too though in a more global sense. Thus Ashvatthama becomes a symbolic figure in the narrative, the legacy of whose act of releasing the Brahmastra in the legend is witnessed in the explosion of the atomic bomb over Japan. In the legend Ashvatthama will undergo a punishment for 3000 years. The consequences of his act however which lead to destruction of life and a closure of all possibilities of fresh life is an all too familiar picture for us who have witnessed the aftermath of the atomic explosion over Hiroshima. The burden of guilt will continue to haunt mankind but have we learnt our lessons yet? Have we learnt to put a stop to such destructive activities? India's atomic explosion in the mountain ranges of Rajasthan may not have killed any human beings yet but the horrific potential for destruction is indicated in the evocative image of the terror stricken peacock. The plight of the peacocks and later of the oil covered duck is a powerful condemnation of all such experiments that aim to destroy life and lead to a destruction of the environment as well.

Husain includes a warning in his chronicle. In war, especially in the last days of war, men are tempted to use weapons that are meant only to threaten. Even the Brahmastra was intended as a threat only. The legend however tells us how it was used by Ashvatthama in the last days of the battle of Kurukshetra and the consequences of that irrational move. In today's world, the race for weapons and for power may ultimately annihilate the human race itself. What Husain is saying in the story is nothing new. But the way he drives his point home makes all the difference. Using myths and legends, weaving fantasy and realism together, juxtaposing tradition and modernity

Husain proceeds on a journey that interweaves the past and the present and by analogy he draws an evocative image of what can happen if we continue to ignore the warnings of the past.

Detailed Analysis

Fantasy and Realism

A mixture of fantasy and realism opens the story. The immediate context is India's testing of the atomic bomb at Pokhran. The first person narrator who is quite obviously the author here is shocked and upset at being pursued by an evil spirit. Only towards the end of the narrative it is revealed who this evil spirit is. India's testing of the atomic bomb has resulted in all the peacocks of Rajasthan flying away in fear. Husain is pointing at the destruction of the natural world which is occurring as a consequence of the use of more and more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction in war. It is a fact that environmental degradation as a consequence of man's greed for power is never given much significance. For this same reason news about the peacocks is tucked away as a small note amidst the more terrifying news about the explosion. By writing a column about the peacocks, the author smugly thinks that he has done his duty and is free from all obligations. But is it really so? Are we really free, asks the author? The manner in which that insignificant piece of information continues to haunt and disturb the author leads him to illustrate his mental state by using the example of a legend about Manuji's fish that continues to grow till it becomes so huge that it has to be released into the sea. In a similar manner the small note about the peacocks continues to overwhelm the author's imagination.

A mixture of fantasy and realism continues to build up the narrative and from Manuji's world we move into the author's world. A flash-back to the past takes us to an earlier occasion and Husain recalls his first visit to Jaipur and his amazing encounter with the beautiful peacocks. They turn out in such great numbers that they are seen on every tree, rock and hill. They had a quiet dignity, and a royal grace and a calm elegance, writes Husain. This is however a picture from peaceful times. Post Pokhran there are no peacocks to be seen anywhere. Husain's technique of juxtaposing memory and the factual situation allows him to heighten the contrast in the situation. While his first vision of the peacocks was one of beauty and grace, the second vision is of a 'battered and bruised' lonely peacock on a distant hill which rises into the sky screaming with terror when the author approaches him. There are no peacock songs to welcome him now. Despondent, terrified, dejected and bewildered, the peacock is the very picture of desolation.

Symbols

Suddenly the perspective shifts to a more global context and Husain recalls another similar picture of devastation: '... a forlorn duck covered with foul effluents watching the waves in disbelief...' The weary bird is a symbol of the horrors of war between the United States and Iraq. The two images become a powerful condemnation of all forms of violence. The suffering of these natural creatures for no fault of theirs is a reminder to us that we are not too far behind. While we destroy their habitat and their world the needle of destruction is moving towards us at the same time. The royal swans exist only in legends now and the reference here is obviously to those species of the natural world that have become extinct now. Husain interestingly polarizes the ancient and the modern to highlight the difference between the two situations. There are no shimmering waters of the Mansarovar now. Instead 'the lakes are dry, the rivers polluted and the air thick with the dust and smoke of bombs.'

By now it is evident that the story is shaping up as an allegory against war and its evils. The lonely peacock and the bewildered duck as symbols of our times are both powerfully evocative images of what we have done to our world by inducting unnecessary suffering into our surroundings suffering that is engulfing poor innocent victims of the power – hungry. The irony is that while we continue to destroy the natural world we are by extension destroying ourselves because we too are a part of it. If we try to be a little more specific in the context of the story then both birds also become symbolic of all those innocent victims of war who ultimately pay the price for man's greed for power. In Husain's own words 'the rich and the powerful rarely ever pay for their sins: instead the poor and weak take upon themselves the burden of suffering so as to redeem their times.' Husain stretches the allegory and the symbolic significance a little further and likens the birds to 'those prophets who, according to all religious texts, think of suffering as a sacred duty.'

Journey as Metaphor

Throughout the narrative we are constantly on the move along with the author traveling through worlds of past as well as present ages. Journey is obviously being used as a metaphor here. We are all familiar with the concept of life being a journey where we begin somewhere and then travel through time and space to reach a goal which ends that journey. In Husain's narrative his life's journey is almost symbolic of the journey of mankind through different time and ages at the end of which he should have reached a goal which could be that of understanding his role in the natural scheme of things. While there are many lessons to be learnt on the way the sad and unfortunate realization is that the goal of understanding is still beyond the reach of man. For the same reason man persists in his self destructive pursuits of power. Through his use of myths and legends Husain points out that despite having traveled through a long span of time for mankind the situation today is not very different from the situation a few millenniums ago.

Coming back to the narrative we resume our journey with the author in search of peacocks and enter another legend which tells us how the peacock once inadvertently helped Satan to enter the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve are exiled from Eden the peacock too is asked to leave. What a fall from grandeur! While earlier it used to perch on the walls of Paradise now it sits on the wall of the author's terrace. Husain repeatedly resorts to legends to enrich his narrative and to give us a multi-dimensional picture of the peacock consistently focusing on what used to be and what is. In the above mentioned legend however, the peacock is being seen as an 'exile'. Exiled from paradise in the ancient lore and now exiled from its natural habitat in the hills of Rajasthan. The idea of exile and migration that is the central metaphor of the story finds a concretization in the words of Husain's old grandmother. Her words bring back memories of the Partition days when thousands of people were exiled from the land of their birth simply because they belonged to a particular community or religion. Her words include all those who face the aftermath of wars between countries. Referring to the peacock on her rooftop she says: '... that is what happens when we are exiled from our own courtyard. Now all he can do is find something to sit on – any wall around any courtyard – or any tree or hill where he can find a foothold.' Being exiled from one's homeland from one's familiar surroundings is one of the many outcomes of war and violence. The exiled peacocks of Rajasthan and the exiled peacock of the legend assume symbolic proportions to highlight the plight of all those who face a similar outcome of the ravages of war. The narrative thus keeps on unfolding as an allegory drawing attention to various aspects of war and the way it affects the world. .

The author carries on with his journey and we see him walking through Sravasthi next. Even though this abode of the Buddha is in ruins now yet Husain sees one peacock sitting on a green hill, lost in thought as if waiting for someone. Due to the presence of that one peacock Sravasthi seemed a 'place of great tranquility.' The image of a ruined yet tranquil Sravasthi is juxtaposed with yet another image of desolation. Husain is recalling the days of the Partition here and the immediate reference is to the looting of a caravan of migrants which was a common occurrence in those days of turmoil. Even amidst this desolation he hears the call of a peacock which in the present circumstances seems strange and 'resonant of millenniums past.'

The Significance of Ashvatthama

The metaphor of a journey continues and with this strange call of the peacock we go further down the ages into those past millenniums of which this call is reminiscent. Fantasy comes into play in quite a strange manner in this part of the narrative. The author continuously beckoned by the peacock's call finds himself in Indraprastha, the city of the Pandavas. The significance of this journey into the past is revealed only later when the author returns to Rajasthan and discovers that the spirit of Ashvatthama has followed him. The image of the author being followed by the evil spirit is horrifying enough to make the peacocks fly away in terror. Fantasy and realism once again come into play together. On the realistic level the Husain is probably journeying through India and particularly Rajasthan but on the metaphorical level it is also a journey into the past – a past built not only by history but also by myths and legends.

We have seen how Husain has constantly woven myths and legends into his narrative to effectively comment on war and its evils. Once again the same technique is adopted to make a compelling assessment of a situation in the past which has risen like a phoenix in our present times. With the mention of Ashvatthama's name we enter the world of *The Mahabharata* and the battle at Kurukshetra. Husain makes a skilful comparison between the realistic situation and the situation in the legend when in the last days of the battle Ashvatthama, son of Dronacharya, releases the Brahmastra. Husain's description of the Brahmastra though based on information in the legend can easily fit the description of any modern day atomic bomb. The interplay of tradition and modernity goes hand in hand with the mixing of fantasy and realism. The comparison between the two situations can be stretched even further only to point out the fact that we have not learnt any lessons from our past mistakes. Just as modern day countries sign nuclear non-proliferation treaties so also both Dronacharya and Arjuna, the two parties in possession of the powerful weapon, vow never to use the Brahmastra and unleash its destructive powers over the world. Husain makes an astute comment on the situation in any war when things spiral out of control and people start resorting to desperate measures. He writes: 'The last days of the war are the most fearful. They are dangerous and unpredictable. During those days men are tempted to use weapons that are only meant to threaten.' This is what had happened when Hiroshima burned and this is exactly what had happened millenniums ago when Ashvatthama in his foolishness, used the Brahmastra and unleashed total destruction over the world of Kurukshetra.

The description in the legend evokes an all too familiar picture. 'The fire is so intense that its flames singed all three worlds' writes Husain. The most difficult aspect to the use of such a weapon is that once it is released there is no stopping it. Destruction is imminent and all one can do is deflect it a little bit to control the extent of that devastation somehow.

What do you think is the purpose of including such a lengthy description of the legend of Ashvatthama into the narrative?

There is a tacit warning embedded in the legend especially for modern day readers like us for whom Hiroshima is not too distant in the past and who continue to witness countries in a constant race for arms and adamant in their efforts to build up nuclear arsenals. On the surface of it leaders vow never to use nuclear power for destructive purposes. But Husain's words are a chilling reminder that in times of war reason fails and rationality does not work. Who can keep the controls then? This is what had happened in the legend and Ashvatthama had released the Brahmastra. This is exactly what can happen in any similar situation of war irrespective of time and place. The only difference would be that instead of being a Brahmastra it may be an atomic bomb or any other weapon of mass destruction.

Husain may be writing of times in the past but the image that he builds up is ominous and at the same time familiar. 'There was mourning in every home. In every family a child had died.' Children, the most innocent victims of the situation have to pay the price with their lives. Even the wombs of women become barren thus snuffing out the possibility of a continuity of life. The aftermath of a nuclear explosion can present a direct comparison with the above description from the legend. In modern day warfare such an outcome is always a real possibility. No amount of punishment can undo the harm that is done.

The interplay of fantasy and realism continues. A punished Ashvatthama presents a horrible image with blood and pus flowing continuously from open wounds. Husain tries to escape this apparition by hiding near Meerabai's Samadhi at first and then inside Khwaja Moinud-din Chishti's dargah.

Parikshit's Question

How should we interpret the image of the author being pursued by the evil spirit? Is Husain trying to convey the idea that we are haunted by the consequences of our actions for all times to come? Is punishing Ashvatthama any solution? What has been perpetrated by his action can never be undone. Is it not better to preempt such situations? To act and then repent or punish is no solution. Even the horrible image of a punished and suffering Ashvatthama has acted as any deterrent for man who continues in his pursuit of destructive weapons. Parikshit's question is a very relevant question in the circumstances. ". . . all the elders of our family were present at Kurukshetra," he asks Vyas Rishi. "There were wise and knowledgeable men amongst the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Why didn't they understand that in war everyone has to pay a price? That war destroys everything. Annihilates everything?" The significance of Parikshit's question holds true for all times and for all ages. If only we understand that in war everyone has to pay a price, no one is left untouched there would probably not be any wars. But this of course is wishful thinking. Citing failure of reason and fate as answers to Parikshit's question Vyasrishi tries to squirm out of an uncomfortable situation. Fantasy and realism, tradition and modernity are once again interestingly juxtaposed to create a heightened awareness of what war can do to us and our world. The author is now pursued not only by Ashvatthama's spirit but is also haunted by Parikshit's question which has become even more urgent in the present situation of India's testing of the atomic bomb in the mountain ranges of Rajasthan. "Parikshit's question hangs over India and Pakistan like a sword" writes Husain and immediately links up the past and the present.

The Legacy of violence

The idea of a legacy of violence that has been explored by Manto and Ghosh as well in their respective narratives in your textbook, is delved into by Husain too though in a more global sense. What is happening in the present has already happened in the past but we seem to have not learnt any lessons from it. Failure of reason continues to plunge the world into turmoil. The spirit of Ashvatthama which has by now assumed additional symbolic significance of highlighting not just the cause but also the consequences of war continues to pursue the author. It is foolish to assume that this evil spirit and all that it symbolizes will be limited to particular geographical boundaries only. On crossing the border and reaching his own country Husain smugly thinks that he has escaped his stalker and would now be able to write his chronicle of the peacocks. He recalls all the peacocks he had met all along his journey through the past and the present and their song crowds his brain. The ultimate vision of the divine peacock that spreads its tail over the entire universe is again a symbolic image and can hint at a utopian situation when peace would prevail all over the world. The author imagines himself walking in the cool shade of this peace. But the next instant he is shocked to discover that he is still being pursued by the evil spirit of Ashvatthama. To his dismay he realizes that physical borders have no meaning for the apparition. The narrative ends with a cry of despair: “O my creator! O my Protector! When will this evil spirit complete his curse of three thousand years? When will I be able to write my Morenama, my chronicle of the peacocks?”

It is evident that Husain’s narrative has to be consistently interpreted and understood on the symbolic and metaphorical level. The idea that the spirit of Ashvatthama cannot be held within particular geographical boundaries means that in the legend and in his image there are lessons to be learnt for everybody. Despite such legends and myths that vividly illustrate the evils of war; despite our own past experiences of contemporary history, if we still persist in our relentless race for arms then it is apparent that we have not learnt from our mistakes. India’s testing of the atomic bomb is a clear indication to that effect. Concluding his narrative by showing himself being still pursued by the evil spirit Husain implies that as long as we continue in our destructive endeavours, the spirit of Ashvatthama will continue to roam the world.

THE GHOSTS OF MRS. GANDHI

Amitav Ghosh

-Dr. Neeta Gupta

About The Author

Amitav Ghosh an author, anthropologist and essayist was born in Calcutta in 1956. He studied at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, St. Edmund Hall, Oxford and at Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He worked for Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi and did his doctorate at Oxford where he received his Ph.D. in social anthropology.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the best known Indian writers writing in English covering a broad spectrum of fiction, travel writing and journalism. His books include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In an Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace* and most recently *The Hungry Tide*. His novel, *The Glass Palace*, was an international bestseller that sold more than a half-million copies in Britain. It also won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards in 2001.

His recent novel *The Hungry Tide* has been sold for translation in twelve foreign countries and is also a bestseller abroad. His novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke prize, Britain's top science fiction prize for 1997. In addition Ghosh has won France's Prix Medici Etranger, India's prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, Anand Puraskar and the Pushcart Prize. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's essay 'The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi' was first published in *The New Yorker* on July 17, 1995. It is an eye-witness account of the riots that broke out in Delhi as an aftermath when Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India was assassinated by her Sikh body guards. One community was singled out by mobsters. Sikh houses were burned down, intense brutalities were inflicted on people belonging to that community, Sikh businesses were destroyed, and fear and terror stalked the streets of the city. Ghosh's essay written a decade after the events took place still manages to catch the fear and shock of the day so effectively that it becomes palpable for the reader. Ghosh rakes through memories to give us an eye-witness account and combines it with what he later heard or read about the events that happened on that particular day. This technique results in a piece of writing that not merely describes but tries to make some sense of the violence that erupted in the city that day and also tries to show us a way out of it – a way to deal with it – 'a civilized willed response' to it. In the course of his descriptions Ghosh does not remain a mere observer but becomes a joiner, a participant and gives us a moving account of how he along with his friend manage to save a Sikh couple who till the last moment refuse to believe that anybody could have a reason to hurt them, harm them let alone kill them.

Can Writing Make a Difference?

Violence in its myriad forms has always been a part of literary writing with various writers dealing with the subject in their own subjective ways. Be it domestic violence, communal violence, violence perpetrated by riots, gang wars, war between countries or even street fights. Violence can have many faces but its origin always lies in a collapse of reason. Therefore writers writing on this particular theme have an added responsibility. They not only need to show what

is happening and why it is happening but also what we should do about it. Even in their description of what is happening they need to maintain objectivity in order to avoid sensationalizing the event and fanning the fire. "Can writing make a difference?" asks Ghosh in the Preface to his book. It goes without saying that the response to his question has to be a resounding 'yes' especially after he shows us the way in most of his writings. 'The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi' stands as a good example of how writers can help us look at the other angle – that of dealing with violence. The main thrust of Ghosh's essay therefore is not on analyzing what happened that day or even on giving us fearful descriptions of the fiery ordeal that the Sikh community went through but on how ordinary people discovered great reserves of courage within themselves to deal with the violence around them. Thus we have an ordinary woman being the first one to realize the danger to the life of a Sikh passenger and the bus driver and rest of the passengers pitching in to save his life; we have a Sikh couple refusing to cave in to the terror of the day with their cook being crucial in saving them from the rioters and finally the image of a small group of people bravely facing the rioters daring them, challenging them to attack.

A Shifting Perspective

After having read the prose piece the predominant feeling is of awe. We are awestruck by the courage displayed by ordinary citizens, by people like you and me and feel that it is surely possible to give a 'civilized willed response' to violence and its abettors. There are however many other issues that engage our attention in Ghosh's account of that day. Drawing on memory of his personal experience and also on what was said, heard and written about that fateful day, Ghosh builds up a brief but clear picture of what Delhi faced on October 31, 1984. Going to and fro between his personal experience and other people's accounts of that day, Ghosh is able to piece together an account that while reporting what happened also tries to analyze and make sense of why it happened. The organized way in which the rioters move, their chilling lack of any emotion, the tardiness of the state machinery in dealing with the violence, the political angle to the riots are all dealt with in an objective and dispassionate manner. Having explained what happened and why Ghosh continuously shows us what we as ordinary citizens can do about it.

We are told of Mrs. Gandhi's death in the first paragraph itself and the fact that it was first broadcast from Karachi by Pakistan's official radio network revives the fearful anticipation that must have checked the Indian government from doing likewise. Ghosh's description of a bus ride to his friends place follows next in which he effectively catches the feeling of terror and fear that now stalked members of the Sikh community. Constantly Ghosh's account moves from the present tense to the past. The perspective keeps shifting. At one moment we are with Ghosh looking directly at the terror stricken Sikh passenger and at the other we are informed that Giani Zail Singh's motorcade had also been attacked by a mob, which is obviously a piece of information that had been gathered only later.

Ghosh describes as he observes from the moving bus and pieces together a disturbing picture of organized mobsters seeking out and attacking members of the Sikh community. Ghosh reports that 'there was a watchfulness about them; some were armed with steel rods and bicycle chains; others had fanned out across the busy road and were stopping cars and buses.' What Ghosh finds most disturbing about these men is their cold blooded attitude to the whole situation. Even as they call out and ask if there were any Sikh passengers in the bus, 'There was no anger in their voices;' writes Ghosh. 'That was the most chilling thing of all.' There is an attempt here to understand the psyche of a rioter. How is it possible that a few people can become so

dehumanized as to take the lives of a few other innocent people? Is it not a total collapse of all rationale?

Courage of the Ordinary People

Moving from the general to the particular Ghosh concentrates next on how ordinary people find a way to combat this menacing violence. The first instance is that of the bus passengers saving a fellow Sikh passenger from the blood-thirsty rioters. As the rioters move away and the bus continues its journey there is absolute silence. Ghosh writes: ‘Nobody said a word as we sped away down the Ring Road.’

Can you identify a reason why the passengers are silent?

Is it because they realize that what they have just accomplished is no ordinary feat?

Is it because they know that their victory is so fragile that any minute can overturn the situation? The fear is so immediate and so palpable that they dare not speak a word lest their triumph proves to be short lived?

Ghosh had begun his account by telling us that he was on his way to his friend Hari Sen’s house who lived at Safdarjung Enclave. Having described the bus ride to it Ghosh now narrows down his focus to one street and a few houses. His observation about Hari Sen’s Sikh neighbors and their grand house rakishly perched on stilts immediately makes us apprehensive. On the one hand we have an observer’s description of the Bawa’s house and at the same time on the other Ghosh continues to build an objective picture of the destruction and the carnage that had overwhelmed Delhi and wrecked the life of the Sikh community. Ghosh writes:

It was a very bright morning. When I stepped out into the sunshine, I came upon a sight that I could never have imagined. In every direction, columns of smoke rose slowly into a limpid sky. Sikh houses and businesses were burning. They were so carefully targeted that they created an effect quite different from that of a general conflagration: it was like looking upward into the vault of some vast pillared hall.

Narrative Technique

Ghosh is entirely objective in his description and in his reportage of what happened. This is the reason why even though he is writing about violence there is no violence in his writing. The eerie silence occasionally disturbed by the sound of a speeding car or motorcycle forms the background to the knowledge that at that very moment a mob was working its way towards their street. The fear is almost tangible. Ghosh’s technique of combining his eyewitness account with details gleaned only later from what was heard, read or written about that day allows him the space and opportunity to analyze what was happening. He writes of how the state apparatus allowed and abetted the outrage:

“Protected by certain politicians ‘organizers were roaming around the city assembling the ‘mobs’ and transporting them to Sikh-owned houses and shops. . . . In all the affected spots, a calculated attempt to terrorize the people was evident in the common tendency among the assailants to burn alive the Sikhs on public roads.”

From a general observation Ghosh again moves to the specific and recounts the case of a Sikh woman whose husband and three sons had been burned alive. From information that must have become available only later Ghosh is able to tell us how twenty five hundred people died in Delhi alone and how they were overwhelmingly Sikh men. Entire neighbourhoods were gutted. The total death toll will never be known.

Ghosh writes dispassionately and as objectively as possible knowing full well the immense responsibility on his shoulders while he does so. His words are carefully chosen. His prose has a quiet dignity as well as strength in it. He realizes full well the solemnity of what he is describing. In the preface to his book Ghosh had asked the question “Is it possible to write about situations of violence without allowing your work to become complicit with the subject?” The answer is obviously in the affirmative with his writing standing as testimony. His next paragraph that concludes the section under consideration immediately puts the horrific descriptions into perspective and raises many disturbing questions.

The Legacy of Violence

The idea of a legacy of violence is explored by Ghosh in this essay. He refers to the days when India and Pakistan were partitioned and to the unprecedented violence that followed in its wake when communities that had till then lived in harmony became thirsty for one another’s blood. Mass slaughter took place on both sides. Innocent people became victims of the state machinery. Rumor mongering fanned the animosity while people with a political agenda cashed in on the situation. What Ghosh sees Delhi going through on October 31, 1984, revives the painful memories. He writes:

I grew up believing that mass-slaughter of the kind that accompanied the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, could never happen again. But that morning in the city of Delhi, the violence reached the same level of intensity.

If anything, we should have learnt our lessons from the days of the Partition but the riots of 1984 come as a disturbing reminder that communal violence is our legacy from those days and it needs only a spark to set it off again. In fact Ghosh’s essay anticipates the Gujarat riots when part of India burned again in the fire of a communal holocaust.

If this is our legacy then how does one deal with it? Ghosh seems to be asking a very crucial question. He tries to provide an answer too in specific instances of ordinary people facing the situation with quiet courage. He begins with the bus passengers who manage to save the life of a fellow Sikh passenger and then goes on to give us a moving account of how he and his friend succeed in saving the life of the Bawas, Hari’s next door neighbours. Mr. Bawa “could not understand why these ‘disturbances’ should impinge on him or his wife. He had no more sympathy for the Sikh ‘terrorists’ than we did; his revulsion at the assassination was if anything, even greater than ours.” It was difficult to explain to the elite gentleman that a mob knows no reason. It is only when the mob almost reaches their house that the elderly couple agrees to come over but even then ‘only for a short while.’ Their cook who is a Hindu remains behind to answer any of the questions that the mob might have. This simple ordinary man’s courage becomes yet another example of a ‘civilized willed’ response to violence. Though scared to the core of his being he is still able to satisfy the mob that the house belonged to a Hindu and had been rented to a Sikh couple who had now fled the city. Hari and Ghosh too face the m assailants at their gate and try to shout them away.

A Socio-Political Comment

Ghosh continues to draw on his memory to tell us again of the state’s collusion with the rioters and gives us the political face of violence.

We were confident that the government would soon act to stop the violence. In India, there is a drill associated with civil disturbances: a curfew is declared, paramilitary units are deployed; in extreme cases, the Army marches to the stricken areas. No city in India is better

equipped to perform this drill than New Delhi, with its huge security apparatus. We later learned that in some cities – Calcutta, for example the state authorities did act promptly to prevent violence. But in New Delhi and in much of Northern India – hour followed hour without a response. Every few minutes we turned to the radio, hoping to hear that the army had been ordered out. All we heard was mournful music and descriptions of Mrs. Gandhi lying in state; of the comings and goings of dignitaries, foreign and national. The bulletins could have been messages from another planet.

Ghosh's essay has clearly become a socio-political comment on the situation.

How do we deal with our Legacy of Violence?

While showing us how violence happens Ghosh in his essay continues to give us examples of how we can deal with it. The courage of ordinary people like the bus passengers or the Bawas' cook is one way of handling it. Another way is shown in the unruffled response of the Bawas and Mrs. Sen. While the rioters are questioning the cook, Ghosh steps into the house to see how the Bawas were doing and the scene that meets his eye has remained etched in his memory. He writes:

Mrs. Sen had a smile on her face as she poured a cup of tea for Mr. Bawa. Beside her, Mrs. Bawa in a firm unwavering voice was comparing the domestic situation in New Delhi and Manila.

I was awed by their courage.

There is no panic, no hysterics and no apparent fear. Instead there is just a simple, dignified and unruffled front to deal with the disturbed situation. Is Ghosh pointing out here yet another way to deal with our legacy of violence? To remain calm, maintain rationality and not cave in to the turmoil but wait for the storm to pass.

The two concluding sections see Ghosh not remaining merely a detached observer but becoming a participant, a joiner of the group that marches forward to confront the rioters directly. The group was 'pitifully small' but 'as it marched out of the shelter of the compound I did not hesitate for a moment: without a second thought I joined,' writes Ghosh. The destruction is so complete and so horrible that like many others Ghosh too 'clung to one scene while successfully ridding [his] mind of the rest.' The scene that Ghosh clings to is of a moment when it seemed inevitable that their small group would be attacked by the rioters. As they advance brandishing their knives and steel rods something happened that went beyond comprehension. All the women in the group stepped out and surrounded the men. Ghosh writes how 'their saris and kameezes became a thin fluttering barrier, a wall around us. They turned to face the approaching men challenging them, daring them to attack.' The mob faltered, confused. A moment later they were gone.

Why do you think the mob disappears?

Is it because they had not expected to meet any resistance let alone from women?

Is it because they are taken unawares by the group's determination and courage and a nonexistence of fear?

Is Ghosh trying to say that if we get paralyzed into inaction by terror then we only strengthen the hands of the perpetrators of violence?

The reasons could be many but the end result is that the group is able to drive away the rioters without any use of violence simply by refusing to cave in to fear.

Ghosh continuously looks for answers to the crucial question of how to deal with our legacy of violence. In the group's response he locates yet another. We cannot counter violence with yet more violence but have to defy it with courage and stoic resistance. The resilience of ordinary people outraged by the events and the power of individual action can never be discounted.

Objectives

This section includes a brief introduction to globalization, a phenomenon that has been at the centre of scholarly debate and discussion for many decades. I have also summarized different perspectives on globalization, that aim to enrich your understanding and provide a context for the critical essays, poems, and short story in this section.

Introduction: What is globalization?

How does one define a term that is so complex, with many layers and dimensions to it? Broadly speaking, globalization refers to significant worldwide changes that have been taking place since the latter half of the twentieth-century, leading to increased global interconnectivity and integration in the economic, social, technological, and political spheres; fostering a sense of belonging to a global community that transcends family, society, and nation. Globalization is a catch-all term, encompassing a range of phenomena. Some of the important ones are summarized.

Economic globalization: It is primarily characterized by the emergence of a global market, based on the principles of free trade. This was sought to be accomplished through the formation of the World Trade Organization in 1995, the most significant development in terms of economic globalization. Other characteristics of globalization are,

- Growth in international trade; with a rise in the number of multinational, and bilateral trade agreements;
- expansion of the services sector. The meaning of the word trade expanded to include not only goods and production but services;
- increase in cross border investment in markets, FDI flows, and outsourcing of production processes;
- growth of corporate giants through mergers and acquisitions. For instance, the gross annual revenue of Wal-Mart, the largest US retail chain, was US \$ 485,000 million in 2017, more than that of many developing countries and small nation states; and
- privatization: all over the world governments sold off state-owned corporations which had become unprofitable.

As Saul (2005) has summarized:

Since 1950 world trade has multiplied – between twelve and twenty-two-fold. Worldwide foreign direct investment has grown fifteen-fold since 1970. For foreign direct investment to developing countries, the multiple is twenty. The

daily turnover in foreign exchange markets was \$15 billion in 1973. Now it is over \$1.5 trillion. Technology production has multiplied six times, the international trade in technology, nine times. In 1956, it was possible to have eighty-nine simultaneous transatlantic telephone conversations by cable. Today, by satellite and fibre optics, there are one million, plus faxes and e-mails.

Informational: Developments in information and communication technologies in the early nineties have revolutionized the way information is stored, processed, and transmitted. The internet, satellites, submarine fibre optic cables, and wireless communications have impacted almost every sphere of human activity; from education to genetics. Personal communications, trans border data flow, governance, and banking have become more efficient. Think of the ease with which you can communicate via electronic mail, apply online for a course or shop for a pet; the list is endless. Information technology has been an important driver of globalization and changed the way people live their lives.

Social: Due to improved infrastructure, travel has become faster and cheaper. As a result, the volume of travel and tourism has increased sharply. In addition to that is the growing body of transnational white and blue-collar workers. Europe, for instance, is home to millions of migrants from the Mediterranean region. However, migration to a foreign land is not always voluntary; people leave their countries to escape hostile living conditions, war, religious or political persecution, and natural calamities. Sometimes, in their desperation they enter other countries through illegal means. Many are victims of human trafficking; forced to work for low wages. Migration, both legal and illegal, has grown to the extent that, in 2015, according to UN data, 3.3 per cent of the world's total population comprised people who live in a country other than the one they were born in.

There has been a shift in occupations as well, with the number of people in the services sector increasing and those in the agricultural and industrial sectors decreasing. Movement of people to urban centres is another worldwide trend. Indicators for social globalization include (a) growth in cross-border personal contacts; tourist flows, resident foreign population, telephone traffic, (b) access to cross-border information flow through the internet, TV, foreign press products, and (c) proximity to international outlets and bookstores, volume of export/ import. Ranked on the basis of these criteria; the Netherlands, Belgium, and Singapore are some of the most globalized countries.

Cultural: Cross-cultural exchange has been facilitated through the mass media, easy access to consumer products and lifestyle goods produced by multinationals, increased interaction between people, travel, and migration. Evidence of international influences is mostly to be found in popular culture where there is a desire to consume not just foreign goods but culture as well. Some obvious examples are:

- cinema: you must have read about Hollywood films being released simultaneously in major metropolises of the world, sometimes in regional language versions, as happened with the immensely popular *Spiderman-3* movie, dubbed and released in Bhojpuri. Similarly, Bollywood cinema is also very popular in China as well as Dubai. *Dangal* earned more in China than it did in India and the popular movie *Three Idiots* did exceptionally well in South Korea.

- food: it is not uncommon or surprising to find an Indian restaurant in a remote town of New Zealand or an Israeli one in the hill-towns of Himachal Pradesh. But American food chains, like McDonald's and Starbucks have the most visible presence in all cities of the world.
- fashion: again, it is western apparel that has begun to replace traditional attire. Jeans for casual wear and suits for formal occasions are the most popular.

These are just a few random examples of cultural assimilation. Consuming foreign culture when in your own country is generally a happy experience. Eating the occasional burger with your friends at a McDonald's outlet, buying a pair of branded jeans, or watching your favourite superhero movie is fun but to live in a foreign country and adapt to new social norms is more complicated. You will read more about this in a later section.

Globalization: an evaluation

The most dominant of perspectives on globalization has always been the economic one. Politicians, technocrats, and economists believed that global markets, freed from narrow national interests and restrictive regulations would eventually lead to economic growth which would benefit both developed and developing countries. The resulting prosperity would empower the underprivileged and citizens of dictatorships to establish new democracies. These ideals of market- oriented policies, democratic politics, and individual rights promised to promote the well-being of billions across the world:

Globalization is helping to give birth to an economy that is closer to the classic theoretical model of capitalism, under which rational individuals pursue their interests in the light of perfect information, relatively free from government and geographical obstacles. It is also helping to create a society that is closer to the model that liberal political theorists once imagined, in which the power lies increasingly in the hands of individuals rather than governments, and in which people are free, within reasonable bounds, to pursue the good life wherever they find it.

(Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2000, p. 340)

Political events like the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989, the end of the Cold War, Margaret Thatcher's drive to privatize state-owned organizations, and President Mikhail Gorbachev's subsequent embracing of classic capitalism further strengthened the ideology of the free market and established the supremacy of the United States in the global economic and political system. There was confidence that countries would cooperate peacefully as players in one worldwide market, pursuing their interests while sharing basic human values. International organizations like the WTO and IMF would be the vehicles through which these values would be pursued. These ideals were based on assumptions that the American free market was the template on which the economy of each country would be restructured.

Critics of globalization point out that though trade negotiations opened up the markets of poor countries to goods produced in industrialized countries, they did not open up the markets of the United States and other superpowers to agricultural goods, in which developing countries had a comparable advantage. Nor did the trade agreements eliminate the subsidies to agriculture provided in developed countries, that made it so hard for third world countries to compete. Interests of the poorer nations, the working class and the natural environment have not been

protected. Though there are binding agreements in trade there are none for labour rights, immigration laws or health

The functioning of the WTO and the IMF has also been attacked. Meant to safeguard the interests of member nations in an impartial way, these organizations are blatantly unrepresentative and there is no transparency in their working. For instance, the WTO doesn't work by voting. It uses a consensus arrangement, which in reality is managed by four superpowers: Japan, the US, the European Union, and Canada.

Free trade has only benefited the multinationals; they produce their goods in free-trade zones where labour laws are not strictly enforced and labour is dirt cheap. Niké, the biggest sports equipment manufacturer, paid sports star Michael Jordan US \$ 60 million in 2016, to endorse their products, more than it paid its entire, 30,000 strong Indonesian work-force.

Proponents of globalization insist that whereas there was no universal suffrage in any country in 1900, by 2000 nearly 63 per cent of all nations had universal suffrage. Global literacy has increased to 81 per cent. The World Bank reports point out how the number of people living on less than US \$ 1.90 per day has halved, especially in economies where free-trade policies were implemented. They claim that there is substantial evidence to prove that there is a direct correlation between standards of living and the degree of globalization.

There is no doubt that globalization has not benefitted large sections of the human race. For instance, the touted benefits of the ICT revolution have not reached those who need them the most. While millions of people use social apps like WhatsApp or Instagram for trivial pursuits like posting holiday pictures or self-glorifying selfies; in rural areas internet access is not available. Around 11 per cent of the world's population still lives on less than \$1.90 a day. India, for instance, has the largest number of the world's poor, around 30 per cent. (www.worldbank.org.2013) The debate still continues.

To conclude this section, read this extract from an article by Amartya Sen, which is an excellent, well-balanced summary of the different viewpoints:

Globalization is often seen as global Westernization. On this point, there is substantial agreement among many proponents and opponents. Those who take an upbeat view of globalization see it as a marvelous contribution of Western civilization to the world. There is a nicely stylized history in which the great developments happened in Europe: first came the Renaissance, then the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, and these led to a massive increase in living standards in the West. And now the great achievements of the West are spreading to the world. In this view, globalization is not only good, it is also a gift from the West to the world. The champions of this reading of history tend to feel upset not just because this great benefaction is seen as a curse but also because it is undervalued and castigated by an ungrateful world.

From the opposite perspective, Western dominance – sometimes seen as a continuation of Western imperialism – is the devil of the piece. In this view, contemporary capitalism, driven and led by greedy and grabby Western countries in Europe and North America, has established rules of trade and business relations that do not serve the interests of the poorer people in the world. The celebration of

various non-Western identities – defined by religion (as in Islamic fundamentalism), region (as in the championing of Asian values), or culture (as in the glorification of Confucian ethics) – can add fuel to the fire of confrontation with the West.

Is globalization really a new Western curse? It is, in fact, neither new nor necessarily Western; and it is not a curse. Over thousands of years, globalization has contributed to the progress of the world through travel, trade, migration, spread of cultural influences, and dissemination of knowledge and understanding (including that of science and technology). These global interrelations have often been very productive in the advancement of different countries. They have not necessarily taken the form of increased Western influence. Indeed, the active agents of globalization have often been located far from the West.

To illustrate, consider the world at the beginning of the last millennium rather than at its end. Around 1000 A.D. the global reach of science, technology, and mathematics was changing the nature of the old world, but the dissemination then was, to a great extent, in the opposite direction of what we see today. The high technology in the world of 1000 A.D. included paper, the printing press, the crossbow, gun-powder, the iron-chain suspension bridge, the kite, the magnetic compass, the wheel-barrow, and the rotary fan. A millennium ago, these items were used extensively in China – and were practically unknown elsewhere. Globalization spread them across the world, including Europe.

A similar movement occurred in the Eastern influence on Western mathematics. The decimal system emerged and became well developed in India between the second and sixth centuries; it was used by Arab mathematicians soon thereafter. These mathematical innovations reached Europe mainly in the last quarter of the tenth century and began having an impact in the early years of the last millennium, playing an important part in the scientific revolution that helped to transform Europe. The agents of globalization are neither European nor exclusively Western, nor are they necessarily linked to Western dominance. Indeed, Europe would have been a lot poorer – economically, culturally, and scientifically – had it resisted the globalization of mathematics, science and technology at that time. And today, the same principle applies, though in the reverse direction (from West to East). To reject the globalization of science and technology because it represents Western influence and imperialism would not only amount to overlooking global contributions – drawn from many different parts of the world – that lie solidly behind so-called Western science and technology.

(Sen, 2002, p.1)

Globalization: the future

Over the years, there have been many indications that globalization was not welcomed by all. In fact, there was active resistance to Western domination in some countries. North Korea, Afghanistan, and Cuba have held out against globalization. Instead of greater understanding and cooperation amongst nations, there is growing resentment with the effects of globalization, even within the developed world.

Many political analysts believe that the year 2016 saw the rejection of the idea of globalization. Donald Trump's election as President of America was a significant event for world politics. Trump won his election by promising to give Americans their jobs back, tighten immigration rules, deport illegal immigrants, and build a "big beautiful wall" between America and Mexico. He tapped into the working-class anger against outsourcing of jobs.

It was this same dissatisfaction with globalization that influenced Brexit; Britain's exit from the European Union. In June 2016, in a nationwide referendum, Britain voted to extract itself from the single market of the European Union, as well as its institutions, laws, and regulations. Europe is faced with a refugee crisis due to the huge influx of refugees from war-torn Syria and Iraq, amidst hardening attitudes towards them.

At the World Economic Forum held in January, 2017 at Davos, Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, WEF, observed that "Globalization has lifted over a billion people out of poverty. But in its present form it is no longer fit for purpose." There was intense debate in Davos, about the future of globalization and the merits of a system under fire from populists. I would like to quote Ray Dalio, founder of investment company Bridgewater Associates;

We may be at a point where globalization is ending and provincialism and nationalism are taking hold. You will see more protectionism, perhaps the reversal of the trend found in the 90s, of trade agreements and negotiations.

(www.weforum.org/agenda/2017)

Economic pundits predict that China, which is now the world's second largest economy and contributed 39 per cent to world growth in 2016, is set to become the new economic world power. It is no coincidence that, in 2017, President Xi Jinping was the first Chinese head of state to attend the WEF. He formally opened the proceedings with an appeal to world leaders to continue on the path of globalization.

Summing Up

Now that you have read the introduction you must have formed a fairly good idea of what the title 'Living in a Globalized World' means. Each chapter in this section of your textbook deals with an important aspect of globalization. 'Toys' by Roland Barthes is a superb intellectual analysis of the products of industrialization. The poems 'Indian Movie, New Jersey' and 'At the Lahore Karhai' deal with the Indian immigrant experience in America and the United Kingdom respectively; Naomi Klein's 'The Brand Expands' is a critique of the marketing strategies employed by corporate giants; 'Colombe' offers us an alternate insight into colonial expansion, and 'Zero-Sum Game' is a satire on international trade agreements and the politicians who are indifferent to the implications for people in developing countries.

References

Micklethwait, J. & Wooldridge, A. (2000). *A future perfect: The essentials of globalization*. United Kingdom: Wylie Agency Inc.

Sen, A. (2002). 'How to judge globalism', *The American Prophet*, 13(1), January 1-14, p.100.

TOYS
Roland Barthes

- Dr. Seema Suri

Objectives

This section of the study material will guide you through a close reading of the essay ‘Toys’ by Roland Barthes. The study-guide will

- discuss the significance of his ideas as a social theorist,
- draw your attention to Barthes’s literary style, and
- explain his strategy as a social critic.

Introduction

Mythologies is a collection of essays which were originally written for the newspapers. Barthes wrote on objects and trends which we generally consider unimportant and accept uncritically: toys, jeans, advertisements and detergent powder. Barthes felt that simple, innocent looking everyday objects also mean something that is beyond their functional value and related to the dominant ideologies in society. His method of inquiry is simple; to uncover the subsidiary meanings (connotations), beyond the literal and agreed upon meanings (denotations).

You might wonder how a critical essay on toys, published in France in 1957, is related to the topic of globalization. Firstly, globalization is not only about the economic, political, and cultural integration of societies. As you read in the introduction to this section, trans border dissemination of knowledge and ideas is an important driver of globalization. Not only are people consuming products manufactured by countries from all over the world but they are taking an interest in other religions, traditions, literature, art, and cinema. Though it was published in 1957, Barthes’s *Mythologies* is an enduring book and is essential reading for anyone interested in cultural studies as he was one of the earliest commentators on modern mass culture.

Barthes was disturbed by the rising affluence of the middle-class and the emergence of a mass culture that was influenced by industrialization and technology. He felt that tasteless bourgeois culture was killing an authentic and genuine popular culture, sustained by the working-classes. Some of the objects that he selects for scrutiny in his collection of essays, *Mythologies*, such as cars and detergents, are products of industrialization. In *Toys*, Barthes selects the most commonplace of objects and explains the serious implications of the toys children play with. His analytical skill is one of the best illustrations of social criticism.

Study-Guide

paragraph 1

microcosm : something small and self-contained that represents all the qualities and activities of something large; a little universe or world.

homunculus : a tiny man, capable of being produced artificially.

Barthes immediately, in the opening sentence, announces his disapproval of French toys. He complains that the French people assume that the child is another 'self' who has to be provided with miniature versions of everyday objects.

Using a cluster of related metaphors, Barthes conveys his dislike of modern toys. He thinks that contemporary French toys are 'a microcosm of the adult world' and 'reduced copies' of human objects.

paragraph 2

dynamic forms : active, energetic.

socialized : the process by which infants and young children become aware of society and their relationship with others.

myth : (a) a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena.

(b) a widely held but false belief. It is in this second sense that Barthes uses the word in this essay.

Citroen : model of a car.

Vedette : large car manufactured by Ford France from 1956-1961.

Martian : alien from the planet Mars.

Barthes states his preference for toys that do not deprive the child of the opportunity to be creative. He thinks that even a simple set of blocks will encourage the child to create new shapes and structures. According to Barthes the problem is that,

French toys *always mean something*, and this something is always entirely socialized, constructed by the myths or techniques of modern adult life.

This sentence summarizes Barthes's intellectual position. What he means is that toys are not as innocent as we might think they are; they are the products of the dominant belief systems in society. Toys have meanings and an investigation into their meaning will reveal how society and adults are providing children with objects that turn them into unquestioning and uncritical adults. Children are naturally creative and free of prejudices but modern French toys provide the child with readymade images of the world.

For instance, as Barthes points out, toy cars and petrol stations make the child believe that it is normal and natural to own cars; thus, blinding the child to the massive amounts of fuel consumption which individual ownership of cars entail, and fail to encourage the child to explore other, alternative modes of transport. Toy Martians reduce the mystery and complexity of science to unsubstantiated fears of aliens. Children who play with toy post-offices will not appreciate that the modern day postal system has come into existence after centuries of evolution and take for granted the existence of such institutions in their lives. A child who is provided with soldiers or tanks to play with cannot realize that war is destructive and unnatural. French toys encourage the child to accept without any curiosity or pleasure the world she/ he is growing up in, accepting its faulty beliefs without question.

paragraph 3

prefigure : imagine something beforehand, according to a type.

alibi : an excuse, pretext, or justification of any kind.

abdication : to formally give up a responsibility or duty.

causality : the relation of cause and effect.

demiurge : the maker of the world.

Barthes develops his argument further in this paragraph. He says that a child, who plays with toy soldiers or Vespa scooters, will gradually start believing that these objects have always existed, created by nature. Socially constructed meanings and institutions are passed off as natural. A toy soldier is going to send a subtle message to the child: that there is nothing wrong in countries going to war and people killing each other. The destructive and inhuman aspects of war are glossed over.

It is not so much the imitation of real-life objects that Barthes objects to but the absurd limits to which toy manufacturers go to, to imitate real life; sometimes even incorporating biological functions in the toys. He illustrates with the example of baby dolls which have an esophagus and urinate. Barthes point out that these dolls train the little girl to become an efficient mother. Little girls are provided with pre-determined roles to follow in life.

What other kinds of toys are girls expected to play with?

Have you ever thought of gifting a baby doll to a little boy or a football to a girl? Why?

Most probably, girls will get kitchen sets, make-up kits or dolls as gifts. Not only do such toys lack in imagination, they are meant to condition children into viewing women in stereotyped roles. Barthes's perspective here is feminist; he is critical of the role played by toys in moulding the gender attitudes of children.

Barthes's approach as a social critic is fresh. The main point that he makes in this paragraph is that French toys do not nurture the creative spirit of children. From an early age, they become passive users. Notice how Barthes uses a series of oppositional words in the second half of this paragraph. They help to reinforce his argument that French toys are "based on imitation" and highlight the contrast between what French toys actually are and what they should ideally do:

owner	:	creator
user	:	demiurge
ready-made	:	invent, discover
property	:	life
inert	:	move by themselves

It is necessary to pay attention to the language as it is instrumental in helping the author build up his argument. For instance, Barthes uses a frightening simile to compare French toys with the

real world. They are ‘like a Jivaro head’; a dead, shrunken human head. The Jivaro tribes of South America would preserve their enemies’ heads till they were reduced to the size of a baseball.

paragraph 4

bourgeois : a member of the middle class; conservative, conventional, unimaginative, materialistic.

graceless : without charm.

hernia : a medical condition in which an organ pushes through its covering wall.

Vosges : mountain region in the South of France, famous for its craftspeople.

fretwork : ornamental work, consisting of perforated interlaced woodwork.

posthumous : after death.

In this paragraph Barthes shifts his focus from the form of the toys to the materials used to make them. Barthes expresses his dissatisfaction with plastic and metal as raw materials to manufacture toys. He again employs the strategy of placing oppositional pairs of words to emphasize the differences between these materials. Mechanical, mass-produced toys are compared to those handcrafted by artisans. He recalls wooden farmhouses that were made by craftspeople of the Vosges region.

<i>Wood</i>	<i>Plastic/Metal</i>
‘product of nature’	‘product of chemistry’
‘natural warmth’ in its touch	‘chemical coldness’ of its touch
firm and soft	sharp angles
muffled and sharp sound	vibrates, grates
created by craftspeople	mechanical, mass-produced
lasts longer, wears out	dies quickly, shatters

Plastic or metal are not appealing materials. They produce irritating sounds and do not establish a long-lasting relationship with the child. Wood is a material that is warm, soft, humane, and pleasing. The overriding tone of this section of the essay is sensuous; Barthes dwells on the sensations produced when one touches wood: ‘natural warmth’, ‘firmness’, and ‘softness’, and ‘the pleasure, the sweetness, the humanity of touch.’ Wood keeps the child in close contact with the tree and nature. To express his disgust with mechanical toys, Barthes uses a rather unflattering image. When they break they ‘disappear behind the hernia of broken spring’. He uses a number of adjectives that we do not normally associate with inanimate objects; plastic is ‘graceless’ and wood is a ‘familiar and poetic’ substance. Can you make a list of other such words used in the essay?

In the end Barthes gets nostalgic about wooden toys made by craftspeople, before mass-produced, factory made toys made of plastic or metal took over. He describes the farmhouses, with intricate woodwork, handcrafted by the artisans of the Vosges region of France. Such toys

are a pleasure to play with, unlike mechanical toys which the child can use but not feel any joy in their touch or even in their possession, as they break easily.

Conclusion

In his essay 'Toys', Barthes has criticized modern French toys for many reasons. The most important point that he makes is that these toys are copies of objects in the adult world. They do not encourage the child to be creative but mould him into a passive, unquestioning user. In the last paragraph Barthes dwells on the superiority of wood as a material to make toys, rather than plastic or metal. He also expresses his disapproval of mechanical, mass-produced toys.

Remember that more than *the critique of French toys* that is the subject of this essay; it is Barthes's *method of inquiry* into his subject matter that is important. For Barthes, toys are social signs, full of meanings that are not obvious and as a social critic he scrutinizes them closely to decipher their role in perpetuating dominant ideologies. He gives an excellent example of dolls that perform biological functions. They condition the little girl to become a mother, instead of encouraging her to explore a career.

Modern toys do not allow children to be creative and condition them to grow up into unquestioning adults who accept social institutions, relationships, and their own position in it without thinking of the implications. The observations that Barthes makes about French toys are very much true of most toys even today.

INDIAN MOVIE, NEW JERSEY*C. B. Divakaruni*

*-Dr. Seema Suri***Objectives**

The following introduction gives a historical context to the poem. Reading a poem requires a strategy very different from that needed for a short story or an essay. The study-guide will help you with a close reading of 'Indian Movie, New Jersey' (1990) and provide an extensive analysis. In addition to appreciating the emotional core of the poem you must learn to appreciate the special techniques used by the poet.

Introduction

The migration of people across countries is not a recent phenomenon as people have been moving across countries and continents for centuries. Economic globalization and dramatic improvements in the infrastructure for transport and communications have resulted in a sharp rise in this trend since the latter half of the twentieth-century.

People leave their countries for many reasons but at the top of the list are economic ones. In addition, there is forced migration as people do not always leave their homeland voluntarily. During the colonial expansion of the European powers in the 15th century, there was large scale, forced migration of people, especially from Africa, to work on the plantations of the settlers in the West Indies. People also migrate due to internal conflicts; to escape oppression or persecution on the basis of race, religion or political beliefs. Natural or environmental disasters such as floods or famines are another cause, as are development projects such as dams or the construction of special-economic zones that displace entire populations. Then there is illegal migration which includes smuggled people and human trafficking.

Uprooted from the familial, social, cultural, and political environment which supports their identity and provides them with a sense of security, the migrants are forced to revise their sense of identity based on these paradigms. The migrant is uprooted and feels alienated within the new and unfamiliar climate, lifestyle, social norms, and public institutions. Many adjustments need to be made and there are problems integrating with the host country; racist and xenophobic treatment, difficulty accessing public resources or obtaining citizenship, and understanding the cultural norms. Ignorance of language is a major obstacle. Sometimes those working in unregulated environments do not even get basic wages.

Dislocation causes a lot of stress and anxiety. The immigrant experience, whether it is that of the Arab in France, an Indian in America or a Chinese in Australia, is the subject of a vast body of modern literature and cinema as well. Anurag Mathur's novel 'The Inscrutable Americans' and Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories 'The Interpreter of Maladies' are some of the popular books on the subject of Indian immigrants in America.

Indians have been migrating to America since the 1790s. In 1900 there were only 2,050 Indians in America. The first wave of immigrants were from an agricultural background in Punjab. From the 1960s onwards, right down to the 1980s, they were most visible as owners of convenience stores and motels, and cab drivers. After that there has been a change in profile and they now belong to a variety of skilled professional backgrounds: academics, software engineers,

management consultants, and media professionals. Indians, in 2017, constituted 19 per cent of the total immigrant population in America and are the fastest growing, most educated, and affluent of all ethnic groups.

Indian immigrants in America are known as Asian or South Asian Americans, along with immigrants from other countries in South Asia. This is to distinguish them from the American Indians who are the local, indigenous people of the country. New Jersey has a large Indian population; and the setting for the poem, as the title implies, is in a movie-hall in New Jersey, where a group of Indians are watching a movie.

Study-guide

stanza 1

The speaker in the poem is not individualized; we don't know his/her gender or social status though we can guess that the speaker is a middle-aged, first generation immigrant because there is a mention of grown up, rebellious children in the second paragraph. It is the collective identity of the Indian immigrant community that is the focus of this poem and the speaker is both a participant and observer in this exploration.

The genre of film is used to sketch the differences in the American and Indian ideals of feminine beauty, as embodied by the film star on screen. The Indian 'sex-goddess', as Divakaruni calls her, has more fleshy limbs than the white film star who is 'all rib/ and gaunt cheekbone'. Her thighs are 'satisfying-solid, redeeming', suggesting stability and reliability. The men gazing on her respond with appreciative whistles to her sexually suggestive movements. Don't miss the association with fertility and fecundity in the image of the sex-goddess 'smiling plumply/ from behind a flowery branch.' The abundant flesh on her body is comforting and familiar. The speaker's preference for the stereotypical Indian representation of womanhood, over the starved looking white film star is an indication of resistance to acculturation or the process of assimilating features of another culture through continuous contact. The immigrant clings to his/her notions of beauty. The coinage 'sex-goddess' is interesting: it combines sexuality with spirituality and captures the influence of cinema on the Indian psyche.

It is clear that the movie is a typical Indian masala film; it follows a formula and has a predictable storyline. The viewers seem to be familiar with the songs; apparently, they have seen the movie before or heard the songs. The whole experience of watching a movie is like a ritual for them, an assertion of their distinct identity. Notice how, throughout the poem, the speaker uses the collective pronoun 'we' no less than ten times, 'our' is used thrice and 'us' twice. The movie-hall in New Jersey becomes the site for collective participation, where the Indian community can re-create, for a brief period, the home that they have left behind. The hostility and alienation felt outside can be discarded: 'It is safe here.' The word 'here' highlights the movie-hall as a sanctuary. Nostalgia for their homeland makes them forget the negative aspects. As the speaker says,

....the day
golden and cool so no one sweats,
roses on every bush, and the Dal Lake
clean again.

Distance makes them idealize their homeland, believing that the Dal Lake, a favourite tourist spot is not dirty or polluted.

stanza 2

On screen, the 'sex-goddess' speaks in English, with a heavy accent. Think, for a moment, about the incongruity of the scene. An Indian movie is being screened for an Indian audience in New Jersey, who have gone there with the ostensible purpose of reasserting their cultural identity and the heroine, who is supposed to be a representation of ideal Indian womanhood, speaks in English and wears 'a brief red skirt'; certainly not traditional attire. The sex-goddess is obviously a member of the English speaking, educated, upper-class; pseudo-modern and adopting the outward manifestations of a western lifestyle. But the audience does not notice the contradictions between the implications of what is on the screen and their nostalgia.

The audience laughs and claps when the actress speaks in English. They identify with her inarticulate and unclear accent and feel relieved to be away from the embarrassment of mispronounced words in their own lives. The poet uses a simile to reinforce the failure to communicate effectively with Americans:

Here
We need not be embarrassed by words
dropping like lead pellets into foreign ears.

Language is an important tool for assimilation with the culture of the host country but the immigrants find it difficult to adapt their pronunciation of English to American norms.

The light from the screen is soothing as it 'wipes from our faces years of America': living in a foreign land is tiring. The tensions of a new life in an alien country are temporarily forgotten in the movie hall. The speaker talks of generational conflicts as well; sons and daughters who want to break the shackles of their parents' traditions and culture. For most second-generation Indians in America, India is no more than a holiday destination which they have visited, perhaps, a few times. Note how the plural 'sons' and 'daughters' forges their collective identity as an immigrant community with common problems. The younger generation has no direct experience of or understanding of Indian society and values: unquestioning obedience of elders in the family, conservative norms for women, and a general allegiance to family over self.

The American culture that the second-generation Indian immigrants have been born and brought up in nurtures and celebrates individualism, and the pursuit of personal gratification, which they find more attractive. The boys do not want to follow their fathers and run the family store. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Indian immigrants were most visible as the owners of convenience stores, motels or as cab-drivers. The girls assert their right to sexual liberty in a secretive manner and meet their boyfriends without informing their parents. Independence is asserted in different ways; sometimes by sporting hairstyles that are associated with punk sub-culture.

It is not as if conflicts between parents and children are peculiar to immigrant groups; they occur everywhere, all the time. For the immigrant in an alien land, the family is her/his only emotional support and if there are tensions within the family it leads to further psychological stress.

stanza 3

The film has a familiar plot, repeated innumerable times in Indian movies, and ends predictably. Yet, the audience is moved to tears by the hero's sacrifice; he gives up his life so that his friend can marry the sex-goddess. The tale of friendship and sacrifice touches them in many ways; it is a reminder of certain values associated with Indian culture and at the same time they realize that their lives are so far removed from their homes; both geographically and culturally.

In India, movies are synonymous with popular culture. Television and radio programmes rely heavily on movies for their content; and style and fashion are dictated by film stars. Though Indian cinema is frequently criticized for its lack of original stories or convincing characterization, the Indian immigrants see no shortcomings. For them watching a movie is an opportunity to rejuvenate their connections with their culture.

After the movie is over, the Indians hang around the foyer, discussing their latest acquisitions. A trip to India is a perennial, favourite topic. The reference to the 'good news: a new gold chain' is a gentle reminder that Indians have not been able to give up their preoccupation with gold ornaments. The speaker observes how they consciously remain silent about the painful reality of their lives outside, where they are targets of racial hatred and discrimination.

You would be interested to know that around 60 per cent of the hotels and motels in America are owned and run by immigrants of Indian origin, and 30 per cent of them are owned by the Patel community from Gujarat. In the eighties, there were nationwide investigations into a network of hotels and motels used to harbour illegal immigrants and facilitate human smuggling. It is apparent that there is resentment amongst members of the host community and prejudice against the whole immigrant community after such incidents, forming obstacles on the path to social inclusion.

stanza 4

The immigrants linger on in the secure environment of the movie-hall, where the familiar smell of Indian snacks is comforting. They stand and talk with their compatriots, arranging the marriages of their children with 'hometown boys and girls'; who, they believe, will be traditional and untouched by American culture. In the second stanza, there is a reference to daughters who date secretly. It is obvious that the Indians do not approve of the dating culture and prefer to arrange an Indian match from back home. Their resistance to American culture is strong.

The confused attitude of the immigrant towards her/his host country can be felt in this stanza. Though the Indians are reluctant to change their cultural norms and practices, they are not averse to realizing their material aspirations here:

open a franchise, win a million
in the mail.

They dream of starting a profitable business or winning huge sums in the e-mail lottery. Their aspirations are cast in material terms; the typical middle-class dream of a house, whether in India

or the suburbs of America, where the neighbors will talk to them. There is a sad undercurrent noticeable here; the immigrant feels alienated by a lack of communication.

Here while the film-songs still echo
in the corridors and restrooms, we can trust
in movie- truths: sacrifice, success, love and luck,
the America that was supposed to be.

The poem ends with the immigrant's observation that in the movie-hall they can believe in 'movie-truths: sacrifice, success, love and luck'; knowing well that these values are rarely found in real life. The fiction of the movie is like the idea of America that pulled them here; the promise of prosperity and social prestige which remains unfulfilled. Perhaps the speaker repents leaving her/ his roots behind and coming in search of an 'America that was supposed to be.', which turns out to be a myth. The immigrant's sense of loss and disappointment is hinted at.

A note on the language

It is not enough to respond emotionally to a poem. An appreciation of the poet's technique enhances our pleasure in reading the poem. Remember that poems are not always within the form of rhyming stanzas, with fixed line lengths and rhyming end-words as in this example,

The sun descending in the *west*,
The evening star does *shine*;
The birds are silent in their *nest*
And I must seek for *mine*.

(William Blake; *Night*)

Most modern poetry is in the form of free verse where there is no fixed pattern of stanzas or syllables. In 'Indian Movie, New Jersey' the poet uses run-on lines, or enjambment, where the sense of one line is carried over to the next.

Divakaruni depends on the repetition of 'we', 'us' and 'our' as an organizing principle. These collective pronouns, used a total of 15 times, resonate throughout the poem. She uses figurative language sparingly, as in the simile of the Indian film star's thighs that are 'satisfying-solid/ redeeming as tree trunks', or the metaphor of the 'years of America' on the faces of the immigrants.

The language is simple, with the inclusion of some Urdu and Hindi words: 'dosti', 'quarbani' and 'pakoras', to give the language an ethnic flavour. Another interesting feature is her use of typical Indianisms in the coinage of words like 'men-viewers', 'sex-goddess', and 'lover-hero'.

The extended, implicit metaphor of movies

The word metaphor comes from the Greek word 'metapherein', that means to transport something from one place to another. A metaphor is a comparison between two dissimilar objects, as in 'fishing for information', where the characteristics of one domain are carried over

to another. Sometimes the metaphor is not restricted to a word and can carry over the whole poem: it is then called an extended metaphor.

If the comparison is not directly stated and implied it is an implicit metaphor. In this poem, there is an unstated comparison between movies and the immigrant community's culture. Indian movies are a composite representation of their ideals, values, and the home they have left behind. The metaphor of Indian movies permeates the whole poem; it is a very successful use of the technique of an extended, implicit metaphor.

Summing Up

In this poem, you have read about the Indian immigrant's experience in New Jersey. Within the space of a few lines, Divakaruni has managed to convey some of the problems faced by the Indian community in America; the sense of alienation and uprootedness, racial discrimination, xenophobic behaviour. The Indian migrants find it difficult to adjust in America because of different cultural norms. Their accent makes it difficult for them to be understood. At the same time, they nurture dreams of owning a house in the suburbs or starting a business there.

The movie-hall is presented as the space where the Indian community asserts its ethnic identity and the movie becomes an extended metaphor for their idea of India. Their response to the movie tells us so much about the culture they have left behind; their ideals of beauty, friendship, and family. The speaker is not unaware that what is shown on the screen is a 'movie truth', as unreal as the idea of America that pulled them here. The next poem in your text book, 'At the Lahore Karhai' has a similar theme and explores nostalgia for home through the metaphor of food.

Notes

- gaunt* : thin, without flesh, bony.
- Dal Lake* : famous lake in Srinagar, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. A popular tourist spot, it is plagued by an alarming rise in the levels of pollution and falling water levels.
- thickened English* : inarticulate, heavy accent while speaking the language.
- Mohawks* : a type of hairstyle where the sides of the head are shaved and a long, narrow strip of hair left. This style was sported by the warriors of the Mohawk tribes, indigenous people of North America and later became associated with punk sub-culture in the U.S.
- quarbani* : Urdu for sacrifice.
- dosti* : Hindi for friendship.
- motel* : a hotel with accommodation and service facilities for cars.
- pakorras* : fried Indian snack.

AT THE LAHORE KARHAI
Imtiaz Dharker

- *Dr. Seema Suri*

Objectives

As the poem ‘At the Lahore Karhai’(2001) is similar in subject matter to C.B. Divakaruni’s ‘Indian Movie, New Jersey’, I have not provided a detailed introduction as it would be repetitive. Read the introduction to the previous chapter before proceeding with the study-guide. Each poet brings a different perspective and technique to the immigrant situation. I have attempted to explain Dharker’s vision of the migrant experience and discussed her poetic technique.

Introduction

People of Asian origin have been living in Britain since the early 18th century. Indian domestic workers, sepoys, cricketers, and sailors recruited by the British Navy were common sights. It was the 1950s and 1960s that saw the largest wave of migration. The Second World War had ended and the Indian subcontinent had just gone through a painful partition. Many people were displaced whereas Britain needed cheap labour to rebuild its ravaged economy. The poem must be read in the backdrop of 200 years of colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent.

In 2017, roughly two per cent of the population of the United Kingdom was of Indian origin, including people from pre-partition India and Indians with British passports from Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria. In London there are many boroughs, like Wembley, Southall, and Hounslow; populated mostly by Indians. Wembley has many restaurants with names similar to ‘Lahore Karhai.’

The poem, like ‘Indian Movie, New Jersey’ is a representation of the immigrant’s nostalgia for home, explored through the metaphor of food. Like most immigrant literature, it is autobiographical in nature. Whereas the overriding tone of ‘Indian Movie, New Jersey’ is sad, this poem has a more cheerful mood. The speaker’s isolation, loneliness, and deep disappointment with America are forgotten for a while in the movie hall, surrounded by other Indians. ‘Lahore Karhai’ does not have any underlying anxieties. The group in the poem has a mixed composition, comprising people of different nationalities; Indian, Pakistani, and British. The speaker’s nostalgia for home-cooked food is expressed in gentle terms, without any sense of alienation from her surroundings.

stanza 1

The poem begins on a happy note: ‘It’s a great day, Sunday’. The group of six friends get into a car and set off for lunch at the ‘Lahore Karhai’, a restaurant in Wembley, London. The poet immediately underscores the sanctity of the visit: it is a ‘pilgrimage’ and the association is with a journey undertaken to connect with a higher being or their inner selves. It is a way of staying in touch with their roots, their ethnic identity.

They reach the restaurant just as lunch has begun to be served. Note the line: ‘No beer, we’re Muslim.’ Their request for beer is turned down by the staff but they are happy with the

morning sun and the old classic film-song playing in the background. The song ‘Yaad na jaaye’, is from a popular Hindi film, sung by Mohammad Rafi in 1963. The words, roughly translated, mean ‘memories refuse to leave.’ The significance cannot be missed. It is the memory of their homeland, the longing for Indian/ Pakistani food and music that brings the group to this restaurant. The music echoes their sentiments.

stanzas 2, 3

The ambience of the restaurant reminds the speaker of the dhabas that dot the Grand Trunk Road and are popular with truck drivers and travelers. The reference to the Grand Trunk Road is significant as this ancient trade route connects the Indian subcontinent; it starts from Bangladesh, runs through east and west India, and from Wagah goes on to Lahore and Rawalpindi in Pakistan. The poet dwells on the common historical inheritance of these countries in the Asian subcontinent.

The dhabas are the lifeline of truckers travelling on this road. Away from home, they are hungry and tired, seeking the taste of home-cooked food. Observe how the poet uses a word implying strong physical desire to describe their hunger: ‘full of lust for real food/ just like home.’ The comparison is carried over into the next paragraph; if the restaurant has morphed into a dhaba then this group of friends are like the truckers: miles away from home, rootless and restless, separated by both distance and time:

looking hopefully (years away
from Sialkot and Chandigarh)
for the taste of our mother’s
hand in the cooking.

The poet says that their lives are ‘overloaded’. What do you think this means? Do you agree that there is a hint of fatigue and tiredness? Why is the immigrant tired? Perhaps tired of having to bear the double burden of making adjustments in a foreign land, and maintaining their cultural entity without support mechanisms.

stanza 4, 5

The poet identifies her friends by nationality. The ‘Lahore runaway’ is a reference to herself. Imtiaz Dharker was born in Lahore but spent most of her life in Britain and India. Then there is the Sindhi refugee and his wife, and two young girls from Bombay, India. The group has a cosmopolitan composition and also includes a young Englishman. It is not a homogenous group like that of the Indian audience in ‘Indian Movie, New Jersey.’ The boundaries between nations become blurred, and it seems the poet is conscious of the South Asian, regional identity of this group. Don’t miss the mention of the Sindhi lady who prays to Lord Krishna. The group comprises both Hindus and Muslims; as well as a British national; truly indicative of a unified global culture.

It is indicative of a certain degree of cultural assimilation with the host country that there is an Englishman in the midst of the other immigrants. He is ‘too young to be flavoured by the Raj’, suggests that he is untouched by any form of racial prejudice. He does not relate to his friends as a colonizer as he was born after the end of British rule in 1947.

There is nostalgia for home but without any of the anxiety-filled, herding together of the group in ‘Indian Movie, New Jersey’. These people seem to have come to terms with life in a foreign land, making the transition from the past to the present and revisiting the past without discomfort, as expressed in the following simile:

This winter, we have learnt
to wear our past
like summer clothes.

Though dislocated from their homeland, the immigrants are on their way to becoming truly global citizens; embracing new cultures while retaining an ethnic identity. The summer clothes are a metaphor for the home and culture they have left behind.

stanza 6-9

The poet shifts her attention to the food on the table. Observe the innovative use of food as a metaphor for familial ties. As I explained earlier, the poet uses food as an implicit extended metaphor for her ethnic roots. In the following lines, she uses specific Indian / Pakistani dishes to affectionately remember her relatives:

A feast! We swoop
on a whole family of dishes.
The tarka daal is Auntie Hameeda
the Karhai ghosht is Khala Aameena
the gajjar halwa is Appa Rasheeda.

The warm naan is you.

Within this stanza, Imtiaz Dharker has used no less than five metaphors. The dishes are perhaps those which their aunts cooked for them, back home in Pakistan; food that was an expression of love, reinforcing interpersonal relations. Families in the Indian subcontinent maintain ties with almost every member of their extended family; cousins, uncles and aunts. This distinct cultural practice is evoked in the fond remembrance of relatives back home. As the poet says:

bound together by the bread we break
sharing out our continent.

These
are ways of remembering.

Food is not only a way to stay connected to home; it also forges relationships in the present. When the light falls on the people in the restaurant it makes the poet realize that they are ‘bound together’ by the food they eat, sharing a common culinary legacy. The sense of connectedness is presented through the metaphor of food.

stanza 10

The last paragraph comes as something of a surprise because till this point the overriding mood of the poem is nostalgic, to the point of sentimentality, about the taste of home-cooked food. The

immigrants' visit transports them to a past where food cooked by a loving mother or aunt nourished them. How then does the preference for Chinese food fit into the theme of the poem?

Other days we may prefer
Chinese.

The point I wish to make is that there is no sense of conflict with the host society and these Asian immigrants have learnt to enjoy other, foreign cultures existing in Britain; one of the most multicultural societies in the world. They seem to have learnt to effortlessly make the transition from one cultural ethos to another. Nostalgia co-exists with assimilation. Unlike the Indian community in 'Indian Movie, New Jersey', who share a deep anxiety and a sense of failure to integrate with the host society; the immigrants in 'At the Lahore Karhai' have come to terms with life in a foreign land and embraced multiculturalism. They can enjoy a beer with their curry and naan.

At the same time, there is perhaps a subtle suggestion that for the immigrant, her/his culture has been reduced to the same status as other exotic cuisines, such as Chinese, which they consume as a break from their everyday monotony. The lived culture they left behind is now experienced on an occasional weekend outing. The taste of food, lovingly cooked by mothers/aunts each day is now sought in restaurants. But not always; sometimes they eat food from other countries as well.

A note on the language

The poem uses free verse, which does not depend on a system of end-rhymes. Imtiaz Dharker's language is colloquial, with a liberal use of Hindi and Urdu words which give it a distinct ethnic flavor; kadhai, naan, kebabs, and khala are some of them.

Although there are no end-rhymes, Dharker uses internal rhymes liberally. When the accented last syllable of two words in one line of a poem rhyme, it is called half-rhyme, as in:

It is a great *day*, *Sunday*,

and in the first paragraph there is another example:

begun / *sun* / two-in-*one*,
or
hair / *air*.

In other places Dharker uses vowel rhymes, where the vowel rhymes but the consonants don't matter, as in:

Hauling our overloaded *lives*
the extra *mile*
we're truckers of another *kind*.

and in para 6 there is the *Hameeda* / *Ameena* / *Rasheeda* which creates a rhythm. This technique is known as assonance.

Try to locate other pairs of words in the poem that have rhyming vowels or consonants.

In addition to the implicit extended metaphor of food that permeates the whole poem, the poet uses food as a metaphor to evoke the memory of loved ones back home. In stanza 6, Dharker uses no less than five metaphors to describe her family.

Another literary device is that of metonymy – which means using one word to stand for another, usually larger, more general thing, as when you say ‘fond of the bottle’ it means ‘fond of drink’. Note the poet’s use of metonymy:

looking hopefully....
for the taste of our *mother’s*
hand in the cooking.

and

bound together by the bread we break
sharing out our *continent*.

What do the ‘mother’s hand’ and ‘continent’ signify in these lines?

Conclusion

The poem, ‘At the Lahore Karhai’ is an expression of the immigrant’s nostalgia for home. The speaker is both participant and observer, enjoying lunch at a restaurant with her friends in Wembley, London. She is an immigrant of Pakistani origin, now settled in London. In the poem, many elements of the culture of the Indian sub-continent are reinforced, especially the sense of community, both the old familial one that has been left behind and the present one that comprises people with a common regional inheritance.

The poem represents the different elements of the poet’s regional culture through the metaphor of food. References to old Hindi film songs, the dhabas on the Grand Trunk Road, the Sindhi lady who prays to Lord Krishna every day, and the memories of loving aunts and a mother who cooked special dishes for them: all these create an image of a culture that is distinctly Asian.

At the same time, the poem is devoid of any discomfort about the immigrant’s place in a new culture and the poet is comfortable with her situation. There are no disturbing background whispers of xenophobic behaviour or racial discrimination, as one read in ‘Indian Movie, New, Jersey’. It is significant indicator of assimilation that one person in the group is of British origin and very comfortable with them. The speaker in this poem misses her home but she has embraced her life in London. She celebrates the multiculturalism of the city.

Notes

Karhai : a deep bottomed dish used to cook and fry.

Grand Trunk Road : Asia’s oldest and longest highway that runs through 2,500 km of the Indian sub-continent, from Sonargaon in Bangladesh, through Kolkota, Delhi and Wagah, on the border, to Lahore and Rawalpindi in Pakistan.

- Raj* : period of British rule over India, from 1858 to 1947.
- tarka daal* : lentils with a sprinkling of oil.
- Karhai ghosht* : mutton cooked in a Karhai.
- gajjar halva* : a sweet-dish made of carrots and milk.
- naan* : a sort of Indian bread made from fermented flour
- khala* : Urdu word for aunt (mother's sister).
- appa* : Urdu word for elder sister.

COLOMBE
E.K. Brathwaite

- *Dr. Seema Suri*

Objectives

Brathwaite's poetry and critical writings are deeply rooted in the history and culture of the Caribbean region. To appreciate 'Colombe' it is essential that you know the meaning of terms like Caribbean and Creole; the significance of Christopher Columbus in Caribbean history and the emergence of a resistance culture in the region. In the sections that follow, I have attempted to give a brief overview of these topics and also touched upon the poet's ideology as a writer.

The two poems 'Indian Movie, New Jersey' and 'At the Lahore Karhai' were about the immigrants' experiences in America and Britain respectively and their nostalgia for home. 'Colombe' is different: it presents a much more complex perspective. It is not autobiographical or contemporary but goes back to a moment, more than 500 years ago, when Columbus landed on the island of Guanahani, in the West Indies, in 1492, and presents him through the eyes of a native of the island.

Introduction

If you look up a map of the world you will notice that the West Indies comprise 7,000 islands, islets, reefs, and cays. Geographically, the West Indies includes 28 territories, including sovereign states and dependencies. Most islands are former colonies of European nations; Cuba, the largest Caribbean island is a former Spanish colony; Tobago was ruled by the Dutch; and Haiti and St. Lucia are former French colonies. Barbados, Grenada, and Jamaica were under British rule. Political violence, corruption, and natural disasters have come in the way of their growth. With limited industries, tourism is the mainstay of the economy, but it hasn't led to overall prosperity.

The Caribbean islands were inhabited by native tribes from the American mainland: the Caribs and the Arawaks, when Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492. The Arawaks were treated savagely by the Spanish; enslaved, murdered, or infected with diseases. The Spanish took over many islands and plundered them. After that the British, French, and Dutch came and seized the islands, and planted sugarcane and tobacco. They imported slaves from Africa to work on their plantations and after the abolition of slavery in 1833, people from India, Europe, and Southeast Asia were brought in as indentured labour to work on the islands. Most Caribbean islands remained colonies till the 1960s.

From a European perspective, Caribbean history is said to have begun with the arrival of Columbus in 1492. But the history of tribes living there before his arrival and the slave rebellions during the 300 years of exploitation haven't been documented. It was not as if there was no resistance to colonial rule. Slaves made up from 50 to 80 per cent of the population on the islands. There were sporadic revolts but lack of cohesiveness led to their failure. There were revolts in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Honduras and New Spain in the 16th century; Antigua in the 17th century and the Maroons staged uprisings for over 50 years in Jamaica, St. Kitts, and Barbados. Paul Bogle led a revolution in Morant Bay, Jamaica in 1865. Toussaint L'ouverture

led a war against the French in Haiti and it became the first Black Republic of the new world in 1791.

A note on E. K. Brathwaite

The Caribbean region has a long history of resistance to colonial rule and cultural assimilation that has taken many forms. In the modern context, writers and artists like Brathwaite look for a Caribbean unity amongst the diverse influences on the islands. Caribbean culture has been shaped by African, Amerindian, European and Indian cultures. As a writer, Brathwaite honours the different facets of Caribbean culture, looking for what he calls the submerged 'submarine' unity in diversity. It is by recognizing their shared past that they can create a vision for the future. For instance, Brathwaite would reject the tourist brochure vision of the region as a laid-back paradise with rum and coconut-water sipping locals singing the reggae. Such stereotypical images, promoted by the Caribbean government's tourism campaigns, are devoid of any reference to their African heritage.

Brathwaite consciously writes in a kind of English that has a distinct Caribbean, Creole feel to it. Creole is a polydialect and refers to any one of the family of languages developed by African slaves in contact with one or more of the European languages such as English, French, or Dutch. Brathwaite believed that non-standard forms of English should be used as they reflect local reality. In one of his lectures, 'English in the Caribbean', Brathwaite said that the English spoken on the islands is in no way inferior to standard English and is an intrinsic part of their cultural heritage. His concern as a poet is with the revolutionary potential of language as an instrument of resistance to cultural domination by the colonizer's language.

He also rejected dominant western poetic conventions. His free verse has varying line lengths, some even comprising one word or one syllable, as in the first line of each stanza in 'Colombe'. Brathwaite believed that a fragmented language is the only way to represent a regional, Caribbean reality. The structure, style, and content of his poems reflect his resistance to assimilation. In some of his later poems, Brathwaite has experimented with font types and sizes, mixing both in a single poem. He felt that the computer makes it possible for the poet to represent the orality of poetry as well as give it a visual element by making typographical innovations. This style of his is known as the Sycorax video style, used in much of his later poetry. The absence of capitalization, punctuation, and grammar in his poetry; as well as the incorporation of 'tunes, tones, and rhythms', which are characteristic of folk traditions and ordinary speech patterns should be viewed from the perspective of language as a socio-political instrument.

Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) was a great maritime explorer. An Italian, he was associated with the Portuguese and Spanish courts, and undertook four voyages across the Atlantic, between 1492 and 1504, to find a sea route to India. Though he could not find India he landed up on the islands in the Caribbean Sea and opened these for European settlement. Till his death, Columbus believed that he had landed on the east coast of India, not a new continent. In 1507, a year after his death, America was shown on a new map of the world.

He remained a legendary figure for many centuries as he brought great material profit to Spain and other European countries by opening up the Americas to European settlement.

Columbus got the title ‘High Admiral of the Ocean and Sea Viceroy’, and perpetual governorship of the islands and continents that he discovered. Columbus always gave the conversion of non-believers to Christianity as the real reason for his explorations. The truth is that his motives were never religious or philanthropic; his voyages were necessitated by anti-Islamic fervour as the Islamic powers had closed land routes to the East, after Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks in 1453. Under the Mongol empire, European powers had enjoyed free access to the land routes to Asia. There was great competition between Portugal and Spain to find a sea-route to Asia. Greed and ambition had driven many before him on long and expensive voyages. It was the lust for riches, the desire for adventure and conquests, and Europe’s genuine need for herbs and spices that drove him to search for an alternate route.

In spite of the fact that Columbus never set foot on what is now known as the United States, and many other discoverers and immigrants had landed on the Caribbean islands before him, he remains a somewhat heroic figure in history; famous as the discoverer of America. Developments in sailing techniques and communications made it possible for him to document and report his journeys back to Europe. Americans admired and identified with his spirit of enterprise and he has been appropriated as a part of American history.

It was only after the quincentenary celebrations of his ‘discovery’ of the Americas that there has been a revision of the assessment of Columbus. The word now preferred over ‘discovery’ is ‘encounter’, as the former word conveys the impression that the islands had no history before Columbus’s arrival. He is now viewed by many historians as a man who symbolizes imperialist and expansionist forces. Columbus’s discovery of these islands marked the beginning of colonization, leading to the exploitation and destruction of the indigenous people. Forced migration and imported diseases resulted in the deaths of thousands of natives. The destructive impact on the island communities’ culture has not been documented properly. At the same time, we must not overlook Columbus’s towering status as a navigator, and his indisputable courage and endurance.

Columbus first landed on the island of Guanahani, now known as San Salvador, on October 14, 1492. It is this moment, from the perspective of an Amerindian native that forms the subject of ‘Colombe’.

Analysis

stanza 1

The first line has one syllable, a pattern that is repeated in the next two stanzas as well.

C
olumbus, from his after-
deck watched stars, absorbed in water

Note how words are split. The use of the symbol ‘&’, called the ampersand, in place of ‘and’ is unusual in poetry. In the Caribbean region, one peculiarity of the local speech pattern is to omit the first letter. It is Brathwaite’s way of demystifying Columbus; by first fracturing the French version of the name of the legendary figure. The name Columbus/ Colombe loses its dignity by being split into two in the beginning of every stanza. Moreover, the image of Columbus in this poem is that of a man who was indirectly responsible for the genocide of the local people. In this

context, using the French version of his name is ironic, as Colombe means dove, which is a symbol of peace.

Observe how the poet has not used capitalization and punctuation. The syntax is also different; hardly any articles are used and the word order is reversed. This shock technique forces us to pay attention to the unusual combinations.

The poem is from the omniscient perspective of the native, secretly watching Columbus; who is a silent, solitary figure, standing on the rear part of the ship, watching the reflection of the stars in the sea. The emergence of daylight makes the reflection turn yellow. Don't miss the beautiful metaphor of the stars 'melting into liquid amber.' Before him, in the daylight, he surveys the beaches before him. Above him birds circle around the flapping flag and the mast of the ship. The reversed syntax in;

harshly hawking

brings in a sense of unease into the poem. The hawking or preying birds are clearly associated with Columbus, who has come like a predator to these islands. The poet steers away from conventional representations of Columbus as an innocent, well-meaning discoverer. The birds of prey are agitated, maybe sensing Columbus's intentions with their special foresight.

stanza 2

Like a lord, Columbus surveys the land before him. His desire to possess it is brought out in the image of the man who has already imagined this exotic paradise:

C
olumbus from his after-
deck watched heights he hoped for
rocks he dreamed. rise from my simple water

Opposing forces can be felt in the poem – the silence of Columbus on the afterdeck of the ship and the silence of the native watching him. The tensions are built up by the native's reiteration of ownership of the elements as 'my summer air', 'my simple water' and 'our land'. The metaphor of the simple water underscores the unsuspecting, simple innocence of the native, compared to Columbus's sinister plans. He appears as a strategist who has already calculated the benefits of his journey.

The short sentences without articles build up the tension. The screaming parrots are an omen of the impending violence, about to be unleashed by Columbus. This image links up with the birds of prey that were making harsh noises above the mast, in the first stanza.

The native can sense the ambition in Columbus's mind. The poem raises doubts about Columbus's motives. We wonder whether the slaughter of the natives was part of his plan to forcibly gain possession of these islands. This aspect of his voyages has not been sufficiently stressed in history text books and journals. The European soldiers use weapons, symbols of western civilization, to crush the passionate resistance and the courage of the indigenous people. The native empathizes with the pain about to be perpetrated on his community; the whip and the boot that will be used as weapons to subjugate and crush these simple people.

Pike
point & musket butt
hot splintered courage. Bones
cracked with bullet shot
tipped black boot in my belly.

Even before Columbus has set foot on the island, the native can feel the pain and suffering of his people at the hands of Columbus's troops. There are many historical accounts of the brutalities inflicted on the natives on the islands. I will give just one example; Columbus's soldiers used the natives as human targets to practice firing and fed the dead bodies to their dogs.

stanza 3

The image of Columbus looking at the bearded fig trees contains echoes of the moment when another Portuguese explorer sighted these in 1536, on another island, and named it Barbados, which means 'the bearded one'. Pay special attention to the imagery. Brathwaite combines suggestions of fertility and virility in the simile of the yellow pouis flowers that 'blazed like pollen' and the waterfalls glimpsed in the greenery. It is an abundant, colourful, and exotic paradise.

Note how Columbus's eyes move in an upward arc. In the first stanza, he is watching the reflection of the stars in the water; when day dawns he looks upon beaches and the rocks rising in the water and in the last stanza his eyes travel up to the ridges. The progressively upward movement of his eyes mirrors his rising ambition and greed.

The figure of Columbus standing silent is ominous; the native has gauged the destructive potential of the explorer. Columbus hears 'mocking voices' behind the bushes. Like the narrator, other natives are watching him. Perhaps his guilt makes him paranoid and he believes the voices are laughing at him.

The second half of the last stanza in 'Colombe' is in line with modern, revised accounts of Columbus. Brathwaite splits the word 'discovery' into two:

What did this journey mean. this
new world mean dis
covery? or a return to terrors
he had sailed from. Known before?

Brathwaite's breaking up of the word 'discovery' is an excellent illustration of how language can be a powerful weapon, forcing us to look at things differently. This technique deprives the word of any dignity and, by extension Columbus's achievement in landing on the island. He is not a brave explorer, but an ambassador of colonial power.

Columbus is imagined as a man with a tortured soul; restless and unhappy. Brathwaite does not take the easy path and project Columbus as an anti-hero. He is more complex; a man sailing across the world to escape his inner demons. Brathwaite has added another dimension to Columbus's motives; the great explorer is presented as a disturbed personality.

The image of Columbus alighting from the ship is conveyed through a powerful metaphor: ‘splashing silence’ as he walks. Again, Brathwaite has inverted the syntax to draw attention to the silence that Columbus has shattered. His destructive potential is conveyed through the crabs crushed under his feet, as he takes his first step on the island, oblivious of the peace that he has disrupted. The image of the crabs, links up with the hawks and parrots in the earlier stanzas.

Conclusion

The poem forces us to revise popular notions about Columbus by presenting him from the perspective of the native. The use of the French version of his name, *Colombe*, the splitting of his name as well as the word ‘discovery’, and the experiments with language: all these contribute to the poet’s attempt to demystify the great navigator. However, Brathwaite does not take recourse to the simple device of presenting Columbus as a villain, driven by pure greed and ambition, resulting in the senseless slaughter of the indigenous people. The Columbus of this poem is a complex man; he is a restless and unhappy soul. Brathwaite’s poetic imagination conceives a man who is disturbed and seems to be escaping from some painful reality back home.

Notes

- Colombe* : French for dove. The dove is generally regarded as a symbol of peace.
- after-deck* : the part of the deck towards the tail.
- amber* : yellowish translucent fossilized resin derived from extinct trees and used in jewellery.
- mast* : a long upright pole of timber and iron, set up in a ship’s keel (lengthwise timber or steel structure of the ship) to support the sails.
- mizzen* : the mast next to the main mast.
- pike* : an infantry weapon with a pointed steel or iron head on a long wooden shaft.
- musket* : light gun, often supported on the shoulder.
- bearded fig trees* : the Caribbean islands’ fig trees, whose long, hanging, aerial roots resembled beards. In 1536 Portuguese explorer Pedro Campos named the island Barbados, meaning the bearded one.

THE BRAND EXPANDS*Naomi Klein*

*Dr. Seema Suri***Objectives**

This section includes a brief introduction to the anti-corporate movement which will place the extract from Naomi Klein's book 'No Logo' (2001), in its proper context. The chapter contains many popular American brand names, which I have explained in the detailed notes. The commentary on the essay will help you grasp the core issues raised by the writer.

Introduction: Anti-corporate movement /Anti-globalization/ Alter-globalization

Like globalization, anti-globalization is also an umbrella term that encompasses many social movements opposed to the growing power of global financial institutions, transnationals, and free trade agreements. They feel that cultural domination is posing a threat to local, indigenous cultures. Their targets are global financial institutions like the WTO and the IMF; and trade treaties like GATS and TRIPS. These various movements aim to preserve democratic principles, human rights, cultural diversity, and the environment. Critics of globalization point to the fact that a phenomenal increase in international trade has not resulted in any of the promised benefits to Third World countries.

Proponents of anti-globalization are not against globalization. On the contrary, they feel that the unhindered flow of people, knowledge, and resources can benefit humanity so the name by which they prefer to call themselves is alter-globalization or the world justice movement. Theirs is a world-view that seeks to make the world a truly democratic and just place. The World Social Forum, the Global Convention on Biodiversity, Greenpeace, and the Anti-corporate movement are some of the social and environmental movements that have emerged to raise awareness about the harmful effect of globalization.

The anti-corporate movement, as the name implies, targets the growing corporate power, not globalization. The key manifesto of the movement is the exposure of the production practices of the large multinationals; it is based on a form of politics that revolves around the exposure of reality rather than any radical ideology. They believe in activism and consider the Internet their tool, as it helps raise awareness about the harm being done by giant transnationals.

Its main characteristic is the attack on US economic domination, as most of the world's biggest multinationals are American. They focus on the impact of aggressive corporate sponsorship and retailing on public space and cultural life, both locally and globally. Anti-sweatshop protests outside Nike Towns in New York or ad busters defacing bill boards are some of the methods used by members of this movement.

Many documentary films have been made to expose the inhuman trade practices of the American corporate giants. You could view some of these on YouTube. I would suggest that you begin with Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009).

No Space/ No Choice/ No Job/ No Logo

Mentioned above is the complete title of Naomi Klein's book, 'No Logo', published in 2001. Naomi Klein comments that it is not just another book on corporate rule, the *de facto* global government:

...the book is an attempt to analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of the opposition possible.

(Klein, p. xxi)

Klein's book explores the surrender of culture and education to marketing, the boiling down of culture to corporate choices, and labour market trends such as outsourcing to third-world countries. She also chronicles anti-corporate activism as an alternative to corporate rule.

The essay, 'The Brand Expands' is from the first section of her book, in which she traces the evolution of the brand; from an inconspicuous label on the inside of apparel to becoming inextricably woven with popular culture, to the extent that the two become indistinguishable.

What is a brand?

From the outset, I'd like to mention that branding is not synonymous with advertising: the two are very different. Advertising is just one vehicle to convey the brand's meaning to the world and forms the interface between the product and the consumer.

The word brand has negative connotations; it derives from the practice of permanently marking or stamping property, usually with a hot iron. Cattle or sheep are marked in this way. Branding is principally the process of attaching a name and a reputation to something or someone. Below are some definitions of the term, as outlined by advertising professionals. Some focus on the trademark, as this one:

The most recognizable feature of a brand is a name, a logo, a symbol or trademark that denotes a product's origin. A person, corporation or institution will own the rights to the brand name and employ it as a means of distinguishing their product or services from others.

- *David Aaker*

Advertising is one of the mechanisms that help brands to succeed in establishing the association of physical and social ideas with particular brands:

A brand is not a product. It is the product's essence, its meaning and its direction and it defines its identity in time and space.

- *Jean-Noel Kapferer*

A product is something made in a factory; a brand is something bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor, a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a brand is timeless.

- *Stephen King*

(Source: Jane Pavitt, *Brands.new*. London: V&A Pub., 2000)

These varying perspectives will help you understand the meaning of the term. Brands are bearers of meaning that exceeds the material attributes of the product. Brands are a combination of the name, logo, packaging, design, as well as consumers' expectations and perceptions about the product or services branded with the trademark. The relationship between brands and consumer behaviour has been the focus of recent research in the diverse disciplines of sociology, anthropology, business marketing, psychology, and design.

Commentary

paragraphs 1,2

Naomi Klein recounts her pre-teen years in school and the obsession with designer labels on clothes. Like other girls in her class, she was convinced that designer labels are essentials of fashion. She and her friends would try to pull on skin-tight jeans, imitating the style of the model in the advertisement for Calvin Klein jeans. Awareness of the value of brands began early. As she observes, 'the reign of logo terror had begun.'

Klein's style of writing is simple; mixing personal anecdotes with hard-hitting statistics and contemporary pop culture. It is a combination of investigative journalism and social theory; and the language is rich in metaphor, succeeding in presenting a damaging critique of corporate power over young, impressionable minds.

Naomi recalls how, when she was working as a sales assistant in a leading apparel retail store she observed children, sometimes as young as six years old, insist on buying clothes that had a visible brand name. With a perceptible tinge of irony, Klein remarks that even infant clothes are branded, turning them into 'mini-billboards'. The extent to which children get influenced by logos of well-known brands is illustrated in the case of the little boy who checks his homework with little red Nike swooshes, one of the most recognizable brands in the world.

The power of the logo, especially over young, innocent minds is a sad comment on the corporate presence in our lives. Visit any shopping mall, one of the many that have mushroomed all over the major metropolises and even small towns in India, and you cannot miss the yellow arch of McDonald's, the Nike' swoosh, the Starbucks Coffee counter or KFC restaurants. What Klein observes of her city Montreal, Canada is becoming true of shopping centres all over the world.

paragraphs 3,4

Naomi traces the growth of the logo. She informs us how brand labels, till the 1970s, were stitched on the inside of the shirt. The only apparel on which the logo was visible was the kind people wore when they went to their clubs to play golf or tennis. Sometime during the late 70s, people, tired of the current trend towards flamboyance in fashion, switched to a more sporty, casual, and comfortable look. Suddenly, everyone was seen wearing these branded T-shirts, especially the ones made by Lacosté. Notice the amusing metaphor:

Ralph Lauren's Polo horseman and Izod Lacosté's alligator escaped from the golf course and scurried into the streets.

The reference is to the logos of these famous brands; Ralph Lauren's horseman and Lacoste's alligator. The logo on the shirts served an important 'social function', becoming a sign of wealth and status. Soon, other major brands copied this trend and the logo became a fashion accessory, investing the wearer with a value that transcended the shirt. Not only did the logo change its position on the shirt but it grew in size as well. Tommy Hilfiger, for instance, printed the name of their brand in bold, capital, six-inch high letters across the front of the T-shirt. It transformed the wearer and dehumanized him into a 'walking, talking, life-sized Tommy doll'. Don't miss the sarcasm in the language. The author's passionate commitment to the anti-corporate movement can be felt in the description of corporate giants who transform children and adults into 'mini- billboards', 'dolls' and 'empty carriers'.

Picking up the metaphor of the alligator, Klein extends it to draw attention to the dangers inherent in branding, with utter disregard for personal space: 'the metaphorical alligator; in other words, has risen up and swallowed the literal shirt.'

Make a list of metaphors used by the author to express her disapproval of the trend of making the logo of the brand visible on apparel?

paragraphs 5, 6

Following the growth of the brand, Naomi points out how it evolved into the next 'level'. From serving a social function, it graduated to branding the outside world. Klein identifies Marlboro Friday, 2 April, 1993, the day the cigarette brand cut its prices, as a significant turning point in the history of advertising. From a company that spent 70 per cent of its budget on advertising and 20 per cent on promotions, it turned around to spend 70 per cent on promotions and 20 per cent on advertising.

After Marlboro Friday, a new consensus emerged amongst corporate giants; that products of the future will be presented, not as commodities but as concepts, the brand as experience, as life style. The reasoning was that if a prestigious brand like Marlboro; which had, since 1954, the longest running ad-campaign in history, and spent more than a billion dollars on advertising, was desperate enough to cut cigarette prices then the whole concept of branding the products had failed.

By the mid-nineties, companies like Nike, Polo and Tommy Hilfiger were ready to take branding to the next level: no longer branding their own products, but branding the outside world as well- by sponsoring cultural events they could go out into the world and claim bits of it as brand name outposts.

Klein borrows from the vocabulary of history to characterize the expansionist strategies of the multinationals. Like colonial powers, they transform culture into outposts of their empire, and this is achieved through sponsoring cultural events. They are like parasites, 'thirstily soaking up the iconography and ideas' of culture. She illustrates with the example of an exhibition of photographs of nudes being sponsored by a major brewery. The association is based on an unconvincing connection between art and beer.

Sponsorship is no longer a simple arrangement that is beneficial to both the artist and the sponsor. Klein calls it 'traditional corporate sponsorship.' It has morphed into what she terms the

Tommy Hilfiger type of ‘full-frontal branding’, applied not only to art and music but the cityscape as well; that is the buildings, sidewalks, and public spaces. Klein is referring to the practice of treating buildings as billboards. The logo has grown to the extent that it supersedes the event to become ‘the main attraction.’

paragraph 7, 8

In this paragraph, the author discusses what is now known as experiential branding/advertising. In another section of her book, Klein calls it ‘the highest feat of branding when companies provide their consumers with opportunities not merely to shop but fully experience the meaning of the brand’. During the nineties, manufacturers attempted to move beyond the conventional goals of advertising; which were to infuse their products with desirable qualities, and create a three-dimensional reality; artificial and unreal. Several instances of how corporates provide a manufactured, unreal external world are frightening; ESPN bars, Swatch time, and Roots country lodges. They have started taking over public spaces, such as bars or school camps, and attempt to re-construct spaces reserved for social interaction.

The brand has gradually become the culture. Klein uses a mock argument to show up the absurdity in the justification that if advertising is about ideas and attitudes then it can very well be the culture. Don’t miss the ironic undertone in this argument;

The effect, if not always the original intent, of advanced branding isto make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture but to be the culture. And why shouldn’t it be. If brands are not products but ideas, attitudes, values and experiences, why can’t they be culture too?

The phenomenon of celebrities endorsing products is critiqued in this paragraph. The co-optation of celebrities is not only the product of the manufacturer’s desire to increase revenues. Klein points out how celebrities eagerly enter into co-branding strategies as it is a lucrative proposition for them. All the celebrities mentioned are owners of their personal corporations and are willing participants in this process.

paragraph 9

Klein believes that the growth of corporate interference was a direct result of the policies of economic liberalization pursued by the prime ministers of Canada, America, and Britain. Privatization and lowering of taxes for the private sector were some of the main changes that took place between 1970 and 1990, leading to a reduction in government funds. Public institutions were considered over-staffed, mismanaged enterprises and government funding was reduced. Educational institutes were forced to turn to the rich multinationals for financial assistance to organize cultural events.

Naomi Klein has a historical perspective and her analysis moves beyond straightforward criticism of multinationals. She identifies the political decisions that fed the growth of the multinationals; privatization, deregulation, and lowering of corporate taxes across most countries, leading to a scarcity of funds for public institutions and events. The absence of any public debate on the need to preserve public spaces further fuelled the growth of corporate sponsorship, which grew from a rare occurrence in the seventies to a massive industry in the eighties, culminating in the type of advertising witnessed at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984.

Like Marlboro Friday, the Los Angeles Olympics held in 1984 marked a significant moment in the history of advertising, when corporate giants were the visible sponsors of an international sporting event. When the Olympics Committee needed funds, 29 companies paid at least US \$ 4 million each to use the Olympics theme in their advertising. Officially, this event was a breakthrough in the private sponsorship of sport. It marked the assertion of America's corporate power.

paragraphs 10,11

Changing the course of her argument, Klein cautions against a dismissal of the kind of sponsorship where there is a 'delicate balance' between the cultural event, the institution's independence, and the sponsor's interests. She points out that, in times of scarce public funding, corporate sponsorship has helped revive many art forms.

She feels that all sponsored events should not be viewed through the prism of commercialization and to illustrate, she quotes at length from advertising critic Mathew McAllister's book, 'The Commercialization of American Culture', who firmly believes that art, once it is sponsored, becomes 'Art for Ad's Sake'. McAllister's thesis is based on idealistic notions that art can remain unaffected by economic imperatives. Klein thinks that this type of outlook ignores the existence of royal patronage of the arts since thousands of years. She gives examples from as far back as 33 BCE, and the Renaissance. As she concludes, 'cultural products are the all-time favourite playthings of the powerful.' Klein's perspective is realistic as she admits that the domain of art has never been free from interference and there has always been some degree of 'meddling'.

Sometimes, sponsorship can have harmful effects as when tobacco companies sponsor events popular with youngsters; as they are indirectly promoting cigarette smoking. But to view all sponsorship as purely commercial ventures can blind us to the changes taking place in the corporate sector. Klein provides statistical figures to illustrate the dramatic rise in the amounts spent by manufacturers on sponsorships.

paragraphs 12-14

Corporate sponsorship grew and transcended the delicate balance between public good and corporate interests, to being viewed as a 'marketing tool' in the eighties. As the culture industry needed financial support, manufacturers became more controlling. Dissatisfied with the arrangements, more and more companies were taking over total control by buying events outright. The result was that the boundaries between the sponsor and the culture became blurred. The aim of sponsors is to become the culture. Naomi gives the example of Molson and Miller beer concerts, where the brand overshadows the stars. Sponsors are now aiming for 'seamless integration'. The big corporate houses have now become the owners of cultural events, buying them outright.

The essay ends with a warning about the dangers inherent in corporate sponsorship – people will be conditioned to believe that no activity, personal or communal, is possible without a sponsor. From being sponsors of cultural events, multinationals have made inroads into private events, like weddings, as well. Quoting from Leslie Savan's book, 'The Sponsored Life', Klein says that we will all end up with a 'sponsored mindset.' Her prognosis for the future is disturbing.

Conclusion

As the title indicates, Naomi Klein's essay maps the growth of the logo, from being an inconspicuous label inside the shirt to a powerful marketing tool which, through the medium of sponsorship, has taken over the function of culture. In language that is informal and has a conversational tone, Klein combines personal anecdote with solid statistics to present a damaging picture of corporate sponsorship. She quotes from many experts in the advertising industry to support her argument.

The essay succeeds in presenting us with the underside of economic globalization. It is not difficult to understand why her book 'No Logo' is considered the seminal text of the anti-corporate movement. The liberalization policies pursued by governments all over the world have resulted in the growing power of multinationals that, through the medium of branding and sponsorship, are colonizing our minds and the public spaces reserved for art events and social interaction. Klein's purpose in this essay is to draw attention to the way transnationals attempt to expand their business and don't stop at intruding into personal spaces as well.

Notes

- Calvins* : jeans made by well-known American fashion designer Calvin Klein. In the mid-70s, he created a designer jeans craze by putting his name on the back pocket. His advertisements usually featured adolescents and had sexual overtones. Actress Brooke Shields featured in one of them.
- Jordache* : considered the originator of the designer denim phenomenon in the late 70s in New York. They had a horse-head for a logo.
- alligator* : logo of Lacosté, a French apparel company selling clothes, footwear and perfumes. The founder René Lacosté was nicknamed alligator and always wore a small green alligator on the pocket of his tennis shirt. The alligator is considered the first example of a brand name appearing on the outside of an article of clothing.
- leaping horseman* : the figure of the classic polo-player on left breast of shirts manufactured by Ralph Lauren.
- Espirit* : famous American clothing brand.
- Gap* : world's largest apparels and accessories retailer. In 1982 they started manufacturing under their own label.
- Nike'* : the name for the Greek goddess of victory. The company by this name is the largest sportswear manufacturer in the world. Famous sports stars like Michael Jordan, Maria Sharapova and Ronaldinho have modeled for them. Nike' has been

- accused of running sweatshops in China, Vietnam and Indonesia.
- swoosh* : the logo of Nike', resembling a tick-mark and so called because of the resemblance to wings and the sound made when a high jump is made.
- Auqarian flamboyance* : the astrological Age of Aquarius, it is believed, began in 1962, and is characterized by offbeat styles and the growth of spiritualism. Also known as the New Age.
- preppy* : neat, fashionable.
- Ralph Lauren* : famous American fashion designer, owner of the label 'Polo'. A vast majority of its apparel is manufactured in China.
- Izod Lacosté* : In the 1980s René Lacosté, owner of Lacosté, teamed up with David Crystal, owner of the label Izod to produce Izod Lacosté clothing, popular with teenagers.
- Roots* : Canada's leading athletic life style brand apparel and leather goods manufacturer. Its logo is a beaver.
- marquee'* : a tent used for social functions.
- Tommy Hilfiger* : world famous fashion designer, owner of Tommy Hilfiger brand. The company has been criticized for manufacturing clothes in sweatshops in the Northern Mariana Islands where labour laws don't apply.
- Farah Fawcett* : American actress and noted pop culture figure in the 70s and 80s.
- Marlboro Friday* : Friday, 2 April 1993 when Philip Morris announced a 20 per cent cut in Marlboro cigarette prices to fight back against bargain brands. As a result, stocks of competitors, as well as other brands like Heinz and Coca-Cola also fell.
- out-post* : the furthest territory of an empire.
- iconography* : the study of symbols and their meaning.
- Tequila Sauza* : a popular alcoholic drink made in Sauza town in Mexico.
- risque'* : audacious.
- George Holz* : photographer, well known for his nudes.
- synergy* : combined effect, that exceeds the sum of individual effects.

- cityscapes* : a view or picture of a city.
- Disney* : world's largest media and entertainment corporation. Disney has been lobbying for harsher implementation of Intellectual Property laws, while itself being accused of violating labour rights. They got 'The Sweatshop Retailer of the Year' award in 2001.
- ESPN* : acronym for Entertainment and Sports Programming Network, a 24-hour American cable television network.
- Swatch* : world's largest watch company. Swatch is a condensation of the phrase 'second watch'. Bold designing and style characterized a new generation of watches that were casual, fun and disposable. These Swiss watches were very popular in the US in the mid-80s.
- conflation* : fusion, combination.
- Michael Jordan* : retired American professional basketball player, regarded as one of the world's greatest basketball players and one of the most effectively marketed stars of his generation.
- Puff Daddy* : nickname for Sean John Combs; American media mogul, record producer, rapper, owner of a clothing line and richest hip-hop entertainer.
- Austin Powers* : fictional movie character, played by Mike Myers, starring in films that are a spoof on James Bond films.
- Brandy* : Brandy Rayoma Norwood; American actress and songwriter, singer. Considered the bestselling female artist in the music industry.
- Brian Mulroney* : Prime Minister of Canada from 1984-1993 signed many free trade treaties.
- Ronald Reagan* : President of the US, from 1981-1989. Introduced significant tax-cuts.
- Margaret Thatcher* : British Prime Minister from 1979-1990. Her tenure was characterized by curtailing, large-scale dismantling and privatization of state-owned enterprises.
- Martha Stewart* : a suburban caterer in the 1970s, by the 1990s Martha Stewart had evolved into a brand entity and her business Martha Stewart Living Multimedia was a hybridized marketing and media venture that managed her syndicated newspaper columns, the publication of her monthly magazine 'Martha

- Stewart Living', production of her T.V. programmes and merchandising her lifestyle goods.
- bogeyman* : a person, real or imaginary, causing fear or difficulty.
- Molson and Miller beer* : beer made in North America's oldest brewery. They also own 50 per cent of Universal Concerts, Canada's only concert promoter.
- bluechip stars* : a term applied to anything of high-value.
- Altoid mints* : British company, manufacturing mints since the turn of the century.
- Medici family* : aristocratic family of Florence, cultural centre of Europe in the 12th century.
- Renaissance* : the period that marked the revival of classical models of art and learning that took place in Europe, from the Middle Ages to the 15th century.
- coralling* : to put or keep something, as animals, in an enclosure.
- Master Card* : membership organization including 25,000 financial institutions which issue its brand of credit cards.
- Dannon* : company manufacturing fresh dairy products.
- Phoenix Home Life* : American insurance company.
- LaSalle Bank* : subsidiary of Netherlands based ABN-AMRO Bank.
- gig* : a light two-wheeled carriage.