CONTENTS

UNIT ONE RIGVEDA: *PURUSHA-SUKTA*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Block:

Block One explores the foundations of Indian Literature. The Vedic hymns are the earliest extant poetic compositions from the Indian subcontinent. Apart from their esoteric content, the Vedas also offer a celebration of Nature, Creation and Life. As such they lay the guiding principles of literary creation for the Indian mind. The Upanishads take the tradition forward in the sense that while the core content still remains rooted in the ancient Vedic vision, the expression in the form of a new poetic speech achieves a wider rhythmic sweep of sound and sense. The Epics –*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*– while shedding much of the esoteric content reinvent the body of literature by bringing it closer to the human existential aspiration and suffering and thus making it truly secular in scope.

For this Block, we have selected *Purusha-sukta,* one of the most widely-known hymns from Rig Veda; *Isha Upanishad,* one of the shortest Upanishads and yet perhaps the most central to the Upanishadic thought; and *A Dialogue between Yaksha and Yudhisthira* on the nature of *dharma* and human conduct from Mahabharata.

The three texts together help us understand the ontological basis of Indian thought and culture and reveal the core of Indian poetic speech in its beginnings.

The Unit:

The roots of Indian literature can be traced back to the compositions of Vedic hymns. Even if a well-defined poetics has not yet been given, as many scholars believe, the art of poetic composition shows beyond doubt an extraordinary perfection. Each Vedic hymn lists the name of Rishi (the Seer as the source of composition), of Devata or the presiding deity, and the *Chhanda* or metre used in the composition. In the *Purusha-Sukta* (Rig Veda X.90), the Rishi is Narayanah, the presiding deity is Purushah and the meter for the first fifteen verses is *anushtup* and for the last verse it is *trishtup.*

Not that we expect you to know Sanskrit, but nevertheless we have provided the Sanskrit text for those who know a little of the language and for others to draw their attention to certain key phrases in the original which we make use of while reading the text in English translation. Even a little familiarity with the original *mantras* will help you appreciate the fact that most of the chantings used in any Hindu ritual draw one way or the other from this hymn.

We should also be very clear right from the start that in these pages we are studying literature, and not religion, philosophy, occult, cosmogenesis or any other such stuff. Of course, all this will surely draw us into a much wider question as to what is literature and what it is not, as also what accounts for the fine demarcation between vision and imagination.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

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

(a) Identify the ancient ontology at the root of Indian mind
(b) Draw a plan of Indian cosmogony
(c) Point out the root ideas behind Indian religion and culture
(d) Critically appreciate the evocative nature of Vedic poetry

1.3 A Background to*PURUSHA-SUKTA*

We said in the Introduction that we are going to ask some very serious questions about literature. What is at the core of an artist's inspiration? Does one write, paint or sing to please oneself and others? Is the function of art merely to entertain, to offer some kind of escape, a relaxation, from the harshness of everyday living? Most popular forms of writing, and entertainment media like TV and cinema seem to be doing nothing else. Many people think that these are also some form of art. How would you distinguish a serious Bharatnatyam or classical music performance from their counterparts in Indian cinema, for example?

One school of thought posits that serious artists are a breed apart. At one time, according to *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, artistic inspiration or "*furor poeticus* was interpreted as the superhuman state during which the poet glimpsed the ultimate nature of things, the divine archetypes." Not only is the artist in direct communion with the divine sources of Reality, but the inspiration rushes down onto him from the very selfsame source. Such was also the view of Vedic seers. The Vedas affirm that "poets are hearers of truth"–*kavayah satyasrutah*. The Rishi hears the *mantra*: he receives it in sound-waves and in no way 'composes' it.

That the *mantras* of *Purusha Sukta* are used in almost every Hindu ritual is an ample testimony to the fact that this hymn represents a revelation of some primordial mode of Reality. A hymn that attempts to formulate the core of the highest formless Truth is surely a pointer to the supreme labour that Indian poetry had in its purview.

The English translation of the text is by Edward J. Thomas. The original text in Sanskrit is also provided.

1.4 Analysing the Text

In this section we shall attempt a textual analysis of each one of the sixteen verses. In the process we will also discuss some of the major key concepts woven in the text.

1.4.1 The Purusha: Among the key concepts in the *Purusha Sukta*, the most central and significant is the concept of Purusha. The concept of 'Being' in the Western philosophy comes closest to the Indian concept of Purusha. The following entry is taken from the Glossary of Sanskrit Terms given at the end of Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*:

> **Purusha**— the Conscious Being; Conscious Soul; essential being supporting the play of *prakriti*; a Consciousness — or a Conscient — behind, that is the lord,

witness, knower, enjoyer, upholder and source of sanction for Nature's works; the true or spiritual person.

There are more than one etymological interpretations of the Sanskrit word *Purusha* but the one that is most widely accepted puts it as –'*purisheteiti purusha'*. *Puri*is 'city, house or dwelling place' and *shete*means 'sleeps'; therefore, the dweller in a defined space, or simply, the Inhabitant is the Purusha. To a simple enquiry "who lives in your body?" one would immediately respond: "I live in my body." This would lead to further inquiry: who is this I, or who am I? In ancient Greece, the Oracle of Apollo announced, "Know Thyself" is the gateway of all wisdom. As one begins to dig deeper, one meets not one but many *purushas*: the one who dwells in the body is termed *annamaya purusha*; the one who inhabits the vital sheaths is *pranmaya purusha*; further on there are *manomaya*and *vijnanmaya purushas*; finally, there is the *Purushottama*, the Supreme Being.

What we are generally aware as 'I' is the ego. How is this ego different from *purusha*? Well, the answer is a little cryptic: only the *purusha* knows itself and the shadow, ego; but the ego which is always in a denial mode, refusing vehemently to acknowledge any other lord of the house except itself, is by definition blind to any perception of the *Purusha*. If you find all this interesting, you are surely on your way to discovering knowledge and bliss, which for sure remains one of the central purposes of literature, indeed of all art.

Vedic Rishis and Upanishadic Seers return again and again to drop hints, to provide clues to their disciples about this mystical Existent. What the disciple, the learner, makes of these hints depends on the disciple.

With this, let us turn to our text to study its rich symbolism, imagery and metaphors as pure and sublime poetry.

1.4.2 Verse by verse commentary:

Verse 1:

> **Thousand-headed was the Purusha, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He embraced the earth on all sides, and stood beyond the breadth of ten fingers.**
>
> lglz'kh"kkZ iq#"k% lglzk{k% lglzikRk~A l Hkwfea fo'orks
> o`RokR;fr"Bn~~ n'kkaxqye~ AA 1AA

The thousand heads, eyes and feet symbolise the infinity of forms which the Purusha can take. The comprehension of such a totality is beyond the human instruments of knowledge and perception. When Krishna reveals such a ViratRupa to Arjuna, the latter is heard crying after a glimpse: "Please take it back, I can stand it no longer!" The earth symbolises the Ground, the Cosmic Manifestation. The Purusha covers it horizontally, vertically and in every other dimension. And yet He stands beyond the Manifestation by ten fingers. He is always a little more than the form he occupies.

It is a poetic representation of the dichotomy between the Form and the Formless, between *Saakar*and *Niraakar*, between the wave and particle. With all his heads, eyes and feet, the Purusha is surely not merely an abstract principle like Divine or the Holy Ghost. He is a person; he has a well-defined form but without being finite. This is why is

he stands ten fingers beyond the space he occupies. This is His transcendence of all form, space and time. And yet He is here in every little form, in every stone and speck of dust.

Verse 2:

> **The Purusha is this all, that which was and which shall be. He is Lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through (sacrificial) food.**

iq#"k ,osna loZa ;n~Hkwra ;Pp HkO;Ek~A mrke`rRoL;s'kkuks ;nUusukfrjksgfr AA 2AA

The first part states that He is the past, present and future. But all that exists in time is mortal, is transitory: these forms come and go. But the Purusha is this and also more. Therefore, the second part of the verse says, "He is Lord of immortality –*amritatvasya ishaanah*". *Amrit*is that which dies not. What is it that is beyond death, beyond time?

Now we come to the most cryptic part:*yat annena atirohati*- 'which (referring to immortality) he grows beyond through food'. How is the Lord of immortality to grow beyond immortality with the help of*anna* (food-grain), which is the most mortal of substances? The translator's parenthetical addition of 'sacrificial'is perhaps an avoidance of coming to terms with the paradox.

We will have to wrestle with many more of such paradoxes in the next Unit on*Isha Upanishad*. As an example of the use of paradox, I give you this statement from an old Buddhist text: "Without faith you cannot see and without seeing you cannot have faith". What comes first, the chicken or the egg? Crack your head, and you will know what a paradox is. Why do these ancient poets – and also the modern ones when they write on similar themes, for example, T.S. Eliot in *Four Quartets*– resort so much to such paradoxical expressions? One answer would be that all that appear as opposites to a mind in duality – light and darkness, pleasure and pain…– are an integral part of the Absolute. The opposition is a mode of perception, not a fact. As one moves beyond the dualistic mind to a unitive vision, all the paradoxes dissolve in thin air. All great poetry – whether of the Vedas, the Upanishads or *Four Quartets*– makes you grow towards that vision. Any art that does not help you move in that direction may be good but cannot be great.

'*Yat annena atirohati'*has indeed proved problematic for most commentators. Uvvat has tried to solve the problem by interpreting *anna*as *amrit*, nectar - the drink of immortality. Mahidhar offers the solution by saying that He is also the lord of those creatures who grow by *anna*. Sayana explains that it is because the *anna* helps a being achieve its expressive manifestation (*paridrishyamanam jagadavastham prapnoti*) from the original state of causality (*kaaranavastha*), such as the case of a tree growing from a seed by absorbing food. The western scholars like Macdonell and Thomas resort to calling this food 'sacrificial'–as the *anna*that is offered as oblation in a *yajna*.

How are we to solve this problem as students of literature? We proceed by taking *anna* to be a symbol. How do we read a symbol? A symbol holds together an infinity of meanings, and not just a single defined one like a mathematical formula. You approach a symbol in humility, with reverence, with obeisance; you meditate upon it; then it starts revealing its meanings, exactly as a dream does.

We take our clue from Sayana. It is by absorbing food (*anna*) that a seed grows into a tree. It is *anna* again that is offered as oblation in a *yajna*. All food is sacrifice. Whatever

is offered as sacrifice becomes food for the gods to grow. The being grows only by food, only by absorbing the acceptable sacrifice. Books, thoughts, ideas are foods for the mind. When you offer these as sacrifice, as *yajna*, to the mind – and offer only the finest and purest which becomes acceptable to it – the mind grows. Similarly your acts of goodness, courage and generosity offered as sacrifice help your vital being (the *praana*) to attain its perfected manifestation. Purusha lies asleep in his house *–puri shete*. In most of us He is in a dormant state, in His seed form. Only in a Buddha, by ceaseless sacrifices through many births, the Purusha attains to a fully awakened state. Once awakened he grows and crosses even beyond the world of Immortals. He is the Supreme Transcendence, the *Parabrahman*, beyond the Beyond, even.

Verse 3:

Such is his greatness, and still greater than that is the Purusha. One fourth of him is all beings. The three fourths of him is the immortal in heaven.

,rkokuL; efgekrks T;k;k¡'p iw#"k%A iknks·L; foÜok Hkwrkfu f=iknL;ke`ra fnfo AA 3AA

Verse 2 described how the Purusha expands through all time and space, how He is immanent in all that is, all that was, and all that will be. Such is His greatness; but He is greater than His greatness. *Padah asya vishva bhutani–* only a fourth of him makes for all that exists in the cosmic manifestation. The numbers are also symbolic. Thus, 'a fourth' should be read as 'only a little part'. *Tripat asya amritam divi–* three fourths or most of Him constitute what is immortal in the Divine Worlds, His own home, His final resting place. Only by crossing beyond the manifested realms is it possible to glimpse the Real.

Verse 4:

Three fourths on high rose the Purusha. One fourth of him arose again here (on the earth). Thence in all directions he spread abroad, as that which eats and that which eats not.

f=ikn~wèoZa mnSRiq:"k% iknks·L;sgkHkor~ iqu%A rrks fo"oa O;Øker~ lk'kuku'kus vfHk AA 4AA

Only a little of Him, a fourth, is spread through the cosmos. The rest of Him is sheer transcendence *–tripaat urdhvah ut et* (three fourths on high rose the Purusha). Only a part of Him, one fourth, comes again and again into cycles of manifestation, where he constitutes both animate and inanimate, 'as that which eats and that which eats not', the Conscient and the Inconscient. The Inconscient, the Dark, declines to accept any sacrifice: it eats not. It denies even the denials. It cannot grow, for it is absolute in its bottomless pit; it can only diminish. The Conscient accepts the sacrificial food and grows. As the light grows, the darkness diminishes.

But mark the absoluteness of the Purusha. He is both that eats and that eats not. There is nothing outside of Him, nothing beyond Him. When Lakshman after visiting Ravana on his deathbed returns to report to Ram, Ram asks Lakshman, "When you looked at

Ravana, did you see me lying there?" On hearing a no from Lakshman, Ram admonishes him, "One who has not seen Ram in Ravana has not truly seen Ram!"

Verse 5:

From him Viraj was born, from Viraj the Purusha[1]. He when born reached beyond the earth behind as well as before.

rLekn~ fojkGtk;r fojktks vfèk iw#"k%A l tkrks vR;fjP;r i'pkn~HkwfeeFkks iqj% AA 5AA

This is the beginning of Creation. From the Supreme Transcendence Viraj was born. One became two. Viraj, as Thomas explains, is "the female principle, which with the primal Purusha produces the concrete universe". From Viraj, the primordial Mother, who is also Brahma in *Atharva Veda*, arose the Manifest Purusha, the Son, also known as the Divine Mind, the matrix of all creation. This Purusha, in the process of birth – *sah jaatah* – grew immense – *ati arichyat* – and pervaded the earth – the creation – from beyond, behind and on all sides.

Purah in the last phrase, *paschat bhumim atho purah,* is open to two interpretations. In one sense it means beyond or forward, which is the meaning accepted by western scholars. In another sense *purah* means body, or in an extended sense, the embodied beings. Indian scholars like Sayana and Mahidhar, accepting the second meaning suggest that after gaining immensity the Purusha created the earth and living creatures.

Verse 6:

When the Gods spread out the sacrifice with the Purusha as oblation, spring was its ghee, summer the fuel, autumn the oblation.

;Riq#"ks.k gfo"kk nsok ;KerUorA olUrks vL;klhnkT;a xzh"e bèe% 'kj)fo% AA 6AA

The Gods from the world of Immortals are the Guiding Principles of Creation. Purusha is the core substance of the *yajna* that has become the whole of creation. It is because the Lord has offered Himself as sacrifice to make all that we are that we can offer all that we are to become as He. The seasons – spring, summer and autumn – arise as subordinate substances of the *yajna*. They act as the ground material for all creation.

Uvvat interprets the three seasons as symbolic of the three *gunas– sat, raj* and *tam*–and this Purusha Yajna as the *Atma-yajna* of the *Yogins.* Thus, it is the Gods who bring about the emergence of the Purusha who, as the later texts propound, is also the Atman. It is by Grace, by the act of Gods, that the Atman is found, and not by one's efforts. '*Yamevaish vrinute ten labhyas*'–'only he whom this being chooses can win Him', as the *Kathopanishad* puts it. Once the Purusha has made its appearance, the Yogins offer Him all that issues forth from the *Maya* of three gunas–*traigunyamayi maya*. Only such a final and absolute offering makes the Purusha Yajna of Yogins complete.

[1] Viraj has been interpreted as the female principle, which with the primal Purusha produces the concrete universe. In the Atharva Veda she is an independent creative principle, identified with the Spell (brahma), with Speech, and with Prajapati.

I have throughout preferred to use the word *yajna* in place of sacrifice, because while the *ahuti* in *yajna* is an offering, given in joy out of love, the sacrifice suggests the victimisation of the thing being offered. It is the reading of an abhorrent act of human sacrifice in the *Purusha Sukta* that makes the interpretation of western scholars like Macdonell not only quite off the mark but also largely repugnant and despicable. For example, Macdonell in his *History of Sanskrit Literature* writes:

> In … the well-known Hymn of Man (*purusha-sukta*), the gods are still the agents, but the material out of which the world is made consists of the body of a primeval giant, Purusha (man), who being thousand-headed and thousand-footed, extends even beyond the earth, as he covers it. The fundamental idea of the world being created from the body of a giant is, indeed, very ancient, being met with in several primitive mythologies. But the manner in which the idea is here worked out is sufficiently late. Quite in the spirit of the Brahmanas, where Vishnu is identified with the sacrifice, the act of creation is treated as a sacrificial rite, the original man being conceived as a victim, the parts of which when cut up become portions of the universe. His head, we are told, became the sky, his navel the air, his feet the earth, while from his mind sprang the moon, from his eye the sun, from his breath the wind. "Thus they (the gods) fashioned the worlds."

Verse 7:

As the sacrifice on the strewn grass they sprinkled the Purusha, born in the beginning. With him the Gods sacrificed, the Sadhyas[1] and the sages.

ra ;Ka cfgZf"k çkS{ku~ iq#"ka tkrexzr%A rsu nsok v;tUr lkè;k _"k;'p ;s AA 7AA

By sprinkling water, *praukshan*, they purified the Purusha. In the earlier verse, the Purusha has been offered the sacrifice of three gunas, and therefore needs to purified again. With the Purusha as the Path and the Goal, they proceeded with the yajna. 'They'now include Sadhyas and Rishis –*sadhyah rishayah cha* –along with the Gods. Sadhyas, according to Sayana and Mahidhar, are those who, like Prajapati, are capable of guiding the Manifestation –*srishti sadhan yogyaah prajapati prabhritayah*. According to Uvvat, Sadhyas include Yogins like Kapila, the propounder of Sankhya–*yoginah kapiladayascha.* This verse makes it amply clear that the Sadhyas and Rishis belong to the Order of Immortals and exist prior to manifested universe.

Verse 8:

From that sacrifice completely offered was the sprinkled ghee collected. He made it the beasts of the air, of the forest, and those of the village.

rLek|Kkr~ loZgqr% lEHk`ra i`"knkT;Ek~A i'kwUrk¡'pØs ok;O;kukj.;ku~ xzkE;k'p ;s AA 8AA

[1] A class of gods or celestial beings.

This yajna is now defined as *sarvahutah yajna. Sarvahutah* is that in which all has been offered, where the offering is complete, absolute and nothing has been left out. You offer your body, life, mind, heart, psyche and also that which lies beyond all these to make the offering complete. *Sarvaatmakah purushah yasmin yajne huyate so ayam sarvahut*– 'where the Purusha in its absoluteness stands offered signifies the complete offering'is the interpretation given both by Sayana and Mahidhar.

Tasmaat (from that) *sarvahutah yajnaat* (sacrifice completely offered) *prishdaajyam* (ghee mixed with curd) *sambhritam* (was collected). What is this fruit, the end-result, gathered at the completion of yajna? Ghee symbolises the pure essence, and curd is a prior state where the essence is still mixed up with inessentials. But the inessential is still that which contains the Essence.

From such a gathered substance were created the beasts (*pashun*) that were to inhabit the air, the forest and the villages. *Pashu* denotes a beast, an animal, but it also carries the connotation of an uninitiated being, a being not yet awakened, a being in whose bodily house the Purusha lies asleep. This is the primal state of creation, where self-awareness – the Self being aware of itself – is still a far cry. In such a state, the man inhabiting villages is no better than a sacrificial animal. But a sacrificial animal is still good enough to be offered to the Gods, Sadhyas and Rishis, who in turn, accepting the sacrifice, can make of the animal a fitting vehicle of their energies. This is the way on which the Creation moves towards perfection.

Verse 9:

From that sacrifice completely offered were born the Verses (*Rig Veda*) and the *Samna*-melodies (*Sama Veda*). The metres were born from it. From it was born the Sacrificial formula (*Yajur Veda*).

rLek|Kkr~ loZgqr _p% lkekfu tfKjsA NUnkafl tfKjs rLek|tqLrLekntk;r AA 9AA

This verse simply states that the three Vedas –Rik, Sama and Yajur– self arose from this yajna, and so did the various meters like Gayatri and others. It establishes the divine origin of *mantric richas* and meters.

Verse 10:

From it were born horses, and they that have two rows of teeth. Cattle were born from it. From it were born goats and sheep.

rLekn'ok vtk;Ur ;s ds pksHk;knr%A xkoks g tfKjs rLekr~ rLekTtkrk vtko;% AA 10AA

Next arose the animal kingdom.

Verse 11:

When they divided the Purusha, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What his two arms? What are his thighs and feet called?

;Riq#"ka O;nèkq% dfrèkk O;dYi;Uk~ A eq[ka fdeL; dkS ckgw dk Å: iknk mP;srs AA 11AA

Verse 12:

The *brahmin* was his mouth, his two arms were made the *rajanya* (warrior), his two thighs the *vaishya* (trader and agriculturist), from his feet the *Shudra* (servile class) was born.

czkã.kks·L; eq[keklhn~ckgw jktU;% —r%A Å: rnL; ;}S';% in~H;ka 'kwæks vtk;r AA 12AA

In the phrase 'when they divided the Purusha'in verse 11, 'divided'is a misreading of *vyadadhuh,* which more closely may come to mean 'produced'. By extension it may suggest that the Gods, Sadhyas and Rishis invoked the presence of Purusha and brought it into being, or made the presence actual. Sayana's *sankalpena utpaditavantah* suggests 'they willed the presence of the Purusha'and Mahidhar's *kaalena utpadayan* suggests 'they brought about the birth of Purusha into time'. Once the presence was brought about, how did they classify its aspects?

Just as the theory of four Humours in the Western world determined personality types, the theory of four *varnas* formed the basis of personality types in India. From the different parts of the Purusha, flow distinctively different essences and energies. These determine the quality of being in an individual formation. "This is the time," writes Professor Reddy, "when the cosmic powers –Wisdom, Power, Harmony and Perfection, figuratively named Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, are manifested in seed-form as the elemental qualities from the body of the Cosmic Person thus sacrificed." Such is also the basis of different *Shaktis* or Goddess forms: Maheshwari, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and Mahasaraswati. It has been pointed out that the prevalence of four *varnas* is also found among animals, minerals and vegetation.

Verse 13:

The moon was born from his spirit (*manas*), from his eyes was born the sun, from his mouth Indra and Agni, from his breath Vayu (wind) was born.

pUæek eulks tkr'p{kks% lw;kZs vtk;rA eq[kkfnUæ'pkfXu'p izk.kk}k;qjtk;r AA 13AA

Verse 14:

From his navel arose the middle sky, from his head the heaven originated, from his feet the earth, the quarters from his ear. Thus did they fashion the worlds.

ukH;k vklhnUrfj{ka 'kh".kkZs |kS% leorZrA in~H;ka HkwfefnZ'k% Jks=kRrFkk yksdk¡ vdYi;Uk~AA14AA

Just as the four personality types were mapped to different centres in the Conscious Being, so is the origin of whole cosmic structure mapped on to the being of Purusha. All comes from Him; all derive their power, their consciousness and their being from Him.

He pervades the cosmos and extends beyond it. He is the Cosmic Being and also the extra-cosmic.

Verse 15:

Seven were the sticks that enclose (the fire), thrice seven were made the faggots. When the Gods spread out the sacrifice, they bound the Purusha as a victim.

lIrkL;klu~ ifjèk;fL=% lIr lfeèk% —rk%A nsok;|Ka rUokuk vcèuu~ iq#"ka i'kqEk~ AA 15AA

The first part of this verse is about the geometrical design of the yajna, the *yantra.* What are these seven circles and twenty-one offerings? Every commentator provides a different listing. But the text itself is silent on it. This is a very well known tradition in the ancient esoteric texts. There is some broad mention, but the details, which were assumed to be dangerous knowledge to the uninitiated, are left out. These could only be given by the Guru to the disciple when the latter was ready.

'When the Gods spread out the sacrifice, they bound the Purusha as a victim'–*deva yadyajnam tanvaana abadhnan purusham pashum*. This part again has proved to be a little problematic to the scholars. They all use some ingenuity to explain why the mighty Purusha is reduced to a *pashu*, a sacrificial animal at the end of the hymn. The *yajna* of Cosmic Creation spreads wider and wider, but it can be completed only when the Creation becomes imbued with divinity in all its elements. Remember, *Pashu*is the one in whom the soul, the Purusha, lies asleep, unawakened in a dormant seed-form. It is still a potential, prior to actualisation. The sacrifice of Cosmic Purusha as *pashu* suggests that He is to enter the Creation and pervade it as an all-inclusive potential seed of divinity.

It is only because the Purusha, the immanent Divine, as a result of this supreme sacrifice, is present as a secret potential in every particle of Creation, that Creation can evolve and attain to an awakened state of Divinity in a Buddha.

Verse 16:

With the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed the sacrifice. These were the first ordinances. These great powers reached to the firmament, where are the ancient Sadhyas, the Gods.

;Ksu ;Ke;tUr nsokLrkfu èkekZf.k çFkekU;klu~A rs g ukda efgeku% lpUr ;= iwoZslkè;k% lfUr nsok%AA 16AA

Yajnena yajnam ayajant deva. The English translation of this phrase appears a little muddle up –'with the sacrifice the Gods sacrificed the sacrifice'. It very simply means, Creation is a yajna and the Gods worship it with yajna. *Taani dharmaani prathamaani aasan.* Such is the primal law, ordinance or *dharma.* Only by offering all that one is or has, by a *sarvahutah yajna*, in adoration of the Creation, which is the supreme sacrifice of the Supreme, that man can hope to reach the world of Immortals, even as the Sadhyas and Gods of yore did.

1.4.3 The Yajna

The *Purusha Sukta* deals with the conditions prior to creation and manifestation and also with the process of creation. In the beginning, if there can be a beginning to that which is beyond time, there is the Absolute, the primal Purusha, the *Parabrahman.* Then enters the feminine principle, *Viraj*, also known as Hiranyagarbha. In short, One has become Two – the father and the mother principles. *Viraj*contains in seed form the material for the next cycle of Creation. It also houses the world of Immortals, of Sadhyas, Rishis and Gods who are merely withdrawn and do not die at the dissolution of a cycle of cosmic manifestation, *pralaya.* These become the guiding principles and presiding deities when the time for new cycle of Creation arrives. They are the first to take form. It is they who invoke or will the birth of the Son, the Divine Mind, the *dashangula* Cosmic Purusha, the Manifest Divine. With this Son as the material, the Immortals fashion the manifestation of the next cycle of Creation. As they perform the primal *yajna* of Divine Sacrifice, the Cosmos arises from the very being and body of the Divine.

As the hymn begins with the chanting of *sahasrasheersha purushah.…,* such is the power of poetry that one can almost see the Virat with his three fourths rising beyond into the realm of Immortals, the sheer Transcendence and one fourth of Him spreading out and enveloping the rising new creation*,* and the Seer seated around him ready for the yajna. As the chanting proceeds, one comes alive with the sense of the Cosmic Purusha entering into a supreme holocaust and transforming into immanence covering the smallest particle of Creation. This is the supreme *dharma*, the teaching crystallises– a total self-giving alone does lead to a greater rebirth in the world of Immortals. Professor V. Madhusudan Reddy, who has done a deep and scholarly study of *Purusha-Sukta,* writes:

> Couched in ritual terminology, the *Purusha-Sukta* clearly reveals the cosmogonic purpose and process. It eulogises the sacrifice of the Supreme Purusha for initiating the evolutionary process of the universe. Its powerful imagery has a great impact on the later tradition, and the *Bhagvata*makes complete use of it in developing the concepts of Anent Narayan, Viraj and Hiranyagarbha. The Sahasrara Purusha is the infinite and eternal, universal and transcendent Being. He is the self-existent Absolute, the inconceivable, ineffable Reality; He is the Unmanifest Divine. Whereas the Dasangula Purusha is the Manifest Divine…. There is no limit to the power and supremacy, *mahima*, of the Purusha. He pervades the entire universe as well permeates the minutest particle of Matter; He is both microcosmic and macrocosmic and also supracosmic…. From the sacrifice come all things, animate and inanimate, liturgical formulas and the four cosmic powers. The tree of cosmic existence has its roots in Him. The world of space and time has its source in the Infinite and the Eternal.

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write a short note on the concept of Purusha.
2. While discussing a Vedic text like Purusha-Sukta, why is it sometime necessary to refer to the Sanskrit terminology?

3. Write a short note on the role of Sadhyas and Rishis in Purusha-Sukta.
4. What is the purpose of *yajna* in Purusha-Sukta?
5. Who is the author of Purusha-Sukta

   (a) Vyasa
   (b) Prajapati
   (c) Narayan
   (d) Brihaspati

1.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

- About Vedic Riks
- The earliest Indian formulation about the nature and origin of creation
- How to read symbolically a rich esoteric text
- About the role of imagery in Vedic Poetry

You have also seen how *Purusha-Sukta* can effectuate a sea change in the way you look around at your world.

1.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to the discussion given at 1.4.1.
2. With suitable examples, you should discuss how some of the words in English do not adequately represent the ideas contained in Sanskrit words/phrases.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 1.4.2.
4. Refer to the discussion given at 1.4.3.
5. C

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1.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the Vedic concept of Creation as elaborated in the Purusha-Sukta.
2. Discuss the Purusha-Sukta as a great poem with a tremendous theme.

UNIT TWO ISHA UPANISHAD

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Upanishads* form the concluding part of the *Vedas*. For example, our present text, the *Isha Upanishad* comes from *Shukla Yajurveda*. For this reason the philosophy of the Upanishads is known as Vedanta – the conclusion or culmination of the Vedas.

As you noted in Unit one, the *Purusha Sukta* was an exposition of the first movements of the Being. In the *Isha Upanishad* the theme remains unchanged in essence but undergoes a radical transformation in its treatment. The music is richer and the rhythm is that of a much wider sweep, a more comprehensive and varied movement. Imagery gains by a feeling-content that is human and earthly. The Upanishad enriches the Vedic content by adding to it a more intense and purer poetic speech.

In the next Unit on the *Mahabharata*, you will notice that the same movement continues. The Epics by bringing Man to the centre-stage, without deviating from fundamental Vedantic tenets, enact a union of Man and God. This is the poetic ideal that still remains the highest, as can be seen in the poetry of Yeats, Eliot and Tagore.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify the growth of Vedic thought in the Upanishad
- Connect Indian aspiration, ethics and ontology
- Point out the roots of Indian religion and culture
- Critically appreciate the poetic richness of the Upanishad

2.3 An Introduction to the Upanishads

The Upanishadsare rightly regarded as the culmination of Vedic thought. Placed at the end of the Vedas, they are known as Vedanta and form the *janna-kanda*of the Vedas. A large number of Vedic hymns invoke or propitiate various gods, such as Indra, Agni, Varuna, Soma, Mitra, Surya, Ashwins, Prithvi and Vayu and are therefore of the nature of liturgical hymns, *karma-kanda.*

The Upanishadsinfocusing on the larger universal truths behind life and creation do away with the necessity of a complex hierarchy of gods. The preference now, in contrast to the earlier Vedic hymns, is for a neutral Transcendent and universal Fact, which is often referred to as Brahman or simply 'That' (*tat*). When a minor god is retained in the narrative for the sake of continuity, he too simply becomes a pointer to 'That'. Pushan, for example, in the *Isha Upanishad* is seen as an aspect of the supreme Brahman. In the *Vedas*, according to Radhakrishnan, "Pushan is another solar god. He is evidently a friend of man, being a pastoral god and the guardian of cattle. He is the god of wayfarers and husbandmen".

The Upanishadic conception of supreme Reality as Brahman and of phenomenal existence as Maya remains at the core of Indian thought, religion and culture. The Upanishads "are the foundations on which most of the later philosophies and religions of India rest", says Radhakrishnan. According to Sri Aurobindo, "The philosophy of the

Upanishads is the basis of all Indian religion and morals and to a considerable extent of Hindu politics, legislation and society. Its practical importance to [our] race is therefore immense" (*CWSA Vol. 18*).

Without a proper understanding of the Upanishads we cannot appreciate the depth of Indian values and rituals – social, religious or cultural, nor can we joyously and intelligently connect to our roots. If the modern Indian mind finds so much unacceptable in its cultural and intellectual tradition, it has largely to blame Macaulay's system of education which has kept it vastly ignorant of its classical knowledge. There are other approaches to Indian cultural history than solely the Western and Nehruvian approaches. Discovery of our classics with a fresh unbiased mind is one such approach.

In all there are 108 Upanishads, of which about a dozen are known as major works. Shankaracharya has written commentaries on ten of these; Radhakrishnan selects eight of them for his analysis of the Upanishadic philosophy; R.E. Hume's English translation – regarded as highly authentic and largely based on Shankara's interpretation – is titled, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*; Sri Aurobindo's earlier selection of thirteen Upanishads had eleven of Hume's. These major Upanishads are –*Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Tattiriya, Aitareya, Kena, Katha, Mundaka, Mandukya, Prashna, Svetaswatara*and*Isha.* Of these, *Mandukya*and*Isha*are the shortest; of the two, *Mandukya* has a more limited theme than *Isha Upanishad*. Notwithstanding its shortness, *Isha* contains one of the most evocative and comprehensive statements of Indian philosophical thought.

2.3.1 Isha Upanishad

Literature is always about themes with a human context. It is generally concerned with problems of human existence. Isha Upanishad, like all Vedantic literature, while dealing with most fundamental issues of Existence relates them centrally to the context of human aspiration. It takes stock of the most perplexing dichotomies that confront human mind and by offering a transcendence that includes reconciliation restores the mind to a state of peace and dynamic action.

The eighteen verses of the Isha Upanishad are arranged in a perfectly crafted structure of thought. The first movement (verses 1 to 3) provides the thesis: how the core of Existence is also the core of human existence. An understanding of the purpose of creation prepares for a way of life which is correct and fulfilling at the same time. The second movement (verses 4-7) states the essential nature of God, and how this knowledge can lead to a state of supreme freedom. The third movement (verses 8-14) first provides a more detailed account of God (verse 7), then moves on to reconcile for man the eternally opposing paths of Knowledge and Ignorance, of Manifestation and the Unmanifest. The fourth and concluding movement (verses 15-18) invokes the gods – the powers of God – and ends with prayer and resolve. But defying all structured reading, the Upanishad, from beginning to the end, remains one integrated symphony where the parts loose themselves in the all-encompassing movement of the Whole.

R. E. Hume's English translation of the Isha Upanishad, in *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, was published in 1921 by Oxford University Press. Regarded as one of the most authentic translations, it was selected by Radhakrishnan for inclusion in his *A*

Sourcebook of Indian Philosophy. A comparison of Hume's version with the original Sanskrit text, however, reveals that Hume's rather-too-literal rendering of the Upanishad is not only lame but also suffers from gross inaccuracies. Hume also relies solely on Shankaracharya's commentary, which favours rather a *sanyasin*'s world-view, a philosophy of rejection of the world. Such an interpretation quite obviously seems against the very spirit of the Upanishad.

Sri Aurobindo's translation of the Isha Upanishad first appeared in 1909 in the *Karmayogin* and later in a revised form in the *Arya* in 1915-16. Sri Aurobindo was both a poet and a *yogin*. His translation therefore is not only lucid but is also revealing of the Vedic spirit in its insight and seriousness of tone. We have chosen this version as our principal text. To facilitate comparison, Hume's version has been provided as footnote. The interpretation that follows derives largely from Sri Aurobindo's commentary on the Isha Upanishad.

2.4 Analysing the Text

In this section we shall attempt a textual analysis, arranged in four parts, of each one of the eighteen verses. In the process we will also discuss some of the major key concepts woven in the text.

The Upanishads are texts meant for advanced students. It is taken for granted that the student must have mastered the key concepts of Indian philosophy before undertaking a sustained study of the Upanishads. As such, these concepts are used as the basic terminology in the poem with no attempt to explain the underlying idea. It is necessary therefore to understand these concepts before one can truly appreciate the depth of the poem.

2.4.1 Thesis: the Opening

Verses 1-3

The opening verses state the most fundamental facts of existence that form the very basis and foundation of our life on earth. Without grasping these basics, one cannot make any sense of human existence.

Verse 1[1]

> **All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.**

bZ'kk okL;fena lo± ;r~ fd´~p txR;ka txr~A rsu R;Drsu Hkq´~thFkk ek x`/k% dL; fLon~ /kue~A1AA

[1] By the Lord (Isha) enveloped must this all be–/ Whatever moving thing there is in the moving world. / With this renounced, thou mayst enjoy. / Covet not the wealth of anyone at all. (R. E. Hume)

Whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion (*yatkinchjagatyaamjagat*): Long before modern science discovered the motion of atomic particles, the Upanishadic seers had noted the nature of universe as a vast sea of motion. This universal motion is Prakriti, the Creatrix. The infinitude of ideas, relations and forms are eddies, currents and waves of that vast sea. They exist for a while, then disappear in some other vaster, newer motion. Nothing is stable or permanent in this sea of transience; only some waves last longer than others. Any stability, like that of a rock or of the Himalayas, is an illusion of the senses that fail to take note of the supra-sensible and subtle atomic motions of change in the Unseen.

And yet, while it lasts, each movement, each wave is a universe unto itself, complete and whole, reflecting the wholeness of the sea. Take a closer look at all that goes inside your head. That which to you is your personal world is a vast universe in flux and contains all that you have heard and known, lived, imagined and experienced. Though it seems we have existed these many years as a single, stable entity, the world of yesterday in the head is never the same as the world of today. To what purpose does Nature create such an infinite variety of individual motions or universes?

All this is for habitation by the Lord (*ishavaasyamidamsarvam*): The act of thinking, feeling or imagining is a movement of energy that springs from the core of your being and images what you essentially are. Every act, gesture and instance of behaviour is nothing but a moving form of that which lies as a formless essence in you. You think because you enjoy being there while the thought lasts.

If you study this movement of Nature in you, you will easily understand the purpose of Nature in cosmic Creation. She too is nothing but the energy of her Lord and in all her motions images a fragment of her Being, the supreme Purusha. She exists for no other purpose and serves no other Lord. She creates these multitude of forms to house for a while a little of the great Essence. The Creation exists that the Lord may enjoy a moment's habitation in a changing Form.

On an academic note, there are three possible meanings of *vasyam*: 'to be clothed', 'to be worn as garment' and 'to inhabit'. Hume's translation, '*By the Lord enveloped must this all be*', is in line with Shankara's interpretation that accepts the first meaning of the word. However, it seems a little far-fetched and is not so close to living experience.

By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy (*teintyaktenabhunjitha*): 'We come from Ananda; we exist in Ananda; and to Ananda we return', says *Taittiriya Upanishad* (III.6). The existence is a movement of joy. To find that joy in living is the goal of human existence. But how do I find joy; how do I enjoy –*bhunjitha*? If there is a goal there has to be a way.

'By that renounced', *teintyaktena*, is the Way. The phrase in Sanskrit, *teintyaktena*, is in *tritiyavibhakti*, the third form, used for instrumentality. The instrument for renouncing is the knowledge that has just been given: *All this is for habitation by the Lord*. The house you live in, the car you drive, the wife and children you have – all exist for imaging, for housing a portion of the Lord. They are there for the Lord, not for 'me', the ego. I own nothing; I possess nothing. In a state of mind where 'nothing is mine' becomes a living fact, the ego does not take roots.

Only when the ego is not there, when the little self ceases to exist, there can be pure unalloyed joy. Feel the moonlit night, look at the star-studded sky, hear the breeze and

the roar of the sea, and Enjoy! You do not own any of these, and yet they all are yours. But remember, you can savour that joy only when the little self is in abeyance. While the little 'I' takes the forefront, 'the world is too much with us': inflation, corruption, the blaring of media, the election *tamasha*, and all that plagues the *aam-aadmi*fill our minds. Then there is no place in the hearts of men for the breeze, the moon and the sea. Drop all this heavy, unpleasant baggage in the knowledge that all this exists for housing the Lord. Once you make friends with the one who lives in the house, you can also come in and be a guest and enjoy all that belongs to the host.

Lust not after any man's possession (*ma gridhahkasyaswiddhanam*): Once you know you are a guest, drop also the desire to possess aught that belongs to your magnanimous, benevolent host. Lust and envy belong to the little miserable creature called ego. You and all that you identify with as yours is for the habitation by the Lord, and so is all that belongs to your neighbour. Neither of you truly own anything! Know this and lust and envy come to an end.

Such is the teaching of the opening verse.

Verse 2[1]

Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years.
Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.

dqoZ™ksosg dekZf.k ftthfo"ksPNr¡~ lek%A ,oa Rof; ukU;Fksrks·fLr u deZ fyl;rs ujsAA 2AA

Once the hankering after the wealth of others – their qualities, achievements, dreams, ideas or simply material possessions like houses, servants or empires – stops, what follows is the beginning of the end of desire and ego. With the end of motivated action, of ego's pursuit of fulfilment, it would seem, all need of action comes to an end.

The Upanishad asserts that there is no escaping from work, and only by doing works, one may wish for a long life. Life has a meaning and we are here on this earth to work for a purpose. The soul does not accept human birth simply for bloating a superficial, non-existent ego. It comes to earth for a work, self-assigned and known only to it. The possibility of doing soul's work solely for the Lord, for the highest Truth, in a state of dedicated desireless action, is a principle woven in the very nature of human existence: *Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this* (*evamtvayinaanyathaitiasti*). The examples of the great ones of the human race – Gandhi, Lincoln, or whatever be your choice of such names – only go to attest this fact.

The works in themselves do not create bondage, *na karma lipayatenare.* What creates bondage, the chain of karma, is desire, an action undertaken with a motive, for fulfilling the ego's plans. Buddhism admits that it is desire which is the cause of rebirth in an endless cycle of birth and death.

[1] Even while doing deeds here, / One may desire to live a hundred years. / Thus on thee –not otherwise than this is it –/ The deed adheres not on the man. (Hume)

Verse 3[1]

> **Sunless are those worlds and enveloped in blind gloom whereto all they in their passing hence resort who are slayers of their souls.**

vlw;kZ uke rs yksdk vU/ksu relko`rk%A rk¡Lrs ÁsR;kfHkxPNfUr ;s ds pkReguks tuk%AA 3AA

To the worlds of darkness return those who are slayers of their souls. How can anyone slay the soul which by definition is immortal? Don't we hear in the Gita, *nainamchhindantishastraani…*neither weapons, nor fire can ever destroy the soul? Then who are the slayers of the soul?

The soul, the Purusha is here for inhabiting every form, small or big, created by Nature. The Purusha occupies a place, slowly and gradually. The presence of the Lord increases in a measured movement, almost in a mathematical proportion, as the ego diminishes and makes room for Him. This is the work of works for which the soul has descended here, to bring down the kingdom of Heaven on earth, as the Bible puts it.

The people who work for the increase of the ego,who devote themselves to fulfilling ego's desires and thus take the downward path of darkness – greed, jealousy, ambition, violence – instead of taking the upward path of light, of love, compassion and wisdom, are truly the slayers of the soul. The Purusha not only refuses to inhabit such houses but departs quickly if at all He had paid a visit to them. For the slayers of the soul, since they choose the path of darkness, the fulfilment inevitably lies in a world of absolute darkness.

Hume, again following Shankara, reads *asoorya*as*asurya,* of the Asura, and translates: 'Devilish are those worlds…'. Sri Aurobindo explains why 'sunless' is a more accurate reading than 'devilish':

> We have two readings, *asoorya,* sunless, and *asurya,* Titanic or undivine. The third verse is, in the thought structure of the Upanishad, the starting-point for the final movement in the last four verses. Its suggestions are there taken up and worked out. The prayer to the Sun refers back in thought to the sunless worlds and their blind gloom, which are recalled in the ninth and twelfth verses. The sun and his rays are intimately connected in other Upanishads also with the worlds of Light and their natural opposite is the dark and sunless, not the Titanic worlds.

2.4.2 Second Movement: Of the Nature of the Lord and Attaining to Him:

The second movements consists of two sub-movements. Verses 4 and 5 describe the nature of Being, the supreme Purusha, and the next two verses, 6 and 7, describe the state of attaining to the Lord's unitary consciousness.

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[1] Devilish are those worlds called, / With blind darkness covered over! / Unto them, on descending go / Whatever folk are slayers of the Self. (Hume)

2.4.2.1 The Lord (Verses 4 and 5)[1]

4. One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters.

vustnsda eulks toh;ks uSun~nsok vkluqou~ iwoZe”kZrA
r)korks·U;kuR;sfr fr"Br~ rfLe™kiks ekrfj’ok n/kkfrAA 4AA

5. That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same is near; That is within all this and That also is outside all this.

rnstfr r™kStfr rn~ nwjs r}fUrdsA rnUrjL; loZL; rn qloZL;kL; ck°;r%AA 5AA

Have you noticed the image of Kali dancing on the breast of Shiva? What is the source of our thoughts and where do they rest? The dance of Prakriti, the Universal Motion, presupposes a ground to rest upon. That ground is Being, the supreme Purusha.

One (*ekam*) *unmoving* (*anejat*): That ground is one, not many. What moves is not the ground, but a motion that springs from it and is sustained by it. It is swifter than Mind (*manasojaviyo*), because whatever the mind can conceive of is already contained in the Being. The gods are a later creation, a part of the Being, therefore they do not reach its farthest point, which, pre-existent, appears to be moving forever before them. The gods are forces that appear to be running as if to achieve a pre-assigned goal, but the Being, even while unmoving, exceeds the field of gods.

In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters (*tasminnapoMatarishwandadhati*): Matarishwan is the Creative Principle or the Creatrix inherent in the Being. Waters are the Laws of the Being (*satyadharma*, as in verse 15). The Universe is an entity of order, not of chaos. There are Paths, arranged in order, that traverse the Cosmos, and Principles that govern it. These have been fashioned in their origin by Matarishwan and do not obey the caprice of some whimsical God. On the significance of Matarishwan and Waters, Sri Aurobindo writes,

> *Matarisvan*seems to mean “he who extends himself in the Mother or the container”whether that be the containing mother element, Ether, or the material energy called Earth in the Veda and spoken of there as the Mother. It is a Vedic epithet of the God Vayu, who, representing the divine principle in the Life-

[1] Unmoving, the One is swifter than the mind. / The sense-powers reached not It, speeding on before. / Past others running, This goes standing. In it Matarishvan places action.
It moves. It moves not. / It is far, and It is near. / It is within all this, / And It is outside of all this. (Hume)

energy, Prana, extends himself in Matter and vivifies its forms. Here, it signifies the divine Life-power that presides in all forms of cosmic activity.

Apas, as it is accentuated in the version of the White Yajurveda, can mean only "waters". If this accentuation is disregarded, we may take it as the singular *apas,* work, action. Shankara, however, renders it by the plural, works. The difficulty only arises because the true Vedic sense of the word had been forgotten and it came to be taken as referring to the fourth of the five elemental states of Matter, the liquid. Such a reference would be entirely irrelevant to the context. But the Waters, otherwise called the seven streams or the seven fostering Cows, are the Vedic symbol for the seven cosmic principles and their activities, three inferior, the physical, vital and mental, four superior, the divine Truth, the divine Bliss, the divine Will and Consciousness, and the divine Being. On this conception also is founded the ancient idea of the seven worlds in each of which the seven principles are separately active by their various harmonies. This is, obviously, the right significance of the word in the Upanishad.

Verse 5 uses paradox to reconcile certain terms that appear as irreconcilable opposites. When the Upanishad says, "That moves and That moves not", it hints at the biune nature of Brahman. The one that moves is the Active Brahman reflected in the Manifestation by its Maya. The one that moves not is the silent, passive Brahman, the Ground, the Transcendent Being. It is near, because the Ground is always there; it is far, because not even the Gods reach its farthest shores. As the essence of all that exists, as the soul of all beings, it is inside every unit in creation. It is outside its creation in the sense that the one who lives in the house is different from the house.

2.4.2.2 The Attainment (Verses 6 and 7)[1]

6. But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

;Lrq lokZf.k Hkwrkfu vkReU;sokuqi'ZfrA loZHkwrs"kq pkRekua rrks u fotqxqlrlsAA 6AA

7. He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

;fLeu~ lokZf.k Hkwrkfu vkReSokHkwn~ fotkur%A r= dks eksg% d% 'kksd ,dRoeuqi';r%AA 7AA

---

[1] Now, he who on all beings / Looks as just in the Self (Atman), / And on the Self as in all beings–, / He does not shrink away from Him.
In whom all beings / Have become just the Self of the discerner–/ Then what delusion, what sorrow is there, / Of him who perceives the unity!

From what is developed in verse 5, it logically follows that all beings exist on the one Ground, in the Atman, and the same Atman as their Essence resides at the core of all beings. Once such a perception becomes a living fact, a direct apprehension, no scope is left for any *jugupsa*, shrinking away from anything. Usually, one avoids certain things that appear as foreign matter, as things harmful to it. But if Brahman alone is perceived everywhere, there is nothing to run away from. And yet there are falsehoods that must be rejected on the Way. Rejection, one must understand, is strength that comes from clarity of perception in the being. *Jugupsa* or shrinking is a weakness born of a misplaced perception.

He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings: While the earlier verse described the perfect state of being in the universe, verse 7 hints to a state of greater attainment, of being one with the Lord, being just as He is. Not just Atman everywhere and everything in the Atman, but being the Atman and watching all beings arising from oneself is demanded. Nothing short of this can be described as the perfect Unitive Consciousness. Only on attaining such a state, delusion and sorrow (*moha* and *shoka*) come to an end, not before.

2.4.3 Third Movement: The Two Approaches to the Real:

The third movement, comprising three sub-movements, extends to seven stanzas from verses 8 to 14. Verse 8, the first of the sub-movements, gives a detailed account of the Real and establishes Its essential identity with the Creation. The two approaches to the Real centrearound the bipolarity of Knowledge-Ignorance (*vidya-avidya*) and Becoming-Non Becoming or Birth-Non Birth (*sambhuti-asambhuti*).

2.4.3.1 The Real (Verse 8)[1]:

> **It is He that has gone abroad — That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.**

l i;ZxkPNqØedk;eoz.keLukfoja ‘kq)eikifo)eA dfoZeuh”khifjHkw%
Lo;EHkw;kZFkkrF;rks·FkkZu O;n/kkPNk’orhH;% lekH;%AA 8AA

It is He that has gone abroad (*sahparyagaat*): The supreme Being, the Lord has extended himself and pervades the whole of creation occupying every form that Nature has created for his habitation. This is His omnipresence and also the supreme sacrifice of the Purusha spoken of in the *Purusha-Sukta*. The verse goes on to list further many other attributes of the Being, who in the last analysis remains beyond all attributes.

He is effulgent (*shukram*), a being of light. It is said elsewherethat a thousand suns reveal no more than a toe of this Being. He is formless (*akaayam*): the various forms are creations of Nature, and though He consents to fill them they are not His. He is Perfect,

[1] He has environed. The bright, the bodiless, the scatheless, / Thesinewless, the pure, unpierced by evil! / Wise, intelligent, encompassing, self-existent, / Appropriately he distributed objects through the eternal years. (Hume)

without a trace of imperfection (*avranam*). All imperfections belong to the workings of Nature and are undulations of an ever-evolving Path. The Being, even while present as Essence in the workings of Nature, is ever beyond all manifestation. He is without sinews (*asnaviram*), because sinews are structured in the body and He is bodiless. He is pure (*shuddham*) and unpierced by evil (*apaapviddham*), because desire, disharmony and darkness are part of the functioning of Nature, not of the Essence.

He is the Seer (*kavih*). His is the Vision, and Manifestation is merely a working out of that Vision. On a lesser note, He is also the Thinker (*manishi*), who knows the parts and orders their arrangement in a larger harmony. He is *paribhuh*, the One who becomes everywhere: all is the becoming of his Essence. He is *swayambhuh,* the Self-existent: there is neither cause nor process of his Being. He just Is. It is He who has ordered objects perfectly (*arthanvyadadhat*) according to their nature (*yaathatathyatah*) from years sempiternal (*shashwatibhyahsamabhyah*). Everything is perfectly situated where it should have been in the cosmic Harmony. The distortions of a partial process that appear as evil and imperfection do thus appear to a partial seeing but disappear in the Wholeness as harsh notes do in the rising crescendo of a cosmic Symphony.

2.4.3.2 Knowledge and Ignorance –*Vidya* and *Avidya* (Verses 9-11)[1]:

9. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

vU/ka re% Áfo'kfUr ;s·fo|keqiklrsA rrksHkw; bo rs reks ; m fo|k;ka jrk%AA 9AA

10. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

vU;nsokgqfoZ|;k·U;nkgqjfo|;kA bfr ‘kqJqe /khjk.kka ;s uLrn~ foppf{kjs AA10AA

11. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

fo|ka pkfo|ka p ;Lrn~ osnksHk;a lgA vfo|;k e`R;qa rhRokZ fo|;ke`re’uqrs AA11AA

Vidya is the knowledge of Being, the Purusha, the Atman. It is a unitiveconsciousness which perceives the One as the fundamental Reality, sees the One everywhere and

[1] Into blind darkness enter they / That worship ignorance; / Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they / That delight in knowledge.
Other, indeed, they say, than knowledge! / Other, they say, than non-knowledge! / –Thus we have heard from the wise / Who to us have explained It.
Knowledge and non-knowledge–/ He who this pair conjointly knows, / With non-knowledge passing over death, / With knowledge wins the immortal. (Hume)

everything in the One. However, the Upanishad warns that an exclusive devotion to Knowledge (*vidya*) has its own danger. It might lead to a state where the world, the manifestation appears as unreal, a false superimposition on the Real, or it may even disappear completely from consciousness. Two examples come to mind: the one of the great Shakaracharya who propagated the view that Brahman alone was real and the world a total falsity (*brahmasatyamjaganmithya*); and the other of ChaitanyaMahaprabhu who in his God-ecstasy walked into the sea and died. Mark carefully the use of words 'as if' in the warning, "They enter *as if* into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone". *Vidya* is the realm of supreme Light, not of darkness, but it could be as deadly as the darkness of Ignorance. Too much of light can also blind the eye.

*Avidya*is knowing the Prakriti, the Many, the manifestation. This *avidya* is our everyday knowledge and we are only too familiar with it. It is a fragmentary consciousness, born essentially from division. 'I', the ego-consciousness seems to be at the root of it. 'I am different and separate from others'. 'This is mine and that is not mine'. 'I am Indian and not Chinese'. 'I am a Christian and not Hindu or Muslim'. 'I am a woman and not a man'. Such a consciousness is at the root of all the chaos in the world. The many branches of knowledge — science, sociology, economics…, and the many theories, schools and approaches — Marxism, Feminism, Freudianism… only go to further propagate this realm of endless conflict, division and chaos. This is the realm not only of utter darkness but also of an incapacitating blindness (*andhamtamah*). An exclusive following after the ways of the world, to a complete denial of the existence of God, the One, inevitably leads to this realm.

Both the ways are available to man, and both lead to different results, as has been taught by men who knew (verse 10). The next verse points out that knowing the Real as both *vidya* and *avidya* (knowledge and ignorance) together at the same time, and not just one to the exclusion of the other, is the Way.

Death is the most fundamental reality of cosmic existence. Every thing, every form, every house that Nature creates ends in dissolution. Death is not only of the gross material body, the physical frame, but also of the subtlest of forms, the ego. Death is the primal Fear, the mother of all others.

By the knowledge of many, the Upanishad tells, one crosses beyond death. Krishnamurti points out that our everyday relationship with objects, ideas and people is the mirror in which we discover what we truly are. It is in interaction with the many that we discover love and compassion, find out that which connects us together. In love and compassion we realise a fundamental unity connecting all life and come to see that all differences are utterly superficial. Not only a queen and a beggar-woman but also a mother-monkey undergoes the same sorrow and pain at the death of their baby. They are one mother, their sorrow is one. Seeing an everlasting continuity of life, as love, as sorrow, even as its various forms disappear, one crosses over the fear of death (*avidyayamrityumtirtva*). Making the most fundamental discovery about oneself that one is the Purusha, the Atman, ever beyond the Phenomenon, one partakes of the immortality of the Being (*vidyayaamritamashnute*).

2.4.3.3 Birth and Non-Birth –*Sambhuti* and *Asambhuti* (Verses 12-14)[1]:

12. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone.

vU/ka re% izfo'kfUr ;s·lEHkwfreqiklrsA rrks Hkw; bo rs reks ; m lEHkwR;ka jrk%AA12AA

13. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

vU;nsokgq% lEHkoknU;nkgqjlEHkokr~A bfr 'kqJqe /khjk.kka ;s uLrn~foppf{kjsAA13AA

14. He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality.

lEHkwfra p fouk'ka p ;Lrn~ osnksHk;a lgA fouk'ksu e`R;qa rhRokZ lEHkwR;k·e`re'uqrsAA14AA

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.1.1) we come across a beautiful image where two birds, close companions, are seated together on the same tree. Of the two, one eats the sweet fruits of the tree while the other watches his companion but does not eat anything. The bird eating the fruits is the soul descended into the cycles of birth and enjoying the sweet and bitter results of karmic chain. The other who does not eat symbolises the condition of silent Brahman, watching but not participating in the creation.

Brahman, the Real, includes both its positive and negative aspects, Being and Non-Being. It is therefore often referred to in the neuter gender as That. There is Being, the Purusha, who conjointly with Prakriti is at the source of Manifestation. That there was still the possibility of an unknowable state, transcendent of Brahman and known only to the supreme Purusha, is accounted for by the term 'Parabrahman'. This is the state of supreme Non-Birth, beyond even the conception of Manifestation: from there no one ever returns (*yadgatvananivartantetaddhamaparamam mam*: Gita,15.6).

On the level of individual human existence, it is the ego-sense which is at the root of the process of coming into the endless cycles of birth and death. This human birth, by all accounts, is hardly a very desirable thing. Krishna tells, *anityamasukhamlokam imam* (this transient world is without joy or happiness: Gita 9.33); Buddha proclaims as the first Great Truth that the world is full of suffering; Keats laments: 'where but to think is to be full of sorrow'. Quite naturally, man has always sought deliverance from this cycle of endless births in a state of Moksha, Nirvana or Liberation.

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[1] Into blind darkness enter they / Who worship non-becoming; / Into darkness greater than that, as it were, they / Who delight in becoming.
Other, indeed –they say –than origin! / Other –they say –than non-origin! / –Thus we have heard from the wise / Who to us have explained It.
Becoming and destruction–/ He who this pair conjointly knows, / With destruction passing over death, / With becoming wins the immortal. (Hume)

*Sambhuti*and*Asambhuti*(Birth and Non-Birth) as such are very rich and complex philosophical concepts. The Upanishad states that those who follow the path of extinction (*asambhuti*) miss the complete knowledge as revealed earlier and consequently end up in a realm of supreme darkness. Those who worship the Being and Becoming (*sambhuti*), again a partial truth, also finish in a state of apparent darkness. Both approaches have their uses but the right Path is one that beholds both Birth and Non-Birth together as inseparably one. This is the Path that leads to true Freedom.

By the dissolution one crosses beyond death (*vinaashenamrityumtirtva*): We have seen that ego-sense is at the root of wanderings in the cycles of birth and death. With the dissolution of ego comes the vision of unity (*ekatvamanupashyatah*), of immortal Existence. Death is of the ego. Fear of death is inherent in the ego, for somewhere it knows that it is false, unreal, no more than a necessary temporal mechanism created for a purpose. With the disappearance of ego –*vinaashena*, annihilated forever, never to be born again, a state of absolute *asambhuti*– what comes to an end is the existence of death, not the Existence, which now wears the face of Immortality. It is a new birth, *sambhuti*, a deliverance from delusion, an active participation in the life of Being and Immortality (*sambhutyaamritamashnute*).

2.4.4 Final Movement: The Prayer (Verses 15-18)

We noted earlier that the whole poem is a single indivisible movement. The divisions are visible only in the structure of thought, somewhat like the ascending floors in the unified wholeness of a house. The poem has its source in the lived experience of a Rishi, and is not a fanciful rendering of an idealistic mind, however noble that be.

The poem begins by laying a roadmap for the highest way of life possible to man – renounce, enjoy and work for the Lord in the world! Find the vision of Truth whence you will see all things in the Lord and He in all things. Find the vision of Union and see how the whole cosmos arises from the Atman in you. Then you shall be delivered from delusion and sorrow. Follow the inclusive Path, not the exclusive one, and see that both Knowledge and Ignorance, both Birth and Non-Birth are His ways and have their own uses. He is Being of Light, a Poet and Thinker, and His Creation is a symphony of Perfection.

Having realised all this and more in his own being, the poet writes his last crescendo in a series of prayers ending with the most complete submission and adoration. The prayers make an emphatic assertion that all our realisations and attainments come from the Lord as a measure of His Grace, and none solely by our own strivings. True, the Path culminates in our finding the union with the Lord, but only He can accomplish this supreme Feat.

Verse 15[1]:

[1] With a golden vessel / The Real's face is covered o'er. / That do thou, O Pushan, uncover / For one whose law is the Real to see. (Hume)

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.

fgj.;e;su ik=s.k lR;L;kfifgra eq[ke~A rr~ Roa iw"k™kiko`.kq lR;/kekZ; –
”V;sAA 15AA

The brilliant golden lid is the Being of Light, the supreme Purusha, and even that is a veil that covers the Real. There is a Power that has nurtured and brought us thus far, and only this Power can take us farther. That power is addressed as Pushan, the Fosterer. The prayer to remove this veil is not for a personal accomplishment, but “for the law of the Truth, for sight” (*satyadharmayadrishtaye*). Thus is the supreme Way!

Verse 16[1]:

O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there, He am I.

iw"k™ksd”ksZ ;e lw;Z izktkiR; O;wg j’ehu~ lewgA
rstks ;r~ rs :ia dY;k.krea rr~ rs i';kfe ;ks·lkolk Siq#”k% lks·gefLeAA16AA

In this prayer, the very same Power is addressed as five Gods –Pushan, Ekarshe (*ekahrishih*), Yama, Surya and Praajapatya. He is all these Gods and infinitely more. The Lord is petitioned to “marshal His rays, to draw together His light” (*vyuhrashmeensamuh*). His rays are all the illuminations —dwait, adwait, vishishtaadwait… we have received on the way. These need to be put in order, and only the Lord can bring about that order. The infinity of revelations has to be drawn together to reveal that supreme Oneness that He is. Only then the poet does see the most blessed form (*kalyaantamamrupam*) and asserts for himself his highest Realisation: “The Purusha there and there, He am I” (*yoasawasaupurushah so ahamasmi*).

Verse 17[2]:

The Breath of things is an immortal Life, but of this body ashes are the end. OM! O Will, remember, that which was done remember! O Will, remember, that which was done remember.

ok;qjfuyee`reFksna HkLekUra ‘kjhje~A Å¡ Ørks Lej —ra Lej Ørks Lej —
ra LejAA17AA

The poem asserts that while the body perishes, the life-breath remains immortal and migrates to other realms. What brings about the life cycle of a particular existence is a Will behind it. This Will knows what it came to accomplish and also how much of it was

[1] O Nourisher, the sole Seer, O Controller, O Sun, offspring of Prajapati, spread forth thy rays! Gather thy brilliance! What is thy fairest form –that of thee I see. He who is yonder, yonder Person –I myself am he! (Hume)

[2] [My] breath to the immortal wind! This body then ends in ashes! Om! / O Purpose, remember! The deed remember! / O Purpose, remember! The deed remember! (Hume)

accomplished. The prayer is to the Will to remember both its purpose and actual accomplishment, because this memory will form the basis of the next cycle of existence. The statement takes us one step beyond Buddhism. Will, not Desire, is at the root of birth. Possibly, desire is only a deformation of the secret Will in the being.

Verse 18[1]**:**

> **O god Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose.**

vXus u; lqiFkk jk;s vLeku~ fo'okfu nso o;qukfu fo}ku~A
;q;ks/;LeTtqgqjk.kesuks Hkwf;"Bka rs uemfDra fo/kseAA18AA

Agni is the power that accepts our sacrifices and carries their essence to Gods and heaven. Since every movement, every act in the universe is a sacrifice, She is the all-knowing Power. Since She knows all, She also knows what is good for us and what is detrimental to our growth. The poet asks her therefore to "remove from us the devious attraction of sin". All that harms our growth in the Spirit is sin. Sri Aurobindo explains:

> Sin, in the conception of the Veda, from which this verse is taken bodily, is that which excites and hurries the faculties into deviation from the good path. There is a straight road or road of naturally increasing light and truth, *rjuhpanthah, rtasyapanthah,* leading over infinite levels and towards infinite vistas, *vitaniprsthani,* by which the law of our nature should normally take us towards our fulfilment. Sin compels it instead to travel with stumblings amid uneven and limited tracts and along crooked windings (*duritani*, *vrjinani).*

The poem ends with the offering of "completest speech of submission" to Agni, the Lord of all sacrifice. This complete and absolute surrender to That, undertaken with an all-comprehending awareness, is the Path. No other path exists: *naanyahpanthaavidyateayanaay.*

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write a short note on the purpose of Creation.
2. What do you understand by slayers of the soul?
3. Write a short note on the use of paradox in verse 5.
4. What are the various attributes of Being as shown in verse 8?
5. Write a short note on Vidya and Avidya.
6. What is the significance of prayers?

[1] O Agni, by a goodly path to prosperity lead us, / Thou god who knowest all the ways! / Keep far from us crooked-going sin! / Most ample expression of adoration to thee would we render. (Hume)

7. What is the total number of Upanishads?

   1. 101
   2. 108
   3. 111
   4. 1008

2.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

- About the nature of cosmic creation
- The relationship between Being and Becoming
- About the nature of Being
- About the path that leads to Truth

You have also seen how the Isha Upanishad can effectuate a sea change in the way you look at yourself and the world around you.

2.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to the discussion on verse 1.
2. Refer to the discussion on verse 3.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 2.4.2.1.
4. Refer to the discussion given at 2.4.3.1.
5. Refer to the discussion given at 2.4.3.2.
6. Refer to the discussion given at 2.4.4.
7. B. 108

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2.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the structure of thought in Isha Upanishad.
2. How does the Upanishad reconcile the opposing concepts of Vidya and Avidya, Birth and Non-Birth?
3. What is the significance of prayers coming at the end of the Upanishad?

UNIT THREE THE MAHABHARATA:

TheYaksha-Yudhishthira Dialogue: Introducing the Text

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Yaksha-Yudhishthira dialogue is one of the better known episodes in the *Mahabharata*. For centuries it has held a core position in the imagination and psyche of Indian people. The phrase *yaksha-prashna* is almost a cliché. The *Mahabharata* is an ancient text: even the Western scholars place the date of its composition somewhere between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500; but it could be much older.

The two questions that we face all through this Block and that need answering – somewhat like the famous *yaksha-prashna* – are: to what purpose do we study these ancient texts; and how should we decipher and interpret the symbolism of a bygone age? In contrast to the rather short texts of the first two Units (16 and 18 verses), we have a fairly large text here – 207 verses. The original Sanskrit text has therefor been provided only for the 76 verses which form the core dialogue and a few more that appear equally weighty.

All through the ages, the *Mahabharata* has retained an undiminished power of appeal. Almost compelled by its lasting presence, every generation has attempted a fresh interpretation through critical discourse, fictional retelling, folk theatre, films and now TV-serials. Even a nodding acquaintance with the original text – only 207 of 100,000 verses, as attempted here – will help you see how superficial generally is the treatment of this great text in popular media.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- List the reasons for reading the ancient texts
- Draw a map of the ancient Indian wisdom
- Contextualise the dialogue between the Yaksha and Yudhishthira
- List the major preoccupations of the Indian mind

3.3 A BACKGROUND TO THE TEXT

Is it really of any critical importance to debate the authorship of the *Mahabharata* or the date of its composition? How successfully can the essence of a complex ancient Sanskrit text be rendered in an English translation? What is the significance of this dialogue and what do the characters of Yaksha and Yudhishthira represent in the present context? The present section deals with these and other related questions.

3.3.1 The Mahabharata

The *Mahabharata*, consisting of one lakh *shlokas* or verses, is the longest epic in the world. It is seven times longer than Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined together. A compendium of wisdom, it claims to contain all possible branches of knowledge:

The mystery which is threefold—the Vedas, Yoga, and Vijnana Dharma, Artha, and Kama—also various books upon the subject of Dharma, Artha, and Kama; also rules for the conduct of mankind; also histories and discourses with various srutis; all of which having been seen by the Rishi Vyasa are here in due order mentioned as a specimen of the book.

HkwrLFkkukfu lokZf.k jgL;a f=fo/ka p ;r~A osnk ;ksx% lfoKkuks /keksZ·FkZ% dke ,o pAA
/keZdkekFkZ;qDrkfu 'kkL=kf.k fofo/kkfu pA y¨d;k=kfo/kkua p loZa rn~ n`"Voku`f"k% AA (1.1.48-9)

All this wisdom is explicated through innumerable stories, intertwined and one leading to another. This has been the traditional style of storytelling in India. Most of these interlinked stories are told by a different narrator, so much so that there are some 300 to 400 characters in the epic whose sole function is to act as narrators. These stories cover almost every imaginable human situation. It is hardly an exaggeration therefore when the author of the *Mahabharata* claims, "There is not a story current in the world but doth depend on this history"(vukfJR;Srnk[;kua dFkk Hkqfo u fo|rsA1.3.388)

Since the epic aims to impart wisdom to its readers, the stories exist as a narrative framework for a specific teaching. The style of expression is aphoristic and pithy. Quite often, just a phrase contains the seed of a whole discourse: for example, *moho hi dharmamudhatvam*(attachment is ontological ignorance) or *kamah samsarhetuh*(desire is of the world). Each word in these two phrases *–moha, dharma, mudhatva, kaam, samsara–* contains a significance which has been perennially the subject of philosophical discourses. When many of such concepts are yoked together in a *shloka*, the comprehending of such a complex verse becomes quite challenging. The poet of the *Mahabharata* was fully aware of this fact when he said: "There are some 8800 *shlokas* in this epic which only I and Shukadev can fully comprehend, and which also perhaps somewhat Sanjay can. Their meaning is so deep hid and woven with such complexity that it cannot be unravelled easily."

v"VkS 'Ykksdlglzkf.k v"VkS 'yksd'krkfu pA vga ossfn~e 'kqdks osfŸk lat;ks osfŸk ok u okAA
rPN~yksddwVe|kfi xzfFkra lq–<+a equsA HksŸkqa u 'kD;rs·FkZL; xw<+Rokr~ çfJrL; p AA1.1.81-82

The complexity of these verses also arises from the fact that they address existential issues mankind has always faced. Every sage and prophet has shed some light on them, but these are questions that remain intellectually insoluble. Perhaps we need to solve them at an experiential level. Others, like the sage-poet of the *Mahabharata,* who have experientially solved them can only drop hints in metaphors and symbols.

The *Mahabharata* is a compendium of deep philosophical concerns of mankind. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is part of the *Mahabharata*, is the finest specimen of a complete philosophical text. The Yaksha-Yudhishthira dialogue, the subject of our present Unit, is another equally comprehensive text. Though very different in every respect from the *Gita*, the dialogues bring out in about 75-80 verses the same wideness of issues as the

700 verses of the *Gita*, which has rightly been hailed by Sisirkumar Ghose as the "One-man-open-University of philosophy". The poet must have foreseen the richness of this poem, when he said:

> The wisdom of this work, like unto an instrument of applying collyrium, hath opened the eyes of the inquisitive world blinded by the darkness of ignorance. As the sun dispelleth the darkness, so doth the Bharata by its discourses on religion, profit, pleasure and final release, dispel the ignorance of men. As the full-moon by its mild light expandeth the buds of the water-lily, so this Purana, by exposing the light of the Sruti hath expanded the human intellect. By the lamp of history, which destroyeth the darkness of ignorance, the whole mansion of nature is properly and completely illuminated.

vKkufrfejkU/kL; yksdL; rq fops"Vr%A
Kkuk´~tu'kykdkfHkusZ=ksUehyudkjde~AA
/kekZFkZdkeeks{kkFkSZ% lekIO;kldhrZuS%A rFkk Hkkjrlw;sZ.k u`.kka fofugra re% AA
iqjk.kiw.kZpUnzs.k JqfrT;ksRLuk% izdkf'krk%A u`cqf)dSjok.kka p d`resrr~ izdk'kue~AA1.1.84-85

3.3.2 The authorship and the date of composition

Indian and Western literary traditions differ radically in their ontological bearings, and if we apply the standards of one to the other it only leads to unnecessary intellectual controversies. For centuries, long before the New Critics appeared in the West, Indians had always known that the text was much more important than its author. It is no surprise therefore that while a large body of ancient texts have survived, little is known about their authors. Valmiki and Vyasa, who are supposed to have been contemporaries of their protagonists, have attained legendary status but without hardly any information about them. Even the details about the life of such later figures as Kalidas are not fully known. Little is known about Nilakantha Chaturdhar, the most famous commentator on the *Mahabharata*, except that he was a Maharashtrian who studied and wrote his books in Varanasi in the latter half of seventeenth century. No one knows anything about artists who created the grand temples of Rameshwaram, Madurai and Khajuraho. Is it because the Indians have always believed that the manifestation of art is much more central than the medium through which it manifests?

So much is credited to Vyasa, that the modern mind with its puny strength finds it hard to believe that any one person could have written so much. But there is much more in the epic that the modern mind would find incredible: for example that Ganesha was Vyasa's scribe; that Vyasa moved in the company of Brahma and other gods; that Prajapati's daughter gave birth to an egg that took 1000 years to mature to bring forth a bird-child, Garuda!

The modern mind takes an easy way out: that there was no such person as Vyasa. The *Mahabharata* was "composed and edited collectively over a long period of time" sometime "between about 500 B.C. and A.D. 500" (*The New Princeton Encyclopaedia*). The same source places the date of composition for the *Vedas* at about 1500 B.C. Dr. Ramdhari Singh Dinkar quotes two Indian scholars who claim the *Rigveda* to be at least

18000-75000 years old. Dinkar is also of the opinion that the war of Mahabharata was fought around 3000 B.C. Recent scientific explorations also suggest that Dwaraka, Krishna's capital, dates back to 5000 B.C. And Vyasa was Krishna's contemporary!

Sometimes, the modern scholarship can also become distracting and misleading. Dinkar, for example, taking a scholastic position, suggests that the *Gita*'s tenets incorporate modifications of Vedantic teachings to make room for Buddhistic doctrines. In contrast, a mystic-scholar like Sri Krishnaprem, alias Ronald Nixon, former professor of English at Lucknow University, would think that it does not matter who wrote the *Gita* or when it was written. What matters alone is that the teachings of the *Gita* are true and experientially verifiable. Under such circumstances, it would be wiser to take our text as the central fact, in line with the New Criticism or not, and to explore whether it contains any wisdom worthy of our attention. In approaching the elders of our tradition, it only makes common sense to drop our colonial baggage that has conditioned us to believe that everything European is far superior to anything Indian, that everything about Aristotle and his breed is scientific, modern and of supreme wisdom and everything of the ancient India is superstitious, unscientific and an ignorant gibberish of a primitive people.

3.3.3 The Translation

Translating a text in an ancient tongue into a modern language like English is fraught with many difficulties. When Srijut Kisari Mohan Ganguli was persuaded by Babu Pratapa Chandra Roy to accept such a gigantic undertaking, he was fully aware of the difficulties ahead. The opening paragraph of the Preface, which Ganguli wrote for the complete edition of the translation, lists some of the issues faced by the translator:

> The object of a translator should ever be to hold the mirror up to his author. That being so, his chief duty is to represent so far as practicable the manner in which his author's ideas have been expressed, retaining if possible at the sacrifice of idiom and taste all the peculiarities of his author's imagery and of language as well. In regard to translations from the Sanskrit, nothing is easier than to dish up Hindu ideas, so as to make them agreeable to English taste. But the endeavour of the present translator has been to give in the following pages as literal a rendering as possible of the great work of Vyasa. To the purely English reader there is much in the following pages that will strike as ridiculous. Those unacquainted with any language but their own are generally very exclusive in matters of taste. Having no knowledge of models other than what they meet with in their own tongue, the standard they have formed of purity and taste in composition must necessarily be a narrow one. The translator, however, would ill-discharge his duty, if for the sake of avoiding ridicule, he sacrificed fidelity to the original. He must represent his author as he is, not as he should be to please the narrow taste of those entirely unacquainted with him.

It took Ganguli almost fourteen years, from 1883 to 1896, to complete this work. During this course he was assisted by many able scholars, Indian and European. But in the end it was the work of a single hand. When we compare this translation verse by verse with the Sanskrit text, one is awestruck by the impeccable fidelity to the original which Ganguli has maintained throughout. There were quite a few versions of the *Mahabharata* in circulation in the nineteenth century. Prominent among these were the Bengal text, the

Bombay printed editions, the South Indian version, and Nilakantha's commentary with text. Before deciding upon his choice, Ganguli seems to have consulted them all. When we consider all available versions, Ganguli's choice appears fairly authentic.

Translation in some sense is also an interpretation. Before you put it into another language, you need to fully comprehend the purport of the original, and that would be interpreting the text. When faced with difficulty, Ganguli would confer with many scholars and if no aid came he would often take recourse to Nilakantha's authentic Sanskrit commentary on the *Mahabharata.*

Another daunting difficulty for any translator would be to find English equivalent of a Sanskrit word. There are hundreds of Sanskrit key words that have no English equivalent. Language is inseparable from culture. A word represents a concept, an experience that is unique to a particular people. Exactly the same experience may not obtain in another culture. Krishnaprem, himself an Englishman, remarked once that European mind has no idea of what *bhakti* is all about; the European devotion is altogether a different affair. Our present text (chapters 310-13) has a host of such words –*dharma, shrotriya, mahat, dhriti, tapas, buddhi, swadhyay, parivaad, yajna, vrinu, daakshya, ajnana, matsara, paishunya*, to cite a few – that defy translation. In some situations where an equivalent English word is hard to find, the translator is forced to offer an interpretation, which many may not agree with. For example, *manastvatmabhimanita* is translated as "Pride is a consciousness of one's being himself an actor or sufferer in life", which is clearly an interpretation. Similarly, *dharmanishkriyataalasyam* reads as "Idleness consists in not discharging one's duties", a translation which not many may agree with. *Dharmanishkriyata* may suggest a state of being where dharma is not yet dynamic and which may be the root cause of indolence both at the level of mind and body. What is important in both the examples cited above is that nowhere is there any attempt at mistranslation or misinterpretation. What is given is what appears to be the most apt rendering.

Considered in totality, Ganguli's translation is an extraordinarily rich and faithful rendering of the text into English. If we still have any issues, these are with the process of translation but none with Ganguli's text. Any scholastic study of literature demands that whenever possible we should refer to the original. And this is what we are going to do all throughout this Unit.

3.4 The Narrative

To us, as students of literature, the philosophical content of the dialogues is as important as the context in which they appear. We need to know the circumstances, inner and outer, that prepare the meeting between the Yaksha and Yudhishthira, what these characters signify in the present context, and also the concluding event the meeting brings about.

3.4.1 Dharma, Yaksha and Yudhishthira

The *Mahabharata* has traditionally been held as a *dharma-grantha*. *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia* rightly comments, "the poem is understood as a discourse on *dharma*". The *Gita* opens with the word '*dharma*'. In the present episode, comprising three chapters, the opening verse, functioning as exposition, has '*dharma*' as its key-word (ch.

310 verse 1)[1]. In all there are 42 occurrences of this word, used 6 times by the narrator, 11 times by the Yaksha and 25 times by Yudhishthira. Of the 123 questions, eight questions,comprising 34 verses, are directly about *dharma*. Much before we are told that it is *Dharma* who is impersonating as the Yaksha, Yudhishthira is addressed twice as *dharma-putra* (son of *Dharma*) and twice again as *dharma-atma* (of the soul of *dharma*). There can be no greater authority than these two – father and son – to discourse on *dharma*.

So the moot question is: what is *dharma*? The first definition provided by *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* is 'what is to be held or kept'. Obviously the reference is to the traditional definition, *dhaarayate iti dharmah* (/kkj;rs bfr /keZ%). There are two categories of faith, ideas and beliefs that hold the centre of our being. In some sense, we do not hold them but are held captive by them. They define what and who we are and also compel us to choose the direction of our life. In the first of the two categories are the impressions, the conditionings we have received from environment, from education, from the experiences of life – our individual or collective *karma*. These are *samskaras* or *chitta-vritti* and there is nothing great about them, though unavoidable they are. These are always in flux: they keep changing, growing, evolving. These are transitory in nature, and nothing about them is permanent. These cannot be of the Real, for the Real, by definition, is eternal and unchanging. These then are *asat*, the not-real. They create, as if by *maya*, the illusion an unreal, fictitious ego. This certainly does not fall under the category of an eternal, immortal *dharma*, *sanatanoamrito dharmah* (311.66). This would rather be at the root of what Yudhishthira terms as 'stolid ignorance, pride and hypocrisy' (*mahaajnanamahamkaro dambho dharmo dhvajochchhrayah*311.100).

What then is the second category that defines our *swadharma*, that which the Yaksha enquires by asking, *kashcha dharmah satamiv* (311.49) – what is it that constitutes the *dharma* of the Real (*Sat, as in Sachchidananda*)? We might take a clue from another portion of the *Mahabharata*: *satvaanurupa survasya shraddha bhavati Bharat / Shraddhamayo ayam purushah yo yachchhradhah sa eva sah* (the *Gita* 17.3).*Shraddha* is of the Essence, and it is *shraddha* which defines what and who we are. *Shraddha* is much more than the English word 'faith'. Purusha or the *atman* is a being of knowledge, hence *shraddha* is a knowledge secret in the soul. Even when the ego, the outer personality is unaware of it, there is something deep within – a god, a daemon, a guardian angel – that appears to guard and guide our steps. This is *shraddha*. This knowledge secret and yet known in the being, of the principles of Being, an ontology uncovered, is *dharma*. To hold it and be held by it, *dhaarayate*, is supreme joy and deliverance. It cannot be understood – 'the essence of *dharma* is hidden in caves' (*dharmasya tatvam nihitam guhayaam* 311.117) – but it can be lived, experienced and discovered. *Dharma* is not a book of precepts, a *shashtra*, but a Being, real and more alive than life, who assumes the form of Yaksha to visit his son, *dharma-putra* Yudhishthira in this story.

3.4.2 The Opening

A brahmin approaches the Pandavas and tells them that a deer has run away with his 'two sticks for making fire and a churning staff'. He asks Pandavas to recover these articles for

[1] chapter numbers refer to Ganguli's text, verse numbers to Nilakantha/Gita Press editions

him because without them he cannot complete his *yajna*. The Pandavas go out hunting for the deer but fail to find it. Tired from chase, Nakula starts bewailing, "Why has this misfortune befallen us that we cannot be of help to a poor brahmin?"

It is in reply to Nakula that Yudhishthira speaks, as the story opens: "There is no limit to calamities. Nor is it possible to ascertain either their final or efficient cause. It is the Lord of justice alone who distributeth the fruits of both virtue and vice" (*naapadamasti maryada na nimittam na karnam / dharmastu vibhjatyarthamubhayoh punyapaapyoh*310.1).

Why does a calamity befall us? What have I done to deserve such an unjust fate? This is an insoluble existential question which all of us have to deal with one way or the other. Yudhishthira refuses to ascribe any reason or motive to a calamity. Fortune proceeds from *Dharma* as the fruit of our good deeds or misdeeds. We are the authors of our own fate and must learn to take full responsibility for it. Such awareness helps us to become sensitive to life all around and to charter a path of right living.

What is interesting is that none of the brothers understand Yudhishthira's saying. They all start blaming some inaction on their part for which they are paying a price. Each one gives a different reason born from a perception rooted in their individual natures. Their replies suggest an egoistic response to an action that might have sprung from a larger whole. Yudhishthira refuses to respond to these inadequate answers.

One by one the brothers proceed to fetch water from a lake, and all of them meet death because they ignore the warning of the Yaksha who guards the lake. Why do they ignore the warning? They all are mighty warriors and as such fairly intelligent. Is it because the event is fated, preordained by *Dharma*?

At last, it is Yudhishthira's turn to go. In him we meet a holistic approach to life. He looks around and appreciates the surrounding beauty of nature. When he sees his brothers lying dead, he looks before and after while lamenting their death. He carefully looks at their bodies to determine the cause of death. While pondering over as to who could be responsible for this misdeed, his mind is quick to focus on Duryodhana and Shakuni. When the Yaksha from the background says that he is a crane and has caused the death of Pandava brothers, Yudhishthira refuses to accept that it could be the work of a mere crane. Finally, the Yaksha makes his appearance and repeats his command: "Without answering my questions, you cannot drink water from this lake which is already in my possession".

Yudhishthira's reply shows that spiritually he is the most advanced of the Pandava brothers: "I do not covet what is possessed by others" (*na chaaham kaamaye Yaksha tav purvaparigraham* - 110.43). Remember the very first teaching of the Isha Upanishad: *ma gridhah kasya swid dhanam*– do not covet any man's possession. Yudhishthira is living the teachings and is therefore in true sense the son of *Dharma*. He alone is qualified to handle the Yaksha's questions.

3.4.3 The Conclusion

One by one the Yaksha puts 123 questions to Yudhishthira who gives a satisfactory reply to each one of them. These will be discussed in the next Unit. Towards the close, the Yaksha reveals that he is *Dharma* who in the form of a deer had stolen the brahmin's sticks and had also caused the temporary death of the four Pandavas. He grants three

boons to Yudhishthira after bringing back the brothers to life. For the first boon, Yudhishthira chooses that the brahmin's sticks be restored to him; for the second, that in the thirteenth year of their exile the Pandavas may successfully live incognito; and for the third, that he may ever remain steadfast in *dharma*. The first boon serves an immediate duty; the second, a larger social responsibility of a king; and the third, the highest need for an individual. The sequence of choices is also significant. The immediate reality, the now, is the most important; it must be dealt first before anything else; and the responsibility towards the collectivity precedes any personal well-being, however high that be.

In revealing his reality of being, not just identity, Dharma sums up the import of the whole discourse. 'Fame (*yash*), truth, self-restraint, purity (*shauch*), candour (*aarjava*), modesty (*hri*), steadiness (*achapalam*), charity (*daana*), austerities (*tapa*) and Brahmacharya, these are my body' (312.7). Body is the manifestation of Spirit. These ten qualities become manifest when *dharma* becomes a dynamic presence. These are not qualities that need be practiced in order to realise *dharma.* These are the attendant qualities of *dharma.* Some comment is required on the English equivalents of Sanskrit words. *Yash* for example is not the same as fame. It is the dynamic radiance of truthful acts, which remains totally unaffected by calumny or public opinion. Similarly, *aarjava* is defined by Nilakantha as *avakrata*, the state of not being crooked. *Aarjava* is being absolutely simple, devoid of any distortion in thought, act and speech. *Daan* is giving, to give oneself and all one has, which certainly is very different from charity. In the next verse, Dharma lists six qualities – abstention from injury (*ahimsa*), impartiality (*samta*), peace (*shanti*), penances (*tapa*), sanctity (*shauch*), and freedom from malice (*amatsar*) – that act as doorway to *dharma* (312.8). *Ahimsa*, according to Nilakantha, is not to hurt another by speech, thought or body, and *amatsar* is complete absence of any tormenting fever on seeing qualities or achievements in another. These are the qualities that need to be practiced in everyday living in order to find an opening for *dharma.*

Dharma said that he had come primarily to see how his son was doing. Speaking to Yudhishthira, he tells what he has seen: "By good luck thou art devoted to the five (tranquillity of mind, self-restraint, *abstention* from sensual pleasures, resignation, and Yoga meditation ''kkUrks nkUr mijrfLrfr{kq% lekfgrks HkwRokReU;sokRekkua i';fr' bfrJqR;qDrk% - Nilakantha); and by good luck also thou hast conquered the six (hunger, thirst, sorrow, bluntness of mortal feeling, decrepitude, and death ';ks'kuk;kfiikls 'kksda eksga tjka e`R;qeR;sfr' bfrJqR;qDrk%- Nilakantha 312.9). 'I am well-pleased to witness thy harmlessness (*aanrishansatvam*); and, O sinless one, I will confer boons on thee'. The last boon asked by Yudhishthira further explains the path of *dharma* he has been treading: 'May I, O lord, always conquer covetousness and folly and anger, and may my mind be ever devoted to charity, truth, and ascetic austerities!' (t;s;a yksHkeksgkS p Øksèka pkga lnk foHkksA nkus rifl lR;s p euks es lrra Hkosr~AA)

Notice again how the Sanskrit words, *moha*, *daana* and *tapa* carry entirely different connotations than their English equivalents used here.

3.5 The Text in English Translation:

MAHABHARATA BOOK THREE - VAN PARVA

Translated into English by Kisari Mohan Ganguli

(1883-1896)[1]

SECTION CCCX

Yudhishthira said, "There is no limit to calamities. Nor is it possible to ascertain either their final or efficient cause. It is the Lord of justice alone who distributeth the fruits of both virtue and vice.' (ukinkefLr e;kZnk u fufe=ka u dkj.ke~A) Thereupon Bhima said, 'Surely, this calamity hath befallen us, because I did not slay the Pratikamin on the very spot, when he dragged Krishna as a slave into the assembly. And Arjuna said, 'Surely, this calamity hath befallen us because I resented not those biting words piercing the very bones, uttered by the Suta's son!' And Sahadeva said, 'Surely, O Bharata, this calamity hath befallen us because I did not slay Sakuni when he defeated thee at dice!'" (Verses 1-4)[2]

Vaisampayana continued, "Then king Yudhishthira addressed Nakula saying, 'Do thou, O son of Madri, climb this tree and look around the ten points of the horizon. Do thou see whether there is water near us or such trees as grow on watery grounds! O child, these thy brothers are all fatigued and thirsty.' Thereupon saying, 'So be it,' Nakula speedily climbed up a tree, and having looked around, said unto his eldest brother, 'O king, I see many a tree that groweth by the water-side, and I hear also the cries of cranes. Therefore, without doubt, water must be somewhere here.' Hearing these words, Kunti's son Yudhishthira, firm in truth, said, 'O amiable one, go thou and fetch water in these quivers!' (5-9)

Saying, 'So be it,' at the command of his eldest brother Nakula quickly proceeded towards the place where there was water and soon came upon it. And beholding a crystal lake inhabited by cranes he desired to drink of it, when he heard these words from the sky, 'O child, do not commit this rash act! This lake hath already been in my possession. Do thou, O son of Madri, first answer my questions and then drink of this water and take away (as much as thou requirest). Nakula, however, who was exceedingly thirsty, disregarding these words, drank of the cool water, and having drunk of it, dropped down dead. (10-13)

And, O represser of foes, seeing Nakula's delay, Yudhishthira the son of Kunti said unto Sahadeva, the heroic brother of Nakula, 'O Sahadeva, it is long since our brother, he who

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[1] Produced by John B. Hare (www.sacred-texts.com). Project Gutenberg [EBook #15474]

[2] The verse numbers given in brackets refer to the Gita Press edition in which the present section forms chapter 312 consisting of 45 ½verses. In *Srimanmahabharatam (mainly based on the South Indian texts),* it forms chapter 313 and contains 51 verses. In the electronic text of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, it forms chapter 296 and has 43 verses. Ganguli's translation makes use of the Bengal texts and has a few additional verses towards the end. Both Ganguli and the Gita Press editors refer to Nilakantha's commentary on the Mahabharata as an authoritative source and hence exhibit a close textual symmetry. Nilakantha's text has the same number of verses and chapter numbers as the Gita Press edition.

was born immediately before thee, hath gone from hence! Do thou, therefore, go and bring back thy uterine brother, together with water.' At this, Sahadeva, saying, 'So be it,' set out in that direction; and coming to the spot, beheld his brother lying dead on the ground. And afflicted at the death of his brother, and suffering severely from thirst, he advanced towards the water, when these words were heard by him, 'O child, do not commit this rash act! This lake hath already been in my possession. First answer my question, and then drink of the water and take away as much as thou mayst require.' Sahadeva, however, who was extremely thirsty, disregarding these words, drank of the water, and having drunk of it, dropped down dead. (14-19)

Then Yudhishthira, the son of Kunti, said unto Vijaya, 'It is long since, O Vibhatsu, that thy two brothers have gone, O represser of foes! Blessed be thou! Do thou bring them back, together with water. Thou art, O child, the refuge of us all when plunged in distress!' Thus addressed, the intelligent Gudakesa, taking his bow and arrows and also his naked sword, set out tor that lake of waters. And reaching that spot, he whose car was drawn by white steeds beheld those tigers among men, his two younger brothers who had come to fetch water, lying dead there. And seeing them as if asleep, that lion among men, exceedingly aggrieved, raised his bow and began to look around that wood. But he found none in that mighty forest. And, being fatigued, he who was capable of drawing the bow by his left hand as well, rushed in the direction of the water. And as he was rushing (towards the water), he heard these words from the sky, 'Why dost thou approach this water? Thou shalt not be able to drink of it by force. If thou, O Kaunteya, can answer the question I will put to thee, then only shalt thou drink of the water and take away as much as thou requirest, O Bharata!' Thus forbidden, the son of Pritha said, 'Do thou forbid me by appearing before me! And when thou shalt be sorely pierced with my arrows, thou wilt not then again speak in this way!' Having said this, Partha covered all sides with arrows inspired by mantras. And he also displayed his skill in shooting at an invisible mark by sound alone. And, O bull of the Bharata race, sorely afflicted with thirst, he discharged barbed darts and javelins and iron arrows, and showered on the sky innumerable shafts incapable of being baffled. Thereupon, the invisible Yaksha said, 'What need of all this trouble, O son of Pritha? Do thou drink only after answering my questions! If thou drink, however, without answering my questions, thou shalt die immediately after.' Thus addressed, Pritha's son Dhananjaya capable of drawing the bow with his left hand as well, disregarding those words, drank of the water, and immediately after dropped down dead. (20-32)

And (seeing Dhananjaya's delay) Kunti's son Yudhishthira addressed Bhimasena, saying, 'O represser of foes, it is a long while that Nakula and Sahadeva and Vibhatsu have gone to fetch water, and they have not come yet, O Bharata! Good betide thee! Do thou bring them back, together with water!' Thereupon saying, 'So be it,' Bhimasena set out for that place where those tigers among men, his brothers, lay dead. And beholding them, Bhima afflicted though he was with thirst, was exceedingly distressed. And that mighty armed hero thought all that to have been the act of some Yaksha or Rakshasa. And Pritha's son Vrikodara thought, 'I shall surely have to fight today. Let me, therefore, first appease my thirst.' Then that bull of the Bharata race rushed forward with the intention of drinking. Thereupon the Yaksha said, 'O child, do not commit this rash act! This lake hath already been in my possession. Do thou first answer my questions, and then drink and take away as much water as thou requirest!'" Vaisampayana continued, "Thus addressed by that

Yaksha of immeasurable energy, Bhima, without answering his questions, drank of the water. And as soon as he drank, he fell down dead on the spot. (33-40)

Then thinking that his brothers had left him long since, Yudhishthira waited for some time. And the king said unto himself again and again, 'Why is it that the two sons of Madri are delaying? And why doth the wielder also of the Gandiva delay? And why doth Bhima too, endued with great strength, delay? I shall go to search for them!' And resolved to do this, the mighty-armed Yudhishthira then rose up, his heart burning in grief. And that bull among men, the royal son of Kunti thought within himself. 'Is this forest under some malign influence? Or, is it infested by some wicked beasts? Or, have they all fallen, in consequence of having disregarded some mighty being? Or, not finding water in the spot whither those heroes had first repaired, they have spent all this time in search through the forest? What is that reason for which those bulls among men do not comeback?' And speaking in this strain, that foremost of monarchs, the illustrious Yudhishthira, entered into that mighty forest where no human sound was heard and which was inhabited by deer and bears and birds, and which was adorned with trees that were bright and green, and which echoed with the hum of the black-bee and the notes of winged warblers. As he was proceeding along, he beheld that beautiful lake which looked as if it had been made by the celestial artificer himself. And it was adorned with flowers of a golden hue and with lotuses and Sindhuvars. And it abounded with canes and Ketakas and Karaviras and Pippalas, and fatigued with toil, Yudhishthira saw that tank and was struck with wonder." (41-45: see footnote 2)

SECTION CCCXI[1]

Vaisampayana said, "Yudhishthira saw his brothers, each possessed of the glory of Indra himself, lying dead like the Regents of the world dropped from their spheres at the end of the Yuga. And beholding Arjuna lying dead, with his bow and arrows dropped on the ground, and also Bhimasena and the twins motionless and deprived of life, the king breathed a hot and long sigh, and was bathed in tears of grief. (1-2)

And beholding his brothers lying dead, the mighty armed son of Dharma with heart racked in anxiety, began to lament profusely, saying, 'Thou hadst, O mighty-armed Vrikodara, vowed, saying,—I shall with mace smash the thighs of Duryodhana in battle! O enhancer of the glory of the Kurus, in thy death, O mighty-armed and high-souled one, all that hath become fruitless now! The promises of men may be ineffectual; but why have the words of the gods uttered in respect of thee been thus fruitless? O Dhananjaya, while thou wert in thy mother's lying-in-room, the gods had said,—O Kunti, this thy son shall not be inferior to him of a thousand eyes! And in the northern Paripatra mountains, all beings had sung, saying,—The prosperity (of this race), robbed by foes will be recovered by this one without delay. No one will be able to vanquish him in battle, while there will be none whom he will not be able to vanquish. Why then hath that Jishnu endued with great strength been subject to death? Oh, why doth that Dhananjaya, relying

[1] Gita Press: ch. 313, 133 verses. Bhandarkar text: ch. 297, 74 verses. South Indian Texts: ch. 314, 136 verses.

on whom we had hitherto endured all this misery, lie on the ground blighting[108][1] all my hopes! Why have those heroes, those mighty sons of Kunti, Bhimasena and Dhananjaya, came under the power of the enemy,—those who themselves always slew their foes, and whom no weapons could resist! Surely, this vile heart of mine must be made of adamant, since, beholding these twins lying today on the ground it doth not split! Ye bulls among men, versed in holy writ and acquainted with the properties of time and place, and endued with ascetic merit, ye who duly performed all sacred rites, why lie ye down, without performing acts deserving of you? Alas, why lie ye insensible on the earth, with your bodies unwounded, ye unvanquished ones, and with your vows untouched?' (3-15)

And beholding his brothers sweetly sleeping there as (they usually did) on mountain slopes, the high souled king, overwhelmed with grief and bathed in sweat, came to a distressful condition. And saying,—It is even so—that virtuous lord of men, immersed in an ocean of grief anxiously proceeded to ascertain the cause (of that catastrophe). And that mighty-armed and high-souled one, acquainted with the divisions of time and place, could not settle his course of action. Having thus bewailed much in this strain, the virtuous Yudhishthira, the son of Dharma or Tapu, restrained his soul and began to reflect in his mind as to who had slain those heroes. 'There are no strokes of weapons upon these, nor is any one's foot-print here. The being must be mighty I ween, by whom my brothers have been slain. Earnestly shall I ponder over this, or, let me first drink of the water, and then know all. It may be that the habitually crooked-minded Duryodhana hath caused this water to be secretly placed here by the king of the Gandharvas. What man of sense can trust wicked wight of evil passions with whom good and evil are alike? Or, perhaps, this may be an act of that wicked-souled one through secret messengers of his.' And it was thus that that highly intelligent one gave way to diverse reflections. He did not believe that water to have been tainted with poison, for though dead no corpse-like pallor was on them. 'The colour on the faces of these my brothers hath not faded!' And it was thus that Yudhishthira thought. And the king continued, 'Each of these foremost of men was like unto a mighty cataract. Who, therefore, save Yama himself who in due time bringeth about the end of all things, could have baffled them thus.' (16-27)

And having concluded this for certain, he began to perform his ablutions in that lake. And while he descended into it, he heard these words from the sky, uttered by the Yaksha,—'I am a crane, living on tiny fish. It is by me that thy younger brothers have been brought under the sway of the lord of departed spirits. If, thou, O prince, answer not the questions put by me, even thou shalt number the fifth corpse. Do not, O child, act rashly! This lake hath already been in my possession. Having answered my questions first, do thou, O Kunti's son, drink and carry away (as much as thou requirest)!' Hearing these words, Yudhishthira said, 'Art thou the foremost of the Rudras, or of the Vasus, or of the Marutas? I ask, what god art thou? This could not have been done by a bird! Who is it that hath overthrown the four mighty mountains, viz., the Himavat, the Paripatra, the Vindhya, and the Malaya? Great is the feat done by thee, thou foremost of strong persons! Those whom neither gods, nor Gandharvas nor Asuras, nor Rakshasas could endure in mighty conflict, have been slain by thee! Therefore, exceedingly wonderful is

[1] 108. Samhritya –killing.

the deed done by thee! I do not know what thy business may be, nor do I know thy purpose. Therefore, great is the curiosity and fear also that have taken possession of me? My mind is greatly agitated, and as my head also is aching, I ask thee, therefore, O worshipful one, who art thou that stayest here?' Hearing these words the Yaksha said, 'I am, good betide thee, a Yaksha, and not an amphibious bird. It is by me that all these brothers of thine, endued with mighty prowess, have been slain!' (28-36)

Vaisampayana continued, 'Hearing these accursed words couched in harsh syllables,[109][1] Yudhishthira, O king, approaching the Yaksha who had spoken then, stood there. And that bull among the Bharatas then beheld that Yaksha of unusual eyes and huge body tall like a palmyra-palm and looking like fire or the Sun, and irresistible and gigantic like a mountain, staying on a tree, and uttering a loud roar deep as that of the clouds. And the Yaksha said, 'These thy brothers, O king, repeatedly forbidden by me, would forcibly take away water. It is for this that they have been slain by me! He that wisheth to live, should not, O king, drink this water! O son of Pritha, act not rashly! This lake hath already been in my possession. Do thou, O son of Kunti, first answer my questions, and then take away as much as thou likest!' (37-42)

Yudhishthira said, 'I do not, O Yaksha, covet, what is already in thy possession!(u pkga dke;s ;{k ro iwoZifjxzge~)O bull among male beings, virtuous persons never approve that one should applaud his own self (without boasting, I shall, therefore, answer thy questions, according to my intelligence). Do thou ask me!' (43-44)

NOTE: VERSES 45 TO 130, CONSTITUTING THE DIALOGUE, ARE TO BE FOUND IN THE NEXT UNIT, WHICH ALSO INCLUDES THE CONCLUDING CHAPTER OF THE ORIGINAL NARRATIVE.

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Discuss the significance Dharma and his son as dharma-putra in the present episode.
2. Write a short note on Mahabharata.
3. Discuss the major problems involved in translating an ancient text like Mahabharata.
4. Describe the events that lead to the Yaksha-Yudhishthira dialogue.

3.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

- About the events leading to the dialogues.
- The significance dharma in a wider context
- The problems involved in translation

[1] 109. Lit. Letters. *Footnotes carrying a second number (for example, 109, here) are originally from Ganguli's translation.*

You have also read the entire text in English translation and glanced the more important verses in in their original Sanskrit form as well.

3.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to the discussion given at 3.4.1.
2. Refer to the discussion given at 3.3.1.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 3.3.3.
4. Refer to the discussion given at 3.4.2.

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3.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the centrality of Mahabharata in the Indian tradition and the problems of translating it into English.

UNIT FOUR THE MAHABHARATA:

TheYaksha-Yudhishthira Dialogue: The Questions

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The question and answer session between the Yaksha and Yudhishthira forms the core of this episode from Mahabharata. Many of us have come across it in an abridged version in our school textbooks. Here we are going to study the full text in a critical framework that befits a postgraduate student of literature.

Every question does not hold the same significance to everyone. But any deep philosophical enquiry that may have puzzled us is quite likely to find a clue in the comprehensive answers provided by Yudhishthira.

If the *Gita* has been recognised as a complete text of Indian Philosophy, the Yaksha-Yudhishthira dialogues can be taken as a complete guide-book for Right Living. It is no exaggeration when our poet claims that anyone who follows the principles of holistic living outlined here can hope to live a hundred years.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- List the major and minor issues of conduct
- Draw a map of the fundamental principles of Right Living
- Rewrite an ancient argument in a modern idiom
- List the causes and cures of the pervasive ailments of modern society

4.3 A BACKGROUND TO THE QUESTIONS

Before we can truly appreciate the depth and seriousness of the teachings provided here in a dialogic form, we would do well to remember the stature of our characters. Not for nothing we have been told that there are to be found some 8800 verses in the *Mahabharata* which only a few can decipher with difficulty. One can make a reasonable guess that quite a few of the 77 verses constituting the questions and answers here would fall under the group of 8800.

It is neither important nor possible to comprehend the full complexity of every verse. What we can do possibly is to define our approach to the text. Do these verses in any way point to the mystery of some supreme Reality behind life? Do the words symbolise some fact we cannot easily surmise? Will they reveal their meaning if approached with a right spirit of meditation? How meaningful is the literary symbolist reading of an ancient text?

In the footnote to verse 311.46, Ganguli states, “Behind the plain and obvious meanings of the words employed both in the question and the answer, there is a deeper signification of a spiritual kind. I think Nilakantha has rightly understood the passage”. That this is the only right approach to the reading of this text was shown by Nilakantha in the seventeenth century, and by Ganguli two centuries later. The same tradition of interpretation has been followed by Sri Aurobindo, Sri Krishnaprem and many others in the modern era.

4.3.1 The Structure

There are 77 verses covering the questions and answers. The Yaksha frames the questions in 34 verses, each having a unified theme. Of these, 2 are divided into five parts and 27 into four parts, each part forming a subsection, complete in itself though part of a larger whole. 5 of the 34 verses have a single question. Thus, in all, there are 123 questions.

For 30 of the Yaksha's verses, Yudhishthira formulates his answers in 30 corresponding verses, point to point in the same order. Twice, he uses 4 verses for his reply, and only once for a 2 verse and a 3 verse answer. In all he uses 43 verses.

Then there is a bonus question– the last one. The Yaksha asks Yudhishthira to choose which one of his dead brothers should be granted the boon of being alive again. When Yudhishthira chooses Nakula, he is asked to explain his choice.

4.3.2 On the Nature of Yudhishthira's Answers

Accepting the Yaksha's challenge, Yudhishthira tells him: "I shall answer thy questions, according to my intelligence". An innocuously modest statement in the English translation, in the Sanskrit original it contains a richly-loaded key to interpreting the whole dialogue that follows: *yathaprajnamtuteprashnaanprativakshyami….*

Yudhishthira states that his answers are going to proceed from *Prajna*. What is *Prajna*? Mandukya Upanishad explains the *Atman* as fourfold (*ayamatmachatushpat*): *jagrat, swapna, sushupti, turiya.* The third of the four, *sushupti*is *Prajna*, the Lord of Wisdom (*prajnanghana*), 'to whom conscious mind is the door' (*chetomukhah*): '*sushuptasthanekibhutahprajnanaghan…chetomukhahprajnastritiyahpaadah'*. Sri Aurobindo defines *prajna* as "the apprehending Truth-Consciousness" (*TheLife Divine,* 151).

Proceeding from *prajna*, Yudhishthira's answers embody the highest, absolute and infallible truth. One may find disagreement with the interpretation of a word, with the line of approach taken by a commentator, but none with the word itself. So how do we approach a word? A symbolist reading would suggest that there is much more that is secret and hidden behind a word than meets the eye of intellect. A symbol represents a much greater Reality, which but for the symbol would remain ever unmanifest.

How often can you make sense of your dreams? Dream is the most frequent symbolist text we have access to. But before you can be ready to read symbols, you need to find out how you interpret the world around you. Is the material world, as reported by our senses and interpreted by mind, the primary and ultimate Reality? Do the physical and social sciences hold the ultimate word of knowledge? Is the Moon a mere mass of matter, or when it drives us to ecstasy, is the phenomenon similar to the tides caused by it in the sea because our bodies too predominantly contain water?

Is the opening question just about the physical Sun? Or are there other Suns accessible to human consciousness? Would you agree with NilakanthaChaturdhar that the name Aditya for the Sun refers to 'unpurified soul' in this question, because Nilakantha is a great

Sanskrit scholar? Or would you rather search deeper and wider for that which is symbolised by the word Aditya?

If you do not apply a symbolist reading to the text, many of the dialogues would appear hardly better than a school level quiz:

> The Yaksha asked, 'What is that which doth not close its eyes while asleep; What is that which doth not move after birth? What is that which is without heart? And what is that which swells with its own impetus?' Yudhishthira answered, 'A fish doth not close its eyes while asleep: an egg doth not move after birth: a stone is without heart: and a river swelleth with its own impetus.' (verses 61, 62)

The ability required to see these questions in a much larger context than a mere quiz is the ability that makes you see the everyday life as Divine – a symbolist way of living, indeed. *Vasudevahsarvamiti*. *Ayamatma Brahman.* 'There is divinity in the fall of a sparrow'. Every object, every relationship is other than what it appears to the senses and ego. To see the truth is to deny the false. It needs tremendous courage, determination, sensitivity and intelligence to see through a million falsehoods being dished out to us everyday as allurement by corporate houses, politicians and media. Only when you have successfully denied the falsehood around you, you will be able to see the truth hidden behind a symbol. Such is the path to *prajna*, holistic living and ultimate fulfilment which Dharma and his son Yudhishthira attempt to teach us in these verses.

4.4 THE QUESTIONS

The Yaksha-Yudhishthira dialogues formulate a total inquiry that man must undertake in order to realise his highest potentials and fulfilment, a possibility embodied in Yudhishthira. We need to comprehend the principles of cosmic manifestation, and also the dimensions of living that make life meaningful by bringing about a dynamic awareness of its underlying processes. The dialogues explore the human activity, aspiration and relationships to define the totality of our existential context. Every guidance we need for everyday living, as well as the deepest and most subtle questions that have ever perplexed us, stands revealed in the far and deep searching light of Yudhishthira's *prajna*. There are listed the psychic movements and energies that need to be rejected, and others that need to be nurtured in order to find the way of right living that ultimately leads to fulfilment and deliverance.

In the following sections we will look at all the 34 themes introduced by the Yaksha.

4.4.1 The Opening Movement: the Cosmic Context

The opening themes by defining the fundamental cosmic principles provide the context in which man has to discover the meaning of his life and works.

1. **Aditya, the Sun** (verses 45-46):

The Yaksha then said, 'What is it that maketh the Sun rise? Who keeps him company? Who causeth him to set? And in whom is he established?' (45)[1]

Yudhishthira answered, 'Brahma maketh the Sun rise: the gods keep him company: Dharma causeth him to set: and he is established in truth.'[2] *[110]*[3] *(46)*

fda fLonkfnR;eqUu;fr ds p rL;kfHkr'pjk%A d'pSueLra u;fr dfLe'p izfrfr"Bfr

AA45AA

czãkfnR;eqUu;fr nsokLrL;kfHkr'pjk% A èkeZ'pkLra u;fr p lR;s p çfrfr"Bfr

AA46AA

Ganguli's footnote, deriving from Nilakantha's commentary, suggests the Sun here refers to the unpurified soul ascending to its pure state. It is Brahman who causes this phenomenon. In other words, it is in the nature of the Real to give rise to this movement from ignorance to knowledge, from *asat* to *sat*, from death to immortality. *Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya; asato ma sadgamaya; mrityormaamritamgamaya*. In Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* we come across the following:

> Our early approaches to the Infinite
> Are sunrise splendours on a marvellous verge
> While lingers yet unseen the glorious sun. (p. 46)

The gradual arising of a spiritual sun flooding the human consciousness is a fact of experience. We can call it the birth of knowledge, consciousness, intuitive apprehension, intelligence, or see it as dying to all that is false and being born to the truth. The phenomenon is a fact. But a question often bewilders us: why does this phenomenon happen to one and not to so many others? The commonplace reply is that perhaps the *karma* of a previous birth is the cause. Yudhishthira's succinct reply, while leaving it at the level of mystery, makes it amply clear that the causes of spiritual awakening are to be traced to the Supreme alone, and not to any terrestrial factor, whatsoever. The next part of

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[1]This is the first question, the beginning of this great dialogue.

[3]110. Behind the plain and obvious meanings of the words employed both in the question and the answer, there is a deeper signification of a spiritual kind. I think Nilakantha has rightly understood the passage. By Aditya, which of course commonly means the Sun, is indicated the unpurified soul (from adatte sabdadin indriadivis &c.). The first question then, becomes, 'Who is it that exalteth the unpurified soul?' The act of exaltation implies a raising of the soul from its earthly connections. The answer to this is, 'Brahma, i.e., Veda or self-knowledge.' The second question--'What are those that keep company with the soul during its progress of purification?' The answer is, Self-restraint and other qualities, which are all of a god-like or divine nature.' The third question is.--Who lead the soul to its place (state) of rest? The answer is, Dharma, i.e., restitude, morality, and religious observances.' It is often asserted that one must pass through the observances (Karma) before attaining to a state of Rest or Truth or Pure Knowledge. The last question is,--'On what is the soul established!' The answer, according to all that has been previously said, is 'Truth or Pure Knowledge.' For the soul that is emancipated from and raised above all carnal connections, is no longer in need of observances and acts (Karma) but stays unmoved in True Knowledge (Janana).

the answer says, 'gods keep him company'. Gods are the powers responsible for maintaining the movements of Manifestation, *Srishti*. It is they who supervise the journeying sun. At every stage in its growth, the divine child is protected and taken care of –*yogakshemavahamyaham*. The next question one may ask, almost in the tone of a textbook, would be: "What happens when a *sadhaka* becomes a *siddha*? What is at the end of nirvana, moksha, liberation, Buddhahood?" The eternal Law of supreme Reality, *Dharma,* according to Yudhishthira, brings the movement of the rising Soul, *Aditya*, to a close, to its fulfilment and rest. Is the phenomenon of so many prophets, messiahs and avatars real? Are not these people some megalomaniacs living in a fantastical world of self-induced hypnotic hallucination? Yudhishthira clearly denies any such possibility: from beginning to end, the sun 'is established in truth'.

2. The greatness of the Great (verses 47-48):

The Yaksha asked, 'By what doth one become learned? By what doth he attain what is very great? How can one have a second? And, O king, how can one acquire intelligence?' (47)

Yudhishthira answered, 'It is by the (study of the) Srutis that a person becometh learned; it is by ascetic austerities that one acquireth what is very great: it is by intelligence that a person acquireth a second and it is by serving the old that one becometh wise.'[111][1] (48)

dsu fLoPNªksf=;ks Hkofr dsufLon~ foUnrs egr A dsufLon~ f}rh;oku Hkofr jktu~ dsu p cqf)eku~AA47AA

Jqrsu Jksf=;ks Hkofr rilk foUnrs egr A èk`R;k f}rh;oku Hkofr cqf)eku~ o`)lso;k AA48AA

What are the qualities that make the Buddha great? The Yaksha lists four of such qualities and asks Yudhishthira to show the path leading to them. Only the one who has attained can tell what leads to the attainment. To the question, "What makes one a *shrotriya*?", the answer is fairly straightforward: "It is *shruti* that makes one a *shrotriya*." The English word used in the translation, 'learned' for *shrotriya* is merely a connotation and not an exact equivalent. *Shruti* means hearing of the divine word, as in *kavayahsatyashrutah*or as in the legend of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. *Mantras* revealed to a Rishi are heard by him. The *Vedas*, a body of revealed literature thus came to be known as *shruti*.

By extension, any one who knew the *Vedas* came to be known as *shrotriya.* Similarly, since Guru in the Indian tradition stood on the same pedestal as God – *gururbrahmagururvishnu…*, anything heard from Guru also became *shruti.* At a time when the Rishi was the Guru who passed on what had been revealed to him to the *shishya*, the tradition had validity. But in a time like ours when every scholar, professor and *katha-vachak*dons the mantle of guru, one needs a little scepticism to be truly

[1] 111. Nilakantha explains both Dhriti and Dwitiya in a spiritual sense.There is no need, however, of a spiritual explanation here. By Dhriti is meant steadiness of intelligence; by Dwitiya lit, a second. What Yudhishthira says is that a steady intelligence serves the purposes of a helpful companion.

religious. Yudhishthira of course would not have intended his statement to include such second-hand *shruti*or*shrotriya.*

The second question, "How does one attain to the *Mahat*?" is again answered very simply: "By *tapas*". *Mahat* is the Great-Self, '*Mahat Atman*', the Ground, the All of all manifestation, beyond which is only the Unmanifest. Kathopanishad explains: "higher than the Great-Self is the Unmanifest and higher than the Unmanifest is the Purusha" (egr% ijeO;DreO;DrkRiq#"k% ij%). It is not necessary to go into technicalities of this state, except to suggest that it marks one of highest attainments human soul is capable of. The journey to it is through *tapas*, Yudhishthira answers. *Tapas*, which commonly means heat, is the gathering of energy. The energy is gathered by controlling its continuous dissipation. Our minds are always chattering, sending forth a million thoughts, desires and feelings in every direction. This is how the energy is dissipated, and it is no surprise that at the end of a day's work we feel tired and completely drained out. It requires a sustained and careful watching to understand this movement of mind. When the ways of dissipation are understood, the holes can be plugged and energy gathered. In the process the gathered energy, *tapas*, rises ever higher piercing through the covering veils of senses, objects of senses, mind and the faculty of knowledge till it attains to the plane of the Great Self (for the hierarchy of planes see Kathopanishad 1.3.10-11)[1].

"How does one become 'one with a second' (*dwitiyawan*)"? The question hinges on the meaning we ascribe to the word '*dwitiyawan*'. The supreme Reality is described as 'one without a second' (*ekmewaadwitiyam*). When the One becomes Two at the beginning of Manifestation, we get the pair of Ishwara-Shakti, Purusha-Prakriti, Brahman-Maya. So 'the second' can be understood without difficulty to mean the Shakti, the Creatrix. It can also mean 'a copy' in the sense when a Guru sometime chooses to replicate himself in the disciple. In either case it means the capacity to help the forward movement of Manifestation. Yudhishthira tells it is *dhriti* which makes one *dwitiyawan*. *Dhriti* is the capacity of holding something. Only when one can successfully hold all that has come down as a result of *tapas*, one can hope to become *dwitiyawan.* It is easy to be a beneficiary of divine gifts, but not so easy to hold those gifts.

To the last part of the question, Yudhishthira's answer is: "it is by serving the old that one becometh wise (*buddhimaan*)". We will do well to remember that in the hierarchy of planes, mentioned earlier, *buddhi* is just before the *Mahat*. The old are also the elders of the Race. By serving them we gain first hand the gift of their wisdom, through touch, experience, observation and many other undefined ways.

3-4. The Man of Knowledge and the Warrior (verses 49-52):

The Yaksha asked, 'What constituteth the divinity of the Brahmanas? What even is their practice that is like that of the pious? What also is the human attribute of the Brahmanas? And what practice of theirs is like that of the impious?' (49)

[1] bfUæ;sH;% ijk º;FkkZ vFkZsH;'p ijaeu%A eulLrq ijk cqf)cZq)sjkRek egkUij%AA
egr% ijeO;DreO;DrkRiq#"k% ij%A iq#"kkUu ija fdafpRlk dk"Bk lk ijk xfr%AA

Yudhishthira answered, 'The study of the Vedas constitutes their divinity: their asceticism constitutes behaviour that is like that of the pious; their liability to death is their human attribute and slander is their impiety.' (50)

The Yaksha asked, 'What institutes the divinity of the Kshatriyas? What even is their practice that is like that of the pious? What is their human attribute? And what practice of theirs is like that of the impious?' (51)

Yudhishthira answered, 'Arrows and weapons are their divinity: celebration of sacrifices is that act which is like that of the pious: liability to fear is their human attribute; and refusal of protection is that act of theirs which is like that of the impious.' (52)

fda czkã.kkuka nsoRoa d'p èkeZ% lrkfeo A d'pS"kka ekuq"kks Hkko% fdes"kkelrkfeo AA49AA
Lokè;k; ,"kka nsoRoa ri ,"kka lrkfeo A ej.ka ekuq"kks Hkko% ifjoknks·lrkfeo AA50AA
fda {kf=;k.kka nsoRoa d'p èkeZ% lrkfeo A d'pS"kka ekuq"kks Hkko% fdes"kkelrkfeo AA51AA
b"oL=es"kka nsoRoa ;K ,"kka lrkfeo A Hk;a oS ekuq"kks Hkko% ifjR;kxks·lrkfeo AA52AA

To appreciate the depth of these verses, we must drop the secular baggage of the modern age. Brahminical or not, this surely is a 'religious' text of the highest order and must be read as such. It delves deep into the foundations of right living and searches for the highest of human tendencies and aspirations. If the modern capitalist society has fallen into believing that 'profit' and 'product' define the core of human existence and aspiration, it has only to blame itself.

In every age and society there have been men who gave themselves completely to the task of finding the Truth, and others who felt committed to battle the forces of evil and darkness. Indians called them by the name of Brahmin and Kshatriya. The Yaksha asks Yudhishthira to identify the four constituent elements – divinity, essence, the unreal, and the human attribute (*devatva, sat, asat*and*manusho-bhavah*) – of these two.

A ceaseless study of the Self, or faithful devotion to ontology (*swaadhyay*) is the divinity of Brahmins; *tapas* is their essence; wrangling in arguments (*parivaad*) their undoing, the false and unreal in them (*asat*); and death is their human attribute.

Skill in wielding the weapons, in overcoming the forces of evil, is what constitutes the divinity in Kshatriyas; a life lived in *yajna* is their essence; abandoning of responsibility is *asat*, and fear their human attribute.

5. The *Yajna*(verses 53-54):

The Yaksha asked, 'What is that which constitutes the Sama of the sacrifice? What the Yajus of the sacrifice? What is that which is the refuge of a sacrifice? And what is that which sacrifice cannot do without?' (53)

Yudhishthira answered, 'Life is the Sama of the sacrifice; the mind is the Yajus of the sacrifice: the Rik is that which is the refuge of the sacrifice; and it is Rik alone which sacrifice cannot do without.'[112][1] (54)

fdesda ;fK;a lke fdesda ;fK;a ;tq% A dk pS"kka o`.kqrs ;Ka dka ;Kks ukfrorZrs AA53AA

çk.kks oS ;fK;a lke euks oS ;fK;a ;tq% A _xsdk o`.kqrs ;Ka rka ;Kks ukfrorZrs AA54AA

The external ritual of *yajna*, as of *puja* (the temple-worship), is a symbolic representation of a much larger movement that takes place in the inner spaces of human consciousness. *Yajna* is the act of offering all that we have and do, inside and outside, completely and absolutely, to the Deity. And the Deity, in whatever of its infinite forms we may choose to worship It, is the Supreme Purusha.

Life-force within and the Life without (*prana*) is the song (*saam*) of Sacrifice (*yajna*). All that moves inside – a million feelings, emotions and *bhavas,* and all that happens outside – the ever-changing chiaroscuro of events and circumstances is what makes the *saam*, the symphony of Life. Mind (*manah*) in its totality is the prayer, the aspiration (*yajuh*) that leads the Sacrifice. The Supreme Truth (*Rik*)[2] alone accepts the Sacrifice, and the Sacrifice does not move beyond it.

6. Carrying on the Creation (verses 55-56):

The Yaksha asked, 'What is of the foremost value to those that cultivate? What is of the foremost value to those that sow? What is of the foremost value to those that wish for prosperity in this world? And what is of the foremost value to those that bring forth?' (55)

Yudhishthira answered, 'That which is of the foremost value to those that cultivate is rain: that of the foremost value to those that sow is seed: that of the foremost value to those that bring forth is offspring.[113][3] (56)

fdafLonkoirka Js"Ba fdafLofUuoirka oje~ A fdafLor~ çfr"Bekukuka fdafLor~ çlorka oje~ AA55AA

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[1] 112. Nilakantha explains this correctly, as I imagine, by supposing that by 'sacrifice' is meant the spiritual sacrifice for the acquisition of pure knowledge. In the objective sacrifice which one celebrates, the Sama, the Yajus, and the Rik mantras are all necessary. In the subjective sacrifice the acquisition of true knowledge, life and mind are as necessary as the mantras from the Sama and the Yajur Vedas in an objective one. And as no objective sacrifice can do without the Riks, being principally dependent on them, so the subjective sacrifices for acquiring true knowledge can never do without prayerfulness, which, I imagine, is represented as the Riks. To understand this passage thoroughly would require an intimate acquaintance with the ritual of a sacrifice like the Agnishtoma or any other of that kind.

[2] The recipient of *Rik*, or to whom the *Riks* are revealed is *Rishi*.

[3] 113. Some texts read apatatam for uvapatam. If the former be the correct reading, the meaning would be--'What is the best of things that fall?' Nilakantha explains both avapatam nivapatam in a spiritual sense. By the first he understands--'They that offer oblation to the gods,' and by the second, 'They that offer oblations to the Pitris.' The necessity of a spiritual interpretation, however, is not very apparent.

o"kZekoirka Js"Ba chta fuoirka oje~ A xko% çfr"Bekukuka iq=% çlorka oj% AA56A

We read in the *Purusha-Sukta* how Creation begins with the Sacrifice of the Purusha, the primordial *yajna*. This creation is further sustained by a self-existing ceaseless universal *yajna*. There are four major movements that carry it on: by those who plant in every direction, near and far (*aavapataam*); those that offer to the elders of the Race, the *pittris*, the tradition (*nivapataam*); those who are firmly established in the immortality of a name (*pratishthmaananaam*) – a Christ, a Buddha; and those that bring forth progeny (*prasavataam*). The Yaksha's question is what is most precious to these four.

Yudhishthira explains that Rain, the life-giving waters, is the most precious thing to be brought down and offered to one and all by those who wish to work for the common weal. Those who wish to carry on the tradition must sow the seeds of knowledge and values so that coming generations inherit aplenty the gains of their forefathers. The *pratishthaman* are the greats who are known for the values and insights[1] they enshrine. To know why a son is so precious to those who are desirous of bringing forth progeny, we need to look at the clue in verse 72 where it is said that a son is the *atman* of his father. Those who wish to bring forth must bring forth their *atman*, and not the embodiment of their vital desires which is most generally the case.

7. A life laid waste (verses 57-58):

The Yaksha asked, 'What person, enjoying all the objects of the senses, endued with intelligence, regarded by the world and liked by all beings, though breathing, [is not yet alive]? (57)

[Yudhishthira answered, 'One who] doth not offer anything to these five, viz., gods, guests, servants, Pitris, and himself, though endued with breath, is not yet alive.' (58)

bfUæ;kFkkZuuqHkou~ cqf)ek¡Yyksdiwftr%A lEer% loZHkwrkukeqPN~olu~ dks u thofr AA57AA
nsorkfrfFkHk`R;kuka fir`.kkekReu'p ;%A u fuoZifr i¥~pkukeqPN~olu~ u l thofr AA58AA

With these verses we come to the close of the opening movement. Having defined the scope and direction of what constitutes the meaning of life, the Yaksha points out that even when a man has outwardly achieved all that is desirable in life –'enjoying all the objects of the senses, endued with intelligence, regarded by the world and liked by all beings'– he may still find that his life has been lived in vain. Yudhishthira's reply seems to reiterate that life is essentially a sacrifice, a *yajna*, an offering, lived not for oneself but for the All. 'For man thou seekest, not for thyself alone.'Therefore a man who does not offer the fruit his works to gods, guests, servants, elders and their own would not be found 'living'even if he possessed the entire wide world.

[1] *Gavah*, the plural for *gau,* commonly translated as cow, also means a ray of sun, hence, intuition, insight and light of knowledge

4.4.2 The Human Context

The second movement explores the larger terrestrial field in which man is set to work. The context moves closer, but the inquiry is still about the fundamentals: what is man, what the field; what are the moving forces and whither does he move?

8. What is man? (59-60):

The Yaksha asked, 'What is weightier than the earth itself? What is higher than the heavens?' What is fleeter than the wind? And what is more numerous than grass?' (59)

Yudhishthira answered, 'The mother is weightier than the earth; the father is higher than the heaven; the mind is fleeter than the wind; and our thoughts are more numerous than grass.' (60)

fdafLon~ xq#rja Hkwes% fdafLonqPprja p [kkr~A fdafLoPNh?kzrja ok;ks% fdafLon~ cgqrja r`.kkr~ AA59AA
ekrk xq#rjk Hkwes% [kkr~ firksPprjLrFkkA eu% 'kh?kzrja okrkfPpUrk cgqrjh r`.kkr~ AA60AA

The mother who shapes the body of man, his self, the personality which defines him is Prakriti. She is the Creatrix who has also created the earth and is therefore greater than the latter. Man is not born from earth; in the essence of his constituent personality he is much larger than his earthly tenement. To discover his truer self, he has to look for qualities he has inherited from beyond the earth, from his Mother who is greater than earth. The soul, the *atman*, the essence comes from the father who holds the mother in his embrace. He is the Purusha, the father, from beyond the highest skies, beyond whom there is nothing higher. Man, the manifest Self, is born from the union of Purusha and Prakriti.

It is mind that makes a man –*manah* defines *manushya*. Of its potentials only this much can be suggested that its energy, its nature, is swifter even than the wind (*vatah*), the swiftest of material energies. Mind is the seat of infinite ideas and thought, *chinta*, the material source of all creativity.

9. Verses 61-62:

The Yaksha asked, 'What is that which doth not close its eyes while asleep; What is that which doth not move after birth? What is that which is without heart? And what is that which swells with its own impetus?' (61)

Yudhishthira answered, 'A fish doth not close its eyes while asleep: an egg doth not move after birth: a stone is without heart: and a river swelleth with its own impetus.' (62)

fdafLor~ lqIra u fufe"kfr fdafLoTtkra u pksifrA dL;fLo)`n;a ukfLr fdafLon~ osxsu oèkZrs AA61AA
eRL;% lqIrks u fufe"kR;.Ma tkra u pksifrA v'euks ân;a ukfLr unh osxsu oèkZrs AA62AA

The symbolism is not obvious here. Nilakantha's interpretation seems far-fetched and is not very convincing. He suggests the fish symbolises the *Jiva*, unblinking even while asleep, one-pointed in crossing over to the other shore. The egg refers to the Cosmic Egg (*Brahmand*), the stone suggests the state of *yogins* who have transcended the body, and the river is *chitta-nadi*, the river of consciousness.

10. Friends (63-64):

The Yaksha asked, 'Who is the friend of the exile? Who is the friend of the householder? Who is the friend of him that ails? And who is the friend of one about to die?' (63)

Yudhishthira answered, 'The friend of the exile in a distant land is his companion, the friend of the householder is the wife; the friend of him that ails is the physician: and the friend of him about to die is charity.'(64)

fdafLor~ çolrks fe=a fda fLofUe=a x`gs lr%A vkrqjL; p fda fe=a fdafLofUe=a efj";r% AA63AA
lkFkZ% çolrks fe=a Hkk;kZ fe=a x`gs lr%A vkrqjL; fHk"kaxfe=a nkua fe=a efj";r% AA64AA

While abroad (*pravasato*), a co-traveller, one who shares the same goal (*sarthah*), is man's friend. At home, the wife is the best friend – in the reverse context of a woman, the husband would be her best friend. For a sick man, desirous of life, a physician obviously is the much needed friend. But how is the 'giving' (*daanam*) the friend of a dying man? What holds back man from a peaceful death is his attachment to various possessions. Giving helps him to free himself from attachments and this paves the way for a smoother transition to the other worlds.

11-12. The Larger Questions (65-68):

The Yaksha asked,—'Who is the guest of all creatures? What is the eternal duty? What, O foremost of kings, is Amrita? And what is this entire Universe?' (65)

Yudhishthira answered,—Agni is the guest of all creatures: the milk of kine is amrita: Homa (therewith) is the eternal duty: and this Universe consists of air alone.'[114][1] (66)

The Yaksha asked,—'What is that which sojourneth alone? What is that which is re-born after its birth? What is the remedy against cold? And what is the largest field?' (67)

Yudhishthira answered,—'The sun sojourneth alone; the moon takes birth anew: fire is the remedy against cold: and the Earth is the largest field.' (68)

dks·frfFk% loZHkwrkuka fdaLon~ èkeZa lukrue~A ve`ra fdafLon~ jktsUæfda fLor~ loZfena txr~AA65AA
vfrfFk% loZHkwrkukefXu% lkseks xoke`re~A lukruks·e`rks èkekZs ok;q% loZfena txr~AA66AA

[1] 114. Yudhishthira has the authority of the Srutis for saying that the one pervading element of the universe is air.

fdafLonsdks fopjrs tkr% dks tk;rs iqu%A fda fLof)eL; HkS"kT;a fda fLonkoiua egr~AA67AA
lw;Z ,dks fopjrs pUæek tk;rs iqu%A vfXufgZeL; HkS"kT;a Hkwfejkoiua egr~AA68AA

Agni, who receives and carries forward the *yajna*, the psychic fire within, is the universal guest. She must be tended with care and absolute self-giving if the sacrifice is to gather strength and make any headway. *Soma* and *go* (xks), both are used for a ray of light and suggest symbolically Truth-Knowledge, which is the leader and also the fructification of *yajna*. Being the essence of movement and the transcendent close of all movements, Truth alone is immortal as well as the secret of immortality. The eternal alone (*sanatan*) is the immortal *dharma*. The temporal, the contextual is not valid for all times. Nilakantha explains that 'the universe consists of air alone' is the received knowledge (*shruti*) about cosmology. *Jagat*, as we saw in Isha Upanishad, is the universal motion, and motion is inseparable from the medium which also forms its essential substance. To expand more would require a comparative study of modern physics and ancient cosmology, which is not possible here.

Truth, residing at the core of an individual and the cosmos and also the supreme Transcendent one is the Sun who moves alone, one without a second –*ekmevadwitiyam*. Imagination is the Moon which constantly renews itself and is perpetually reborn. Cold symbolises inertia and death, for which the psychic fire, the prime mover, is the only remedy. Earth is the greatest field for man's action. Man is here on the earth to work for earth's redemption, for making the earth divine, for bringing the heaven to earth.

13. The Human Aspiration (69-70):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is the highest refuge of virtue? What of fame? What of heaven? And what, of happiness?' (69)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Liberality is the highest refuge of virtue: gift, of fame: truth, of heaven: and good behaviour, of happiness.' (70)

fda fLonsdina èkE;Za fda fLonsdina ;'k%A fda fLonsdina LoX;Za fda fLonsdina lq[ke~AA69AA

nk{;esdina èkE;Za nkuesdina ;'k%A lR;esdina LoX;Za 'khyesdina lq[ke~AA70AA

Dharma, esteem (*yasha*), heaven and happiness are the four things that men seek most. What constitutes the single central foundation (*ekpadam*) of each one of these? Yudhishthira replies: *dharma* rests on skill and perfection (*dakshyam*); the act of giving (*daanam*) leads to an esteemed existence; truth alone delivers one to heaven; and right conduct (*sheel*) is the secret of happiness.

14. The Human Support (71-72):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is the soul of man? Who is that friend bestowed on man by the gods? What is man's chief support? And what also is his chief refuge?' (71)

Yudhishthira answered,—'The son is a man's soul: the wife is the friend bestowed on man by the gods; the clouds are his chief support; and gift is his chief refuge.' (72)

fdafLonkRek euq";L; fdafLon~ nSo—r% l[kkA mithoua fdafLonL; fdafLonL; ijk;.ke~AA71AA

iq= vkRek euq";L; Hkk;kZ nSo—r% l[kkA mithoua p itZU;ks nkueL; ijk;.ke~AA72AA

What is the soul of man; who is the divinely ordained companion; and what constitute the chief support and refuge of man? Yudhishthira replies: 'a son is the soul of man'. Whether he is aware of it or not, the son inherits whatever the father has accumulated as insight and value, as the dynamically lived truth. The son is free to accept or reject his inheritance, to carry it forward or dump it on wayside. But either way, he carries on the movement and hands it over to the next generation. He is the necessary link in an eternal progression. The wife, the female companion for life, is man's friend (and vice versa) ordained by gods (*daivkritah*). *Daiva* in Sanskrit also denotes fate and destiny which in some way is the fructification of one's *karma*. Therefore, a wife or husband is the fated companion we have won by our own doings. Of course, there are others, *sanyasins* for example, who choose to travel light without a companion, alone to the Alone. The clouds that bring the gift of life-giving waters to man are his chief support (*upjivanam*), and giving (*daanam*) is his supreme refuge.

Don't you wonder why our text, or the ancient Indian culture whose voice it is, gives such centrality to *daanam*, to the act of giving? The act of possession forms, defines and reinforces the ego. With the act of giving you take the opposite path that leads to the diminishing of ego and the awakening of *atman* and Brahman. It is an ancient path that does not go well with modernism, one would argue. Yudhishthira would call it, not just ancient, but the eternal path. Well, we are free to choose the 'modern' path that unerringly leads to a highly sophisticated hospital or to a psychiatric session of depth analysis! Or, won't we practice a little of *daanam*, even if it be rather tentatively? Now that the Yoga is again fashionable, there is no harm in a little experimentation.

15. The Human Desirables (73-74):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is the best of all laudable things? What is the most valuable of all his possessions? What is the best of all gains? And what is the best of all kinds of happiness?' (73)

Yudhishthira answered,—"The best of all laudable things is skill; the best of all possessions is knowledge: the best of all gains is health: and contentment is the best of all kinds of happiness.' (74)

èkU;kukeqÙkea fdafLon~ èkukuka L;kr~ fdeqÙkee~A ykHkkukeqÙkea fda L;kr~ lq[kkuka L;kr~ fdeqÙkee~AA73AA

èkU;kukeqÙkea nk{;a èkukukeqÙkea Jqre~A ykHkkuka Js; vkjksX;a lq[kkuka rqf"V#Ùkek AA74AA

What is the best in the blessed (*dhanyanaam*)? The Sanskrit word *dhanya* literally means 'the giver of *dhanam*', which has a much wider connotation than mere material riches when we consider its usage in such words as *tapodhanam*and*vidyadhanam*. We also have to take note of the next part of Yudhishthira's answer where he says that *shruti*– divine hearing, revelation, the highest knowledge – is the best of riches. Before one can give, one must possess what one is about to give. Those who can give the highest are those who possess the highest. These indeed are blessed. An unsurpassable dexterity in works (*dakshyam*) is the greatest of characteristics they exhibit. It is this skill that helps them connect to the Real, and also which helps them to pass on their wealth to others.

The best of profits is *aarogyam*, a total absence of sick, dark and distorted movements in any part of the being – mind, life or body. Such would be the very foundation for following the path of *dharma*, according to Nilakantha. The best of happiness is contentment, which comes from the perception that one is always part of a holistic movement which is always perfect.

4.4.3 The Right Conduct or Sadhana:

Having defined the larger contexts that validate man's strivings, the text focuses on man's immediate field, his conscious participation in the movement of universal *dharma,* the *sadhana* in everyday living, that prepares and leads him to his supreme goal. What follows is a concise manual for right living. The path is suggested, not explained. The Indian way of teaching avoids giving a methodology, but encourages one to discover it for oneself by deep reflection and self-exploration.

16. The Basics (75-76):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is the highest duty in the world? What is that virtue which always beareth fruit? What is that which if controlled, leadeth not to regret? And who are they with whom an alliance cannot break?' (75)

Yudhishthira answered,—'The highest of duties is to refrain from injury: the rites ordained in the Three (Vedas) always bear fruit: the mind, if controlled, leadeth to no regret: and an alliance with the good never breaketh.' (76)

d'p èkeZ% ijks yksds d'p èkeZ% lnkQy%A fda fu;E; u 'kkspfUr dS'p lafèkuZ th;ZrsAA75AA

vku`'kaL;a ijks èkeZL=;hèkeZ% lnkQy%A euks ;E; u 'kkspfUr lafèk% lfn~HkuZ th;ZrsAA76AA

Before you undertake a journey, you need to know where you are going. The highest *dharma* in this world, Yudhishthira tells, is not to hurt anyone by thought, speech or action (*aanrishansyam*). Gandhi's practice of *ahimsa* is a living re-discovery of an ancient teaching. Long before Gandhi, Yudhishthira had practised it to perfection (see verses 129-133). The *dharma* that always bears fruit is the triune-dharma (*trayidharma*). Perhaps this triune path was so well known in the Mahabharata age that the poet does not find it necessary to elaborate. Nilakantha takes it to mean the three syllables of *Aum* and

its elaborate significance as detailed in the Mandukya Upanishad and elsewhere. The triune dharma can also be understood as the dharma of mind, life and body and can equally be related to the triune path of knowledge, devotion and works of the *Gita*. More can be discovered in experience alone. Which control (yam-niyam) does not lead to any regret? A complete mastery over the mind, which includes control and regulation, never leads to any regret. 'Who are they with whom an alliance (*sandhi*) cannot break?'*Sandhi* also means 'union'. Therefore Yudhishthira's reply more pointedly suggests that it is union with the Real (*sat*) that alone is permanent and can never be broken.

Mastering the mind and keeping the resolve of not hurting any one in the centre, one should practise the triune dharma and aim at a lasting union with the Real.

17. Renouncing the Darkness (77-78):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is that which, if renounced, maketh one agreeable? What is that which, if renounced, leadeth to no regret? What is that which, if renounced, maketh one wealthy? And what is that which if renounced, maketh one happy?' (77)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Pride, if renounced, maketh one agreeable; wrath, if renounced leadeth to no regret: desire, if renounced, maketh one wealthy: and avarice, if renounced, maketh one happy.' (78)

fda uq fgRok fç;ks Hkofr fda uq fgRok u 'kkspfrA
fda uq fgRokFkZoku~ Hkofr fda uq fgRok lq[kh Hkosr~AA77AA
ekua fgRok fç;ks Hkofr Øksèka fgRok u 'kkspfrA
dkea fgRokFkZoku~ Hkofr yksHka fgRok lq[kh Hkosr~AA78AA

At the outset one needs to take stock of powers and forces that block one's progress on the path. Even if they can't be dealt at once, these constitutional weaknesses in the very nature of man's being need to be dealt eventually. Pride, anger, desire and greed are the most deadly of these, according to our text. Pride springs from the notion that I am the doer, the fountainhead of my actions. It is a separative movement, which makes one a proud achiever, a tyrant. It is born from a primal ignorance which refuses to see that it is always the Whole that acts, and not the minuscule part. Renouncing the pride of being a doer leads to an identity with the Whole, and as a shining representative of That, the One, one becomes dear to all.

Renunciation of anger is the one thing that can never be regretted. But it is easier said than done. Anger is an invincible foe, not easily to be overcome, warns the text in verse 92. Renunciation of desire (*kaam*) is what makes a person rich, and not the multitude of his possessions. As long as I want something, I am a poor man. When I reach a state of mind from where I can firmly pronounce that I do not need anything, I have found my fulfilment. Greed (*lobh*) is an ugly downward movement of desire, the desire of wanting more –'*ye dil manage* more', the mantra and dharma of contemporary capitalist society. Only by renouncing greed one finds happiness, is at peace with oneself. Living with greed is living with a perpetual hell of misery.

18. The Purposiveness behind Giving (79-80):

The Yaksha asked,—'For what doth one give away to Brahmanas? For what to mimes and dancers?For what to servants? And for what to king?' (79)

Yudhishthira answered,—'It is for religious merit that one giveth away to Brahmanas: it is for fame that one giveth away to mimes and dancers: it is for supporting them that one giveth away to servants: and it is for obtaining relief from fear that one giveth to kings.' (80)

fdeFkZa czkã.ks nkua fdeFkZa uVurZdsA fdeFkZa pSo Hk`R;s"kq fdeFkZa pSo jktlqAA79AA

èkekZFkZa czkã.ks nkua ;'kks·FkZa uVurZdsA Hk`R;s"kq Hkj.kkFkZa oS Hk;kFkZa pSo jktlq AA80AA

There are four major recipients of offerings and charity: brahmins, performers, servants and the king. By making an offering to the brahmin, one receives in turn spiritual energy and knowledge and thus grows in *dharma*. The performers on receiving donations sing your name abroad and make you famous. One gives to servants, because they need to be looked after. To the king, one gives for obtaining relief from fear.

19. The World and Beyond (81-82):

The Yaksha asked,—'With what is the world enveloped? What is that owing to which a thing cannot discover itself? For what are friends forsaken? And for what doth one fail to go to heaven?' (81)

Yudhishthira answered,—'The world is enveloped with darkness. Darkness doth not permit a thing to show itself. It is from avarice that friends are forsaken. And it is connection with the world for which one faileth to go to heaven.' (82)

dsufLonko`rks yksd% dsufLoUu çdk'krsA dsu R;tfr fe=kf.k dsu LoxZa u xPNfrAA81AA

vKkusuko`rks yksdLrelk u çdk'krsA yksHkkr~ R;tfr fe=kf.k laxkr~ LoxZa u xPNfr AA82AA

After a couple of lighter questions about everyday conduct, the Yaksha returns to a larger philosophical inquiry that alone gives meaning and value to our conduct. The answer defines the nature of the world in which we function. This world is ever enveloped in a thick veil of Ignorance (*ajnana*). The following elaboration of the seven-fold veil of Ignorance is from Sri Aurobindo:

> We are ignorant of the Absolute which is the source of all being and becoming; we take partial facts of being, temporal relations of the becoming for the whole truth of existence, — that is the first, the original ignorance. We are ignorant of the spaceless, timeless, immobile and immutable Self; we take the constant mobility and mutation of the cosmic becoming in Time and Space for the whole truth of existence, — that is the second, the cosmic ignorance. We are ignorant of our universal self, the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, our infinite unity with all being and becoming; we take our limited egoistic mentality, vitality, corporeality for our true self and regard everything other than that as not-

> self, — that is the third, the egoistic ignorance. We are ignorant of our eternal becoming in Time; we take this little life in a small span of Time, in a petty field of Space, for our beginning, our middle and our end, — that is the fourth, the temporal ignorance. Even within this brief temporal becoming we are ignorant of our large and complex being, of that in us which is superconscient, subconscient, intraconscient, circumconscient to our surface becoming; we take that surface becoming with its small selection of overtly mentalised experiences for our whole existence, — that is the fifth, the psychological ignorance. We are ignorant of the true constitution of our becoming; we take the mind or life or body or any two of these or all three for our true principle or the whole account of what we are, losing sight of that which constitutes them and determines by its occult presence and is meant to determine sovereignly by its emergence their operations, — that is the sixth, the constitutional ignorance. As a result of all these ignorances, we miss the true knowledge, government and enjoyment of our life in the world; we are ignorant in our thought, will, sensations, actions, return wrong or imperfect responses at every point to the questionings of the world, wander in a maze of errors and desires, strivings and failures, pain and pleasure, sin and stumbling, follow a crooked road, grope blindly for a changing goal, — that is the seventh, the practical ignorance. (*The Life Divine* 680-681)

Ganguli translates both *ajnana* and *tamas* as darkness, but one needs to make some distinction. *Ajnana* suggests a half-awakened state of subconscient, where the false is taken as truth, the appearance covers the Real, and the rope becomes a snake. *Tamas* is the absolute darkness, the infinite Inconscient which does not allow any room for light. It is the cause of our refusal to see any other point of view than our own.

A puppet in the hands of *ajnana* and *tamas*, man, caught in the greed for more, forsakes and sacrifices the best of his friends. His attachments to things of the world of appearances hold him back from approaching the shore of light, the heaven (*swargam*).

20. A Death-like Existence (83-84):

The Yaksha asked,—'For what may one be considered as dead? For what may a kingdom be considered as dead? For what may a Sraddha be considered as dead? And for what, a sacrifice?' (83)

Yudhishthira answered,—'For want of wealth may a man be regarded as dead. A kingdom for want of a king may be regarded as dead. A Sraddha that is performed with the aid of a priest that hath no learning may be regarded as dead. And a sacrifice in which there are no gifts to Brahmanas is dead.' (84)

e`r% dFka L;kr~ iq#"k% dFka jk"Vªa e`ra Hkosr~A Jk)a e`ra dFka ok L;kr~ dFka ;Kks e`rks Hkosr~ AA83AA
e`rks nfjæ% iq#"kks e`ra jk"Vªejktde~A e`reJksf=;a Jk)a e`rks ;KLRonf{k.k% AA84AA

The opposite of the immortal state of liberated souls is the mortal state of souls in bondage. A man devoid of any wealth, *daridrah*, is like a dead man, tells Yudhishthira. If you refer to the fifteenth question, where we discussed the riches of *shruti*, and also

tapodhanam and *vidyadhanam*, you will know who a *daridrah* is. A nation (*rashtra*) is dead without a king. Dhritrashtra has rightly been seen as the Ego which has usurped the empire of the soul. *Rashtra*, therefore can be easily taken to suggest the field (*kshetra*) of existence, which without its knower and ruler (*khsetrajna*) is truly in a state of death. *Shraadha* is the act of offering to the Elders who have departed from this shore. Such an offering can be made only by a man of knowledge, *shrotriya*, who knows the tradition, gratefully acknowledges his inheritance, and also knows the worlds beyond. The *shraadha* performed by anyone else is meaningless. Similarly a *yajna* is complete only when offerings (*dakshina*) have been made to all who have participated in the *yajna.* No *yajna* is done for the benefit of self; it is performed for the welfare of all. Without this giving out to All, the *yajna* is dead and will not bear any fruit. Also remember, when you make an offering, you always offer to That, no matter who your recipient be.

4.4.4 The Path:

The dialogue moves to the next step and takes up questions relating to the Path: the nature of provisions one needs to carry or avoid – food, drink, poison; the good companions – knowledge, control, compassion, simplicity; the evil companions one needs to drop at the outset – anger, greed, pride, attachment, indolenc. As we will see, the list that follows is quite exhaustive, and the suggestions are far-reaching in their effect.

21. The Path and Provisions (85-86):

The Yaksha asked,—'What constitutes the way? What, hath been spoken of as water? What, as food? And what, as poison? Tell us also what is the proper time of a Sraddha, and then drink and take away as much as thou likest!' (85)

Yudhishthira answered,—'They that are good constitute the way.[115][1] Space hath been spoken of as water.[116][2] The cow is food.[117][3] A request is poison. And a Brahmana is regarded as the proper time of a Sraddha.[118][4] I do not know what thou mayst think of all this, O Yaksha?' (86)

dk fnd~ fdeqnda çksäa fdeUua fda p oS fo"keA Jk)L; dkyek[;kfg rr% fic gjLo p AA85AA

[1] 115. The word used in the question is dik, literally, direction. Obviously, of course, it means in this connection way. Yudhishthira answers that the way which one is to tread along is that of the good.

[2] 116. Footnote 2: The Srutis actually speak of space as water. These are questions to test Yudhishthira's knowledge of the Vedic cosmogony.

[3] 117. The Srutis speak of the cow as the only food, in the following sense. The cow gives milk. The milk gives butter. The butter is used in Homa. The Homa is the cause of the clouds. The clouds give rain. The rain makes the seed to sprout forth and produce food. Nilakantha endeavours to explain this in a spiritual sense. There is however, no need of such explanation here.

[4] 118. What Yudhishthira means to say is that there is no special time for a Sraddha. It is to be performed whenever a good and able priest may be secured.

lUrks fnx~ tyekdk'ka xkSjUua çkFkZuk fo"ke~A Jk)L; czkã.k% dky% dFka ok ;{k eU;ls AA86AA

'They that are good constitute the way' (*santo dig*) should be read with 'that alone is the path along which the great have trod' (*mahajano yen gatahsapanthah* verse 117). The path is like the razor's edge (*kshurasyadhara*), and the Great Ones who have trod this path before are the pioneers who have found the way for us, the lesser mortals. Those that actually walk the path know it first hand that there is nothing like walking in someone else's footsteps. At each step, the footprint in front has to be deciphered, interpreted anew, for there are so many of them leading everywhere. At the end of the day, it is you who do the walking and you who arrive anywhere, not the man who inspired you or showed you the way. Still, a nodding gratitude to the compass that helped you find your way not only makes you humble but also keeps you connected to a long line of travellers without making you, in the least, a 'follower'.

To explain how the skies can be taken to be water, Ganguli translates *aakash* as 'space' and comments that the Yaksha is testing Yudhishthira's knowledge of Vedic cosmogny. Nilakantha simply ascribes such knowledge to *shruti*. The symbolism can also be read as the relationship between the life-giving substances (water) and the Infinite (*aakash*) beyond which there is nothing. Further, we are told that the earth is our food (*anna*), that it is earth that creates, sustains and nourishes us, at least, in the nature of our earthly existence. Read together, we are nurtured by both*aakash* and *prithvi*, our father and mother.

'A request is poison' (*prarthanavisham*). Never ask for a favour, even from God. What is the state of mind that asks? It is the feeling of incompleteness, of not having enough, desiring more, of helplessness, of not being able to bear one's fate – a state of suffering born from acute and intense ignorance. Begging for help only intensifies this state, makes it more real, and plunges the consciousness further down. The path is trod by moving away from darkness, not moving into a greater darkness.

What is the auspicious time for performing *shraadha*? A brahmin is that time, Yudhishthira replies. How can a man be time? Not man, but attaining of manhood is in time. Flowering into brahminhood is the moment when offerings can be made to the elders of the Race. To know what constitutes this brahminhood, we will have to wait for verses 107-111.

22-23. Companions on the Path (87-90):

The Yaksha asked,—'What hath been said to be the sign of asceticism? And what is true restraint? What constitutes forgiveness. And what is shame?' (87)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Staying in one's own religion is asceticism: the restraint of the mind is of all restraints the true one: forgiveness consists in enduring enmity; and shame, in withdrawing from all unworthy acts.' (88)

The Yaksha asked,—'What, O king is said to be knowledge? What, tranquillity? What constitutes mercy? And what hath been called simplicity?' (89)

Yudhishthira answered,—'True knowledge is that of Divinity. True tranquillity is that of the heart. Mercy consists in wishing happiness to all. And simplicity is equanimity of heart.' (90)

ri% fday{k.ka çksäa dks ne'p çdhfrZr%A {kek p dk ijk çksäk dk p ºzh% ifjdhfrZrk AA87AA

ri% LoèkeZofrZRoa eulks neua ne%A {kek }U}lfg".kqRoa gzhjdk;ZfuorZre~ AA88AA

fda Kkua çksP;rs jktu~ d% 'ke'p çdhfrZr%A n;k p dk ijk çksäk fda pktZoeqnkâre~ AA89AA

Kkua rÙokFkZlEcksèk% 'kef'pÙkç'kkUrrkA n;k loZlq[kSf"kRoektZoa lefpÙkrk AA90AA

The eight major qualities that propel us forward are listed as askesis, control, forgiveness, modesty, knowledge, tranquillity, compassion and simplicity.

Tapas or askesis consists in staying firm in one's *dharma,* sticking to one's path, no matter how difficult it grows. Such is also the repeated injunction from Krishna in the *Gita.* When you stick to your path, the path gets clearer and you gain in strength. To rein in the mind is the supreme discipline. The wandering mind not only dissipates energy, it also often leads us astray. Forgiveness is the capacity to bear the conflict of dualities. Why do you get hurt, or get angry at people and circumstances? Is it because you find them moving in the opposite or 'wrong' direction? The world as seen through mind is a dualistic play of light and darkness, good and bad, pleasure and pain. To forgive is to recognise and understand the other as the necessary half of existence, not to be in conflict of wishing it away. This is true forgiveness which helps you move closer to the unitary state of being by transcending the dualistic nature of mind. Modesty (*hri*) is a state of mind that refuses to be caught in the unnecessary and inessential.

True knowledge is the knowledge of fundamentals, beyond the quagmire of peripherals. A supreme peacefulness of *chitta*– the ever-flowing river of impressions – is beingtranquil (*sham*). Compassion is wishing well to every creature, and equanimity of *chitta*is the true simplicity. The controlling of *chitta* is the very first instruction in Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutra.* Start by watching the pell-mell movement of impressions in your mind. If you persist a long time, you become aware of the watcher turning into a growing intelligence within, and simultaneously things start falling into place, leading eventually to peacefulness and equanimity of *chitta.* Try it out. Indian teaching is all about experience. No one ever reached Johannesburg by gazing at the atlas. Yudhishthira is not a subject for an M.A. degree!

24-25. Enemies of the Path: the Traps and Spoilsports (91-94):

The Yaksha asked,—'What enemy is invincible? What constitutes an incurable disease for man? What sort of a man is called honest and what dishonest?' (91)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Anger is an invincible enemy. Covetousness constitutes an incurable disease. He is honest that desires the weal of all creatures, and he is dishonest who is unmerciful.' (92)

The Yaksha asked,—'What, O king, is ignorance? And what is pride? What also is to be understood by idleness? And what hath been spoken of as grief?' (93)

Yudhishthira answered,—'True ignorance consists in not knowing one's duties. Pride is a consciousness of one's being himself an actor or sufferer in life. Idleness consists in not discharging one's duties, and ignorance in grief.' (94)

d% 'k=qnZqtZ;% iqalka d'p O;kfèkjuUrd%A dh–'k'p Le`r% lkèkqjlkèkq% dh–'k% Le`r% AA91AA

Øksèk% lqnqtZ;% 'k=qykZsHkks O;kfèkjuUrd%A loZHkwrfgr% lkèkqjlkèkqfuZnZ;% Le`r% AA92AA

dks eksg% çksP;rs jktu~ d'p eku% çdhfrZr%A fdekyL;a p foKs;a d'p 'kksd% çdhfrZr% AA93AA

eksgks fg èkeZew<+Roa ekuLRokRekfHkekfurkA èkeZfuf"Ø;rk··yL;a 'kksdLRoKkueqP;rs AA94AA

Call them human weaknesses or forces of darkness, there are movements that hinder man's onward journey, his spiritual evolution. Among these, anger is the first one listed here. An invincible foe, anger is rooted in man's egoism. Ego is a false projection: there is nothing real about it, and it fears every moment its very existence. From this fear and insecurity spring the waves of anger aimed at anything that questions the reign and authority of ego. Anger feeds the ego. It is only in the finding of one universal and transcendental Self that the ego can be dissolved. Likewise, greed is a disease, a sickness of mind that is unending. Once the nature of greed is truly seen and understood, there awakens the possibility of returning to health. Diagnosis, they say, is the first step to recovery. After recognising anger and greed as potent pitfalls on the way, the traveller is warned to distinguish between the good and the not-good (*sadhu* and *asadhu*). One who is given to the well-being of all is *sadhu*, and the one who lacks in compassion is *asadhu.*

In the next verse, the Yaksha asks Yudhishthira to identify what lies at the heart of some of the most persistent and nagging of man's existential questions: attachment, pride, indolence and sorrow. Yudhishthira's epigrammatic reply, point to point, places him as the master artist of the Path. An ontological idiocy (*dharmamudhatvam*) is the cause of all attachment. Not knowing the Being, we are trapped in the entanglements of becoming. All pride is rooted in the pride of 'I' (*atmabhiman*). When the *dharma*, the ontology, the knowledge of Being becomes inoperative (*dharmanishkriyata*), indolence, the effective arrest of being, is the result. Sorrow is simply ignorance (*ajnana*). Not knowing the Real, one is tossed up and down in the dark labyrinths of the unreal, and that is the measure of all sorrow and suffering. Children of night have no hope, except that they die with their mother, Night!

26-27. Back on the Path (95-98):

The Yaksha asked,—'What hath steadiness been said by the Rishis to be? And what, patience? What also is a real ablution? And what is charity?' (95)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Steadiness consists in one's staying in one's own religion, and true patience consists in the subjugation of the senses. A true bath consists in washing the mind clean of all impurities, and charity consists in protecting all creatures.' (96)

The Yaksha asked,—'What man should be regarded as learned, and who should be called an atheist? Who also is to be called ignorant? What is called desire and what are the sources of desire? And what is envy?' (97)

Yudhishthira answered,—'He is to be called learned who knoweth his duties. An atheist is he who is ignorant and so also he is ignorant who is an atheist. Desire is due to objects of possession, and envy is nothing else than grief of heart.' (98)

fda LFkS;Ze`f"kfHk% çksäa fda p èkS;Zeqnkâre~ A Lukua p fda ija çksäa nkua p fdfegksP;rs AA95AA

LoèkeZs fLFkjrk LFkS;±èkS;ZfefUæ;fuxzg% A Lukua eukseyR;kxks nkua oS Hkwrj{k.ke~ AA96AA

d% if.Mr% iqek¥~Ks;ks ukfLrd% d'p mP;rs A
dks ew[kZ% d'p dke% L;kr~ dks eRlj bfr Le`r% AA97AA

èkeZK% if.Mrks Ks;ks ukfLrdks ew[kZ mP;rs A dke% lalkjgsrq'p âÙkkiks eRlj% Le`r% AA98AA

It is time to take stock and reiterate a few things. To be immovable (*sthir*) is to be unwavering in following the law of one's being (*swadharma*). Being established in one's *dharma* is not the same as drifting along the muddy flow of one's nature. The law of being not only masters but also makes the movement of nature flow upward. Patience is controlling the unruly unintelligent senses. Cleansing the filth of mind is true bathing, and *daanam* is protecting all beings.

At this point, having travelled a little way, one may feel pride in one's achievements and may look condescendingly at others. But a man who suffers from 'superiority-complex' is at the same time a victim of 'inferiority-complex'. A proud man is also envious. The Yaksha therefore asks Yudhishthira to define such terms which may be troubling a man at this stage. Who is a man of knowledge; who is a non-believer, and who a grossly stupid person; what is desire and what is envy?

Only a man who knows the *dharma* (*dharmajna*) is truly a man of knowledge. The man who denies the existence of That –*naaasti*– is in true sense a non-believer (*nastik*) endued with highest stupidity (*moorkhah*). Desire is longing and striving for things of the world (*kaamahsamsarhetuh*). Envy (*matsarah*) is the smouldering of heart (*hrit-taapah*), on noticing qualities in others –Nilakantha adds. "Oh how I wish I had the same big car which my neighbour has or else he also didn't have such things and was as poor as me!" This is how the heart burns in a dark fire and suffers from the disease called envy.

28. Darkness in the Heart (99-100):

The Yaksha asked,—'What is pride, and what is hypocrisy? What is the grace of the gods, and what is wickedness?' (99)

Yudhishthira answered,—'Stolid ignorance is pride. The setting up of a religious standard is hypocrisy. The grace of the gods is the fruit of our gifts, and wickedness consists in speaking ill of others.' (100)

dks·gadkj bfr çksä% d'p nEHk% çdhfrZr%A fda rn~ nSoa ija çksäa fda rr~ iS'kqU;eqP;rs AA99AA

egkKkuegadkjks nEHkks èkekZs èotksPNª;%A nSoa nkuQya çksäa iS'kqU;a ijnw"k.ke~ AA100AA

There are other pitfalls to be guarded against – egoism (*ahamkara*), spiritual hypocrisy (*dambh*), wickedness (*paishunya*), and the concept of Fortune (*diava*). Egoism, explains Yudhishthira, springs from supreme Ignorance. Spiritual hypocrisy is being intolerant towards other viewpoints and parading one's belief, one's guru and one's scripture as the supreme truth. Wickedness consists in finding faults in others and painting them darker than they be. Fate or fortune, tells Yudhishthira, is the outcome of the offerings made by us. *Daanam*, as pointed out earlier, is one of the central issues in these dialogues, and must therefore be understood in its widest sense. It certainly means more than mere charity, which often inflates the egoism in the giver, and should never be equated either with the symbolic offerings made to a deity or religious organisation. *Daanam* is to be understood as a total dedication of one's whole life to the Highest, as seen in the example of a Buddha or a Gandhi.

29. Making the Impossible Possible (101-102):

The Yaksha asked,—'Virtue, profit, and desire are opposed to one another. How could things thus antagonistic to one another exist together?' (101)

Yudhishthira answered,—'When a wife and virtue agree with each other, then all the three thou hast mentioned may exist together.' (102)

èkeZ'pkFkZ'p dke'p ijLijfojksfèku% A ,"kka fuR;fo#)kuka dFkesd= laxe% AA101AA

;nkèkeZ'p Hkk;kZ p ijLijo'kkuqxkS A rnk èkekZFkZdkekuka =;k.kkefi laxe% AA102AA

Now the Yaksha throws an almost impossible question: "Virtue, profit, and desire (*dharma, artha,* and*kama*) are opposed to one another. How could things thus antagonistic to one another exist together?" Yudhishthira solves a near-impossibility with another near-impossibility: when the wife and dharma take possession of each other (*parasparvashanugau*), the three eternal opponents may come under one roof. Women bring forth and nurture life and are therefore natural creatures of this world. They are often devoted to working out the fulfilment of *artha* and *kama*. Most men who take to a religious way of life often renounce the world and turn *sanyasins*. *Dharma* is thus usually

associated with the renunciation of the world. Yudhishthira points out that only a woman, while retaining the propensities for *artha* and *kama,* can still turn to the path of *dharma.*

4.4.5 The Final Questions:

Is there a reason to call the last five the final questions? Well, the poet of the *Mahabharata* does not provide any classification for the series of questions. The classification provided here is merely an attempt to decipher some pattern behind the series. Three of the last questions (31, 33 and 34) have certainly a finality about them. For example, the poet may have foreseen the possibility of being charged a brahminist. There is no other reason why he should devote five verses – in such a highly aphoristic text where each verse has enough substance for five full-length essays – for explaining what makes a brahmin. Similarly, five verses are given to the final mysteries, and three to explaining what makes a supremely fulfilled man.

30. The Door toEverlasting Hell – an Interpolation? (103-106):

The Yaksha asked,—'O bull of the Bharata race, who is he that is condemned to everlasting hell? It behoveth thee to soon answer the question that I ask!' (103)

Yudhishthira answered,—'He that summoneth a poor Brahmana promising to make him a gift and then tells him that he hath nothing to give, goeth to everlasting hell. He also must go to everlasting hell, who imputes falsehood to the Vedas, the scriptures, the Brahmanas, the gods, and the ceremonies in honour of the Pitris, He also goeth to everlasting hell who though in possession of wealth, never giveth away nor enjoyeth himself from avarice, saying, he hath none.' (104-106)

v{k;ks ujd% dsu çkI;rs Hkjr"kZHk A ,rUes i`PNr% ç'ua rPNh?kza oäqegZfl AA103AA
czkã.ka Lo;ekgw; ;kpekuefd¥~pue~ A i'pkUukLrhfr ;ks czw;kr~ lks·{k;a ujda oztsr AA104AA

osns"kq èkeZ'kkL=s"kq feF;k ;ks oS f}tkfr"kq A nsos"kq fir`èkeZs"kq lks·{k;a ujda oztsr AA105AA

fo|ekus èkus yksHkkn~ nkuHkkxfooftZr% A i'pkUukLrhfr ;ks czw;kn~ lks·{k;a ujda oztsr AA106AA

With substantial variations found in the many editions of the *Mahabharata* available to us, it is only reasonable to assume that that there must have been quite a few interpolations in the text during its long history of existence.

Verse 103, for example, is so bland in phrasing the question that it's difficult to imagine that it came from the same source as the other verses. The three verses that provide the answer are equally lifeless with no perceptible philosophical depth. They appear reasonably suspect of merely voicing a social agenda. Even a fairly vocal Nilakantha is politely reticent on the content of these verses. He not only distances himself from the idea of an eternal condemnation but even seems to deny it by explaining that an 'eternal

hell' is simply the condition of being perpetually reborn, which would hardly amount to any kind of hell, temporary or permanent.

You invite a poor mendicant brahmin and then change your mind and decline to give him alms, and for this you go to an everlasting hell! I simply refuse to accept that Lord Krishna could be so harsh on such commonplace frailties of mankind. Similarly, any one who denies the authority of scriptures etc also goes to hell. Lord, save the souls of Buddha and Jiddu Krishnamurti!

31. The Brahmin (107-111):

The Yaksha asked,—'By what, O king, birth, behaviour, study, or learning doth a person become a Brahmana? Tell us with certitude!' (107)

Yudhishthira answered,-'Listen, O Yaksha! It is neither birth, nor study, nor learning, that is the cause of Brahmanahood, without doubt, it is behaviour that constitutes it. One's behaviour should always be well-guarded, especially by a Brahmana. He who maintaineth his conduct unimpaired, is never impaired himself. Professors and pupils, in fact, all who study the scriptures, if addicted to wicked habits, are to be regarded as illiterate wretches. He only is learned who performeth his religious duties. He even that hath studied the four Vedas is to be regarded as a wicked wretch scarcely distinguishable from a Sudra (if his conduct be not correct). He only who performeth the Agnihotra and hath his senses under control, is called a Brahmana!' (108-111)

jktu~ dqysu o`Ùksu Lokè;k;su Jqrsu ok A czkã.;a dsu Hkofr çczwásrr~ lqfuf'pre~ AA107AA
J`.kq ;{k dqya rkr u Lokè;k;su Jqrsu ok A dkj.ka fg f}tRos p o`Ùkeso u la'k;% AA108AA
o`Ùka ;Rusu laj{;a czkã.ksu fo'ks"kr% A v{kh.ko`Ùkks u {kh.kks o`ÙkrLrq grks gr% AA109AA
iBdk% ikBdk'pSo ;s pkU;s 'kkL=fpUrdk%A loZsO;lfuuks ew[kkZ ;% fØ;koku~ l if.Mr% AA110AA
prqoZsnks·fi nqoZ`Ùk% l 'kwæknfrfjP;rs A ;ks·fXugks=ijks nkUr% l czkã.k bfr Le`r% AA111AA

The Yaksha asks: "By what, O king, birth, conduct (*vritten*), study, or learning (*shruten*) doth a person become a Brahmana?" Yudhishthira dismisses the centrality of three factors – birth, study and learning. Neither being born to brahmin parents, nor getting educated at the greatest of academies can bestow upon one the mantle of brahminhood. Yudhishthira says conduct alone makes a brahmin. Conduct is the dynamic manifestation of all that you truly are, of your 'realised' truth, the living *bodh*, the root sense behind the word 'buddha'. Against this living truth, all one's learning and scholarship pale into sheer insignificance. If the truth remains unrevealed in conduct, then all scholars and professors are condemned as mere fools and addicts of learning (*sarvevyasaninomurkha,* verse 110). Even he who has mastered all the four *Vedas* but is of lowly conduct is hardly better than a *shudra,* a man of unawakened intelligence. He alone who carries an ever-burning sacrificial psychic fire and is the lord of his senses is in every sense a true brahmin (111).

32. A quite simple question and reply, and possibly another interpolation (112-113).

The Yaksha asked,—'What doth one gain that speaketh agreeable words? What doth he gain that always acteth with judgment? What doth he gain that hath many friends? And what he, that is devoted to virtue?' (112)

Yudhishthira answered,—'He that speaketh agreeable words becometh agreeable to all. He that acteth with judgment obtaineth whatever he seeketh. He that hath many friends liveth happily. And he that is devoted to virtue obtaineth a happy state (in the next world).' (113)

fç;opuoknh fda yHkrs foe`f'krdk;Zdj% fda yHkrsA
cgqfe=dj% fda yHkrs èkeZjr% fda yHkrs dFk;AA112AA

fç;opuoknh fç;ks Hkofr foe`f'krdk;Zdjks·fèkda t;frA
cgqfe=dj% lq[ka olrs ;'p èkeZjr% l xfra yHkrsAA113AA

Polite and pleasing speech, carefully thought out action-plan, and a company of many of friends make for a successful man of the world. But only a life lived by the highest principles of Being can provide momentum to cross over to the supreme Transcendence.

33. The Last Mysteries (114-118):

The Yaksha asked,—'Who is truly happy? What is most wonderful? What is the path? And what is the news? Answer these four questions of mine and let thy dead brothers revive.' (114)

Yudhishthira answered,—'O amphibious creature, a man who cooketh in his own house, on the fifth or the sixth part of the day, with scanty vegetables, but who is not in debt and who stirreth not from home, is truly happy. Day after day countless creatures are going to the abode of Yama, yet those that remain behind believe themselves to be immortal. What can be more wonderful than this? Argument leads to no certain conclusion, the Srutis are different from one another; there is not even one Rishi whose opinion can be accepted by all; the truth about religion and duty is hid in caves: therefore, that alone is the path along which the great have trod. This world full of ignorance is like a pan. The sun is fire, the days and nights are fuel. The months and the seasons constitute the wooden ladle. Time is the cook that is cooking all creatures in that pan (with such aids); this is the news.' (115-118)

dks eksnrs fdek'p;Za d% iUFkk% dk p ofrZdkA
on es prqj% ç'uku~ e`rk thoUrq ckUèkok% AA114AA
i¥~pes·gfu "k"Bs ok 'kkda ipfr Los x`gs A vu`.kh pkçoklh p l okfjpj eksnrs AA115AA
vgU;gfu Hkwrkfu xPNUrhg ;eky;e~ A 'ks"kk% LFkkojfePNfUr fdek'p;Zer% ije~ AA116AA
rdkZs·çfr"B% Jqr;ks fofHkUuk uSdks _f"k;ZL; era çek.ke~A
èkeZL; rÙoa fufgra xqgk;ka egktuks ;su xr% l iUFkk%AA117AA
vfLeu~ egkeksge;s dVkgs lw;kZfXuuk jkf=fnosUèkusuA
eklrZqnoÊifj?kêusu Hkwrkfu dky% iprhfr okrkZAA118AA

Who is truly happy? What is most wonderful? What is the path? And what is the meaningful discourse (*varta*)?

Apparently, the reply that a man who stays home and has no debts to pay, even if his provisions be meagre, is truly a happy man seems to be rooted in the socio-economic conditions of a bygone age. The symbolism however is as relevant today as it was to its first generation of listeners. *Pravasi*, the man in a foreign land is the one who has strayed away from his native ground, the ground of his being, his *swadharma*. A man without any debt is the one who has fulfilled his obligations. It needs to be read in the context of greatest debts being those to father, mother and guru (*pitri-rina, matri-rina*and *guru-rina*), to Purusha, Prakriti and Shiva, the only Guru. Only a man who has successfully discharged his duties to these can be said to be free of all debts.

The greatest wonder is, Yudhishthira tells, that in the midst of death, man retains his sense of immortality. The *Atman* can assert its quiet immortal presence even in the most unconscious of beings. This is the symbolic depth of Yudhishthira's reply, not the superficial literal sense that leaves an un-evolved mind awestruck.

The Truth is not to be established by logic (*tarkoapratishthah*): "For not by Reason was creation made / And not by Reason can the Truth be seen," says Sri Aurobindo in *Savitri*. The Revelations (*shruti*) have differently been given to many. There is not one Seer whose teachings have gone uncontested. The essence of *dharma* is hidden in a secret cave, in the recesses of Being. Therefore, for beginners, the path trodden by the Great Ones is the Path.

In the cauldron of tremendous attachments (*mahamohmayekatahe*), with sun and seasons as aides, Time is seen as cooking every creature, preparing delicacies to be served at the table of the Lord[1]. This is the theme for any discourse (*varta*). Only by burning in the dark fires of one's attachments, one sees them for what they are and also what one truly is behind this grisly mask. "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire" (Eliot, *Four Quartets*). The only choice we make is between the fires of hell and the heavenly fire of Nachiketas (*Kathopanishad*): 'fire or fire'. Going down and going up, for the path is a winding spire, one evolves through Time. *Kala* is both time and death in Sanskrit, and the lord of death, Yama is also Dharma. Passing through fire, one either perishes or comes out purer and shining as gold. Stepping beyond the last rungs of evolution, the final Liberation, one is ready to meet the Lord, to be served as food at His table. Yudhishthira says, this is the discourse for life. It certainly cannot be summed up in a paragraph.

34. The Fulfilment (119-121):

The Yaksha asked,—'Thou hast, O represser of foes, truly answered all my questions! Tell us now who is truly a man, and what man truly possesseth every kind of wealth.' (119)

Yudhishthira answered,—'The report of one's good action reacheth heaven and spreadeth over the earth. As long as that report lasteth, so long is a person to whom the agreeable

[1] Compare *Sailing to Byzantium*: "O sages standing in God's holy fire…..artifice of eternity."

and the disagreeable, weal and woe, the past and the future, are the same, is said to possess every kind of wealth.' (120-121)

O;k[;krk es Ro;k ç'uk ;kFkkrF;a ijariA iq#"ka fRonkuhe~ O;k[;kfg ;'p loZèkuh uj% AA119AA

fnoa Li`'kfr Hkwfea p 'kCn% iq.;su deZ.kk A ;kor~ l 'kCnks Hkofr rkor~ iq#"k mP;rs AA120AA

rqY;s fç;kfç;s ;L; lq[knq%[ks rFkSo p A vrhrkukxrs pksHks l oS loZèkuh uj% AA121AA

Who is the one who has found all that is worthy to be possessed (*sarvadhani*)? A man is said to exist only as long as the memory of his works lasts in heaven and earth – a Buddha or a Christ, for example. The man who has found perfect equanimity in the midst of all dualities in Time is the truly fulfilled man.

4.4.6 The Conclusion:

The Yaksha said,—'Thou hast, O king truly answered who is a man, and what man possesseth every kind of wealth. Therefore, let one only amongst thy brothers, whom thou mayst wish, get up with life!' Yudhishthira answered,—'Let this one that is of darkish hue, whose eyes are red, who is tall like a large Sala tree, whose chest is broad and arms long, let this Nakula, O Yaksha, get up with life! (122-123)

The Yaksha rejoined,-'This Bhimasena is dear unto thee, and this Arjuna also is one upon whom all of you depend! Why, then, O king dost thou, wish a step-brother to get up with his life! How canst thou, forsaking Bhima whose strength is equal to that of ten thousand elephants, wish Nakula to live? People said that this Bhima was dear to thee. From what motive then dost thou wish a step-brother to revive? Forsaking Arjuna the might of whose arm is worshipped by all the sons of Pandu, why dost thou wish Nakula to revive?' (124-127)

Yudhishthira said,—'If virtue is sacrificed, he that sacrificeth it, is himself lost. So virtue also cherisheth the cherisher. Therefore taking care that virtue by being sacrificed may not sacrifice us, I never forsake virtue. Abstention from injury is the highest virtue, and is, I ween, even higher than the highest object of attainment. I endeavour to practise that virtue. Therefore, let Nakula, O Yaksha, revive! Let men know that the king is always virtuous! I will never depart from my duty. Let Nakula, therefore, revive!'(128-130)

èkeZ ,o grks gfUr èkekZs j{kfr jf{kr% A rLekn~ èkeZa u R;tkfe ek èkekZs grks·oèkhr~ AA128AA
vku`'kaL;a ijks èkeZ% ijekFkkZPp es ere~ A vku`'kaL;a fpdh"kkZfe udqyks ;{k thorq AA129AA

èkeZ'khy% lnk jktk bfr eka ekuok fonq% A LoèkekZUu pfy";kfe udqyks ;{k thorq AA130AA

'My father had two wives, Kunti and Madri. Let both of them have children. This is what I wish. As Kunti is to me, so also is Madri. There is no difference between them in my eye. I desire to act equally towards my mothers. Therefore, let Nakula live?' (131-132)

The Yaksha said,—'Since abstention from injury is regarded by thee as higher than both profit and pleasure, therefore, let all thy brothers live, O bull of Bharata race!" (133)

Pleased with his replies the Yaksha asks Yudhishthira to choose any one of his brothers who would be granted the boon of returning to life. Yudhishthira chooses Nakula. Bewildered at his choice, the Yaksha asks, "When Bhima and Arjuna are not only dear but also of great help to you in the coming war, why do you choose Nakula over them?"

Yudhishthira proceeds to explain the ground that forms the basis of his choice. That ground is *dharma*. 'Abandoning the ground of Being, the being perishes (*dharma evahatohanti*). Grounded in the Being, the being enjoys existence (*dharmorakshatirakshitah*). For this reason, I refuse to abandon the Ground, lest I should come to nought', tells Yudhishthira. '*Aanrishansyam*, not hurting any one in any way, is the highest dharma and supreme goal. Further, the king ought to be grounded for all time in dharma (*dharmashilahsada raja*). My father had two wives, Kunti and Madri, and both to me are equally my mothers. I do not want either of them to be without a son; therefore, I choose Nakula to be made alive again.'

The Yaksha puts his final seal of sanction on Yudhishthira's choice: 'Thou hast chosen *aanrishansyam*over *artha* and *kama,* over advantage and desire; let all thy brothers, therefore, be alive again'.

The Concluding Chapter

SECTION CCCXII[1]

Vaisampayana continued,—"Then agreeable to the words of the Yaksha the Pandavas rose up; and in a moment their hunger and thirst left them. Thereupon Yudhishthira said, 'I ask thee that art incapable of being vanquished and that standest on one leg in the tank, what god art thou, for I cannot take thee for a Yaksha! Art thou the foremost of the Vasus, or of the Rudras, or of the chief of the Maruts? Or art thou the lord himself of the celestials, wielder of the thunder-bolt! Each of these my brothers is capable of fighting as hundred thousand warriors, and I see not the warrior that can slay them all! I see also that their senses have refreshed, as if they have sweetly awaked from slumber. Art thou a friend of ours, or even our father himself? (1-5)

At this the Yaksha replied,-'O child, I am even thy father, the Lord of justice, possessed of great prowess! Know, bull of the Bharata race, that I came hither desirous of beholding thee! (6)

[1] Gita Press: ch. 314, 29 verses. Bhandarkar text: ch. 298, 28 verses. South Indian Texts: ch. 315, 29 verses.

'Fame, truth, self-restraint, purity, candour, modesty, steadiness, charity, austerities and Brahmacharya, these are my body! And abstention from injury, impartiality, peace, penances, sanctity, and freedom from malice are the doors (through which I am accessible). Thou art always dear to me! (7-8)

;'k% lR;a ne% 'kkSpektZoa gzhjpkiye~ A nkua riks czãp;ZfeR;srkLruoks ee AA7AA
vfgalk lerk 'kkfUrLri% 'kkSpeeRlj% A }kjk.;srkfu es fof) fç;ks áfl lnk ee AA8AA

'By good luck thou art devoted to the five;[119][1] and by good luck also thou hast conquered the six.[120][2] Of the six, two appear in the first part of life; two in the middle part thereof; and the remaining two at the end, in order to make men repair to the next world. (9)

fn"Vîk i¥~plq jäks·fl fn"Vîk rs "kV~inh ftrkA }s iwoZs eè;es }s p }s pkUrs lkEijkf;ds AA9AA

'I am, good betide thee, the lord of justice! I came hither to test thy merit. I am well-pleased to witness thy harmlessness; and, O sinless one, I will confer boons on thee. Do thou, O foremost of kings, ask of me boons. I shall surely confer them, O sinless one! Those that revere me, never come by distress!' Yudhishthira said,—'A deer was carrying away the Brahmana's fire-sticks. Therefore, the first boon that I shall ask, is, may that Brahmana's adorations to Agni be not interrupted!' The Yaksha said,—'O Kunti's son endued with splendour, it was I who for examining thee, was carrying away, in the guise of a deer, that Brahmana's fire-sticks!" (10-13)

Vaisampayana continued,—"Thereupon that worshipful one said,—'I give thee this boon! Good betide thee! O thou that are like unto an immortal, ask thou a fresh boon! Yudhishthira said,—'We have spent these twelve years in the forest; and the thirteenth year is come. May no one recognise us, as we spend this year somewhere.' Vaisampayana continued,-'Thereat that worshipful one replied,—'I give this boon unto thee!' And then reassuring Kunti's son having truth for prowess, he also said, 'Even if, O Bharata, ye range this (entire) earth in your proper forms none in the three worlds shall recognise you. Ye perpetuators of the Kuru race, through my grace, ye will spend this thirteenth year, secretly and unrecognised, in Virata's kingdom! And every one of you will be able at will to assume any form he likes! Do ye now present the Brahmana with his fire-sticks. It was only to test you that I carried them away in the form of a deer! O amiable Yudhishthira, do thou ask for another boon that thou mayst like! I will confer it on thee. O foremost of men, I have not yet been satisfied by granting boons to thee! Do thou my son, accept a third boon that is great and incomparable! Thou, O king, art born of me, and Vidura of portion or mine!" Thereat Yudhishthira said,—'It is enough that I

[1]119. That is, tranquillity of mind, self-restraint, abstention from sensual pleasures, resignation, and Yoga meditation.''kkUrks nkUr mijrfLrfr{kq% lekfgrks HkwRokReU;sokRekkua i';fr' bfrJqR;qDrk% - Nilakantha

[2] 120. That is, hunger, thirst, sorrow, bluntness of mortal feeling, decrepitude, and death. ';ks'kuk;kfiikls 'kksda eksga tjka e`R;qeR;sfr' bfrJqR;qDrk%- Nilakantha

have beheld thee with my senses, eternal God of gods as thou art! O father, whatever boon thou wilt confer on me I shall surely accept gladly! (14-23)

'May I, O lord, always conquer covetousness and folly and anger, and may my mind be ever devoted to charity, truth, and ascetic austerities!'(24)

t;s;a yksHkeksgkS p Øksèka pkga lnk foHkks A nkus rifl lR;s p euks es lrra Hkosr~ AA24AA

The Lord of justice said,—'Even by nature, O Pandava, hast thou been endued with these qualities, for thou art the Lord of justice himself! Do thou again attain what thou asked for!" (25)

Vaisampayana continued,—"Having said these words, the worshipful Lord of justice, who is the object of contemplation of all the worlds, vanished therefrom; and the high-souled Pandavas after they had slept sweetly were united with one another. And their fatigue dispelled, those heroes returned to the hermitage, and gave back that Brahmana his firesticks. That man who pursueth this illustrious and fame-enhancing story of the revival (of the Pandavas) and the meeting of father and son (Dharma and Yudhishthira), obtaineth perfect tranquillity of mind, and sons and grandsons, and also a life extending over a hundred years! And the mind of that man that layeth this story to heart, never delighteth in unrighteousness, or in disunion among friends, or misappropriation of other person's property, or staining other people's wives, or in foul thoughts! (26-29)

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. What are the qualities that make a man great?
2. Write a note on friends in various situations.
3. What are the things that men most desire in life?
4. Write a note on the forces of darkness that block man's progress on the path of right living.
5. Who are the eight companions on the Path?

4.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

1. About the cosmic and human context of the questions.
2. About right conduct and the path
3. To distinguish between a symbolic interpretation and a facile reading of the text.

You have also been encouraged to refer to the original terminology, because English words may often not do full justice to the original text.

4.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.1. (2)
- Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.2. (10)
- Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.2. (15)
- Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.3. (17)
- Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.4. (22-23)

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4.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

2. Critically examine the significance of right living as portrayed in the dialogues.
3. Discuss the centrality *dharma* and *daanam* in Yudhishthira's replies.

UNIT 5 SELECTIONS FROM SONGS OF KABIR

5.1. INTRODUCTION

One of India's most popular poets, Kabir occupies a unique place among the oral-poets of Indian literature .His poems, mainly in the form of couplets (*dohas*) have been sung and recited by millions throughout North India since 15th century when he lived. His poetry presents a matchless combination of philosophical thoughts and common life - experiences in a language that enlightens both the elite and the masses equally. Addressing his audiences in a conversational style, Kabir extols his vision of reality and debunks the delusions, pretensions and empty orthodoxies of so-called religious people, and preaches the path of divine love and universal brotherhood. In the best of his poems, he emerges as a great mystic poet who has the fire of a social reformer to awaken the consciousness of his readers against the shams and hypocrisies of their personal socio-cultural life. For a reader in the modern times, his whole poetry is a spirited plea for a world of human beings, free from biases of caste and creed - an appeal for simplicity in thought and deed, and an immaculate love for the Almighty and His children.

5.2. OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to enable you to understand and develop your insights into the following aspects of Kabir's works:

- To be aware about the myths and legends associated with Kabir's life and their impact on his poetry.
- To know about Kabir's times and ideological influences that shaped his works.
- To present an analysis of Kabir's Vision of Reality:His Mysticism.
- To explain the salient features of Kabir's poetry .
- To understand Kabir's language and style and list the problems of translation.
- To evaluate Kabir's contribution and his relevance to the present times.

5.3. KABIR'S LIFE AND WORKS

As students of literature, you will be amazed to know that great poets and seers of ancient India have often been quite reticent about their biographical details and works, as a result, there are little evidences of their personal life and authenticity of works, be it the case of Kalidas, or Sur, or Tulsidas or Mira: there are many legends about their lives which have come to us through an oral tradition. In the same way, there are many legends associated with Kabir's life and there are controversies regarding the authenticity of his works as they were communicated from generation to generation by word of mouth and naturally transformed, inbetween, by the users intentionally or unintentionally. You have to keep this limitation in your mind when you pass a judgment on his life and works. As you know, the life and experiences of an authorinfluence his or her works in a subtle manner; we would therefore be focusing mainly on those biographical details of Kabir which are largely accepted and have close bearing on his works:

5.3.1. Legends about Kabir's birth and death

It is almost universally believed by people that Kabir was born about the year 1440 in or near Banares in the family of weavers and he became a disciple of the famous Hindu ascetic Ramananda in his early life. As the legend goes, Kabir was very much impressed by the teachings of Guru Ramanada and he had the intense desire to be his disciple, but being the actual or adopted child of a Muslim family, he had little chances that a Hindu guru would accept him as a disciple. So, one day he lay down on the steps of the holy Ganges where Guru Ramananda used to come for a bath, unknowingly, Ramananda trod upon his body and exclaimed in his utter amazement, "Ram, Ram". Kabir took these two words from his Guru as the mantra of his initiation and thus got admitted to his discipleship. Kabir acknowledged this indebtedness in his poetry throughout his life by giving a supreme place to the Guru and preached and practiced the principle of God's Oneness, which Ramanada had endeavoured to establish in thought.

It seems quite natural that Kabir who had no formal education, acquired knowledge of different sects and beliefs by joining in the theological and philosophical discourses which his guru Ramananda had with the leading Muslim and Hindu saints and philosophers of his times and eclectically chose his path and visualized the reality of the world. Though taking keen interest in all the theological ideologies and practices of his day to criticize their displaced focuses, he never chose the life of an ascetic, or retired from day to day life for rigorous mortifications of body in pursuit of the truth. All the legends agree on this point that he had a family and children and loved his simple profession of a weaver, enjoying singing his songs of devotion and ultimate reality. Voicing a strong dislike for all institutional religions-Hindu or Muslim, he vehemently rituals (such as pilgrimages, fasts, smearing of ashes on body, rigorous yogic practices, idol worship and all other bodily austerities) as unnecessary and undesirable for the realization of Divine reality. His firm belief was that one couldattain union with the Divine by purity of soul and love under the guidance of a genuine Guru.

It can be easily understood why Kabir's non-conformist views expressed so vociferously in his poetry were not been tolerated by the heads of religious institutions of the Hindu and the Muslim alike, and he had to face opposition and persecution in Benares of his times that was the centre of so many institutionalized sects and religions. One of the legends tells that a beautiful courtesan was sent by the Brahmans to test Kabir's moral uprightness but eventually she herself got converted.There is another legend that heonce performed a miracle of heeling and was summoned before the king Sikandar Lodi, who charged him of claiming to possess divine powers. Sikandar Lodi spared his life but asked him to leave Benares.It is said, after this incident, probably in 1495,Kabir wandered in different cities of the country in the company of a group of disciples and led the life of a wandering bard of divine love and humanity.

It is unanimously agreed that he died at Maghar near Gorakhpur,in the year 1518. Like his birth, his death is also surrounded with legends.It is said that after his death, his Hindu and Muslim disciples quarreled for the possession of his dead body; Hindus wished to burn it while the Muslims wanted to bury it. As they were engaged in heated arguments, Kabir appeared before them and asked them to remove the shroud and see within, when they removed the shroud, they did not find his body, instead, they found a bunch of flowers, which they divided equally, the Hindus took them to Benares to perform last rites and the Muslims buried them according to their tradition. Such was the life and

death of Kabir who always stood against man-made barriers of caste and religion and propagated the path of universal brotherhood and love among mankind.As students of literature,it is so futile to test the truth of these legends about Kabir's life.What is important is to examine how these tales about Kabir's life enable us to understand his vision and works.

As most of the religious literature in medieval India passed on through oral tradition by devotees and wandering ascetics and *sadhus* with their dialecticalalterations, Kabir's poetry has also come down to us orally over several centuries.It has been collected by people of quite divergent beliefs. Besides oral forms, his poetical works are initially collected in three major written collections of notes, found in the three widely separated regions of North India: The Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred book of the Sikhs, compiled in Punjab about 1603,the Rajasthani collection, known as the Panchvani, that includes the sayings of the five saints exalted by Dadu Panth and the third one, popular in U P And Bihar, is Bijak, the scripture of the Kabir Panth, that contains only works attributed to Kabir.Though these three collectionsof Kabir's works have many similarities, Kabir of Guru Granth and Panchvani sings songs of devotional ecstasy while the voice in Bijak is more of a revolutionary and social reformer. But Kabir's poetry, whether present in the common folk tradition in oral form or collected in printed volumes, appeals to us because of its striking form of address. It abounds in questions, assaults, paradoxes and enigmas and always strikes at the falsities of life, awakening the consciousness of the listeners or readers towards the delusions of the material world and institutionalized religions.

5.3.2.Varied Forms of his Poetry

However, Kabir is more interested in what he has to say than the form of his sayings.His poetry has three major varieties, classified as Sabda, which are in the form of address, the Ramaini and the most popular, Sakhi- his practical experiences of life and truth. If Sabda comprises of his beliefs and convictions in life, the poetry in Ramaini is devotional in nature and presents Kabir as an ardent follower of Nirguna-Bhakti, his Sakhi reveals his versions of reality of this mundane world and its allurements (Maya) and delusions. His Sakhies in the form of couplets have enthralled millions of common people over the centuries as they are simple and direct in their appeal and impact, In the favourite refrain, "kahat Kabir suno bhai sadho'', he ruthlessly attacks the falsities of day to day –life, disdaining all religious orthodoxies and extols the path of soul's love for the Divine

5.3.3. Kabir's Works and their Translation

As you know, Kabir's poetical works are originally in that form of Hindi which was spoken by the sadhus and itinerant saints in the 15th century and it came to us through word of mouth over the years and many of his poems got transformed in between by the singers and wandering seers according to their convenience and interests. In the first half of the 20th century, we have some very important edited anthologies of Kabir in Hindi, such as 'Kabir Saheb ki Shabdavali' from Belvedere Press, Allahabad in 1900, 'Kabir Rachnavali' by Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay, published from Kashi in 1916 and Babu Shyamsundar Das' anthology 'Kabir Granthavali', published by Kashi Pracharini Sabha in 1928. Though each of these anthologies claims authenticity, they resemble only in spirit, and are marked by linguistic variations of the text.

It is interesting to note, much before these anthologies of Kabir, Gurudev Ravindra Nath Tagore translated hundred songs of Kabir and the book entitled, "One Hundred Poems of

Kabir" was published by The India Society in 1914. It was based upon the printed Hindi text with Bengali translation of Mr Kshiti Mohan Sen, who had painstakingly gathered Kabir's poetry from written and oral sources, available from books, manuscripts and as the wandering ascetics and saints sang it. While Kshiti Mohan Sen's work inspired many Hindi and regional writers to work on Kabir, Tagore's translation of Kabir gave instant recognition to Kabir's mystical poetry in the West. An extraordinary critical attention was paid to his works, which is quite evident from a number of translations of Kabir in European languages such as English, French and German.

5.4.KABIR'S TIMES AND INFLUENCES

As students of literature you know that no literary figure can ever be completely free from the impact and influences of the traditions of the past and the thoughts and principles of his own times. As a literary artist, he not only influences the life and thoughts of his times but is also influenced by the traditional and contemporary thoughts. Kabir's works present a mixed impact of the various religious beliefs and practices that existed in his time or existed before him. Kabir, being uneducated, cameto know about such belief systems not from any source books but by debating and interacting with ascetics of different faiths and practices while travelling from one place to another as a seeker of truth.

Kabir was born and brought up in that period of India's social and political history which is marked by the emergence of various conflicting religious and philosophical ideologies and practices. The beliefs prevalent in his times had their origin in Vedic literature; others came from the Vaishnava Bhakti, propounded by Ramananda or from the yogic practices of Siddha and Nath sects which had their origin in Buddhism.On the other hand, the Sufi philosophy had great impact on the Hindus and the Muslims alike. It was the time when many senseless, even inhuman rituals and practices were performed by Tantrics and Hathayogis.Kabirdoes not completely subscribe to any of these philosophies but he refers to them occasionally to juxtapose his vision of reality.

Kabir historically lived in the time when the worship of many gods, ritualism and caste-system dominated Hindu religion; Kabir seems to be influenced by the teachings of Vedic Upnishadic literature in his belief that God is One and the ultimate truth, He has no shape, or body, He is beyond man's power of understanding, He can be realized only by the control of mind, true love and devotion. Here he bears a striking similarity with the tenets of Islam, making many scholars to believe that he was influenced by Islam, but his insistence on God's name (naam smaran)and the celebration of the divine in each individual makes him different.

He seems to be deeply influenced by the teachings of the Vaishnava Bhakti movement, much popularized by his guru Ramananda who denounced all discriminations of caste, religion and disdaining worldly allurements (Maya) and propounded the path of unwavering love towards God as the only way to realize His grace.Like his guru,Kabir picked up the language of the masses to spread the message of love among all children of God irrespective of their caste, colour or faith and prioritized such human love as the most required qualification for realizing God.

He seems quite aware of the different Yogic practices of the Buddists, Siddh and Naath Sects from whom he seems to inherit not only vocabulary but also a great respect for guru and the opposition of all rituals and falsities of external behaviour which has often appeared in his poetry in the form of mysticism and upside-down language. (*Ulatvasi*)

Moreover, he seems to have been in close contact with the Sufi saints who regarded human soul as lover and worshipped God as beloved expressing the agony of the separated soul and its yearning for union. Kabir's many poems express the same intensity of the longing which a devout soul has for the union with the Ultimate soul.

Over all, it is difficult to determine which thought/ideological instance of Kabir is influenced by which stream of thought, as ideas and thoughts are like rivers that always develop and transform as they move person to person, what is important is that Kabir is eclectic in his approach and he has culled his ideas to shape his vision of reality that was quite revolutionary and matchless in his Age and times

Self Assessment Questions I

1. Kabir's life is full of legends; list them from birth to death.
2. Write a short article,pointing out what qualities of Kabir's vision are reflected in these legends.
3. Enumerate some of the major influences on Kabir's thought.

5.5. SALIENT FEATURES OF KABIR'S POETRY

5.5.1. Kabir's Devotion to God

It has been observed that Kabir is basically a devotee;his poetry is only a vehicle of his vision.As a devotee,he doesnot subscribe to any mode of worshipping and emphasizes the complete surrender of the sincere soul to the Ultimate without any concern for rituals and religious practices;he defines this Ultimate Reality(BRAHM) as he experiences it and shares the bliss of this belonging with the Ultimate, establishing different relationships:

Sometimes he greets this God like a bride waiting for the bridegroom:

The refrain is-*'dulahin gavahu manglachar'*

O bridesmaids,
Sing wedding-songs;
King Rama, my bridegroom,
Has come to my house.
……
Kabir says,
I'm off to my wedding:
I'm marrying
the Imperishable One.

(Kabir:*The Weaver's Songs*, p133-134)

His heart often experiences the pangs of separation from his beloved God-

Talafe bin baalam mor jia
din nahi chain*, raat nahi nindia,talaf talaf ke bhor kia.* (Singh, p17)

(My heart aches with pain when my Beloved is separated from me, neither do I rest in the day nor do sleep in the night,I long for His meeting in the morning while writhing in pain at night.)

Kabir sometimes worships this God as a child, his words speak of the intensity of his devotion:

Hari janani main balak tora
kahe *ne avagun baksahu mora.*(Singh, p13)

(God is my mother,I am His child, why would you not forgive my faults.)

Sometimes his yearning to be united with this God is so passionate that he even wants to be the loving dog of GOD-

Kabir kuta ram k, mutia mera naam,
gale *ram ki jevari,jit khaiche tit jaun.*(Singh, p4)

(Kabir is Ram's dog, Mutia is my name,I have the candy of His name in my mouth, I am driven to where he likes.)

When Kabir refers to Ram or Hari, it is not Hindu's Ram or Hari, Kabir believes that God (read Brahm) has no shape or name, each individual is part and parcel of the divine soul, so he vehemently discards all discriminations of caste and religion, his devotion to God makes him forthrightly comment:

Jaat paat puchhai nahi kohi, Hari ko bhaje so Hari ka hoye. (Singh, p5)

(There is no need to ask about the caste or class, one who remembers Him is His.)

He firmly believes that each soul is integral to the Ultimate soul, there is no division between man and God and he explains it through symbols:

Jal main kumbh, kumbh mai jal hai, bahar bhiter pani,
phoota kumbh jal jalhi samana,ihi thath kathyo gyani. (Singh, p61)

(Water possesses pot and the pot contains water, there is water inside and outside, when the pot breaks, the water mingles with water, it is the truth told by the learned.)

Sometimes he puts this so simply in his Sakhi -
The One is one with the All,
The All is one with the One.
Kabir is one
With the knowledge without duality
(Kabir:*The Weaver'sSongs,*p.184)

So Kabir does not prescribe to the worshipping of God in temples or mosques as He lives in every heart: the refrain is 'moko kahan dhudhe re bande'

Why look for Me anywhere else, my friend,
When I'm here, in your possession?
Not in temples, not in mosques-
Not in the Ka'aba, not on Kailash,
Not in rites, not in rituals-
Not in yoga or renunciation.
Look for Me and you'll find Me quickly-
All it takes is a moment's search

Kabir says, listen, O brothers-
He's the very Breath of our breaths.
(Kabir: *The Weaver's Songs*p.195)

Kabir attaches prime importance to three things in his devotion (naam-smaran):

1. The human body free from the vices like greed and lust

2. The significance of a Guru (a genuine teacher)

3. The company of the saints (*satsang*), Kabir keeps on warning his listeners that the devotion to God is not possible without taking care of these three. In one of his famous poems, he beautifully describes how God had made this human- body painstakingly, and man should use it with effort and care, comparing human body with a woven sheet: the refrain is 'jhini jinni bini chadaria'-

He wove the sheet
So fine, so fine,
He wove the sheet so fine.

What was the warp?
What was the weft?
What was the thread
With which He wove the sheet?

Ingala and Pingala
The warp,the weft,
Sushumna the thread
With which He wove the sheet

He spins the eight-petalled lotus
As his spinning –wheel,
With five elements
And three great qualities

He weaves the sheet.

He weaves the sheet
Through ten months
In a mother's womb,
Beating in the weft,

Testing and checking
every strand,
He weaves the sheet.

Saints and humans
Wrap themselves in His sheet,
But the wrapping soils the sheet
So fine, so fine.

His servant Kabir
Wraps himself in the sheet
With effort and care
He keeps it spotlessly clean,

This sheet so fine so fine

(Kabir: *The Weaver's Songs*, p.192)

Thus, you can see Kabir does not subscribe to any religious practice or dogma, he is down to earth in his devotion, it teaches a simple life of discipline and duty and an honest submission of soul to the ultimate, that is possible only with love for all human-beings. The essence of his love to God is love to all creatures of God:

Pothi padh padh jag mua,pandit bhaya na koy
dhahi *aakhar prem ka, padhe so pandit hoe*.(Singh, p19)

(People have long studied books of religion, they donot make them learned, if you learn the letters of love in spirit, you will be enlightened in the real sense.)

Kabir strongly believes that this realization of one's divine belonging with God is not possible without the guidance of a true Guru, hence in number of songs, he glorifies the grace of Guru: the refrain is- *tu surat nain nihar*

Open your eyes of love, and see Him
who pervades this world! consider it well, and
know that this is your own country.

When you meet the true Guru, He will awaken your heart;
He will tell you the secret of love and detachment
And then you will know indeed that He transcends this universe…
(*Songs of Kabir*, p50)

OR

It is the mercy of my true Guru that has made me to know the Unknown…
Kabir says: "The Guru is great beyond words, and great is the fortune of the disciple."

(*Songs of Kabir,* p21-22)

Kabir is quite sure that soul's union with God is possible only by an honest, sincere and dutiful life, the Guru would show the right path and the company of saints (read noble people, Kabir often addresses them as 'sadho'), would keep him off the allurements and delusions (*maya*), of the world. Though he is not afraid of death, he does not wish to lose the pleasures of *satsang* in this world-

Ram bulava bhajiya, diya kabira roye

jo sukh sadhu sang main,so vaikund na hoye. (Singh, p20)

(Ram has sent call for me, but my heart weeps the bliss that I have in the company of the saints, would not be available even in heaven)

5.5.2. Kabir's Mysticism

As you have already noticed that Kabir is basically a devotee of Nirakaar *Brahm*.His poetry is but the expression of his experienced truth.As a seeker of the ultimate Truth,and the reality of this material life and world, he has his own understanding and vision.He knows it very well that it is very difficult to understand the true nature of God and the reality of the world,it is more difficult to explain it in simple terms, so when he comes to explain the mystery of God, His creation,His relationship with each living or non-living entities of this world and the realities of this world,he turns mystical.His mysticism is nothing but the explication of human soul's relationship with the Ultimate Soul based on his experienced truth. This mysticism can be understood only in relation to Kabir's vision of God and the reality of this world .We can see some of the ways through which this quality of Kabir's poetry has been expressed in his works.

One of his favourite ways to express this mysticism is depicting the soul yearning for the union with the ultimate soul just as a beloved yearns for her lover. The pangs of love in separation that his soul experiences seems to be the impact of the Sufi poets, and no reader of Kabir can ignore the beauty of such poetic pieces in Kabir, see one example, where the soul in separation is ready to undergo any mortification gladly to be united with the sweetheart(God)-

Is tan ka diya karun, baati melun jeev
lo*hi seencho tel ju ,kab mukh dekhon peev.* (Singh, p.40)

(My body would be the earthen lamp, my breath would be the wick, the blood would be the oil, and then I would see the face of my love!)

Another type of Kabir's mysticism is seen in his poetry when he talks of attaining God by using the terms of the siddhis and yogis

ila pungula bhathi kinhi,brahm agni parjari
sasihari sur dwar dus munde,laagi jog jug taari
man *matwaala peeve ram ras,duja na suhai.*(Singh, p.43).

(I made the furnace of *ila pungula*, and lighted it with the fire of Brahm, and keeping the ten doors shut, I devoted to the activity of jog, now my heart enjoys the Ram-ras,now nothing is dear to me.)

At other place,he addresses the human soul thus-*'hansa piyare sarvar taji kahan jaye'*

Dear Swan,
Where will you go
When you've left the lake?
(Kabir: *The Weaver's Songs,*168).

Kabir is fond of sharing the joy of his soul's love for the beloved God in many of his 'upside-down language' (*Ulatbaasi*,) - the refrain is- *'chal hansa wa des jahan'*

O my heart! let us go to that country where
Dwells the Beloved, the ravisher of my heart!
There Love is filling her pitcher from the well,
Yet she has no rope wherewith to draw
Water;

There the clouds do not cover the sky, yet the
Rain falls down in gentle showers:
O bodiless one do not sit on your doorstep;go
Forth and bathe yourself in that rain!
There it is ever moonlight and never dark; and
Who speaks of one sun only? That land is
Illuminate with the rays of a million suns.

(*Songs of Kabir*, p.52)

He explains through up-side-down language how God is beyond man's power of reason and logic-

… A tree stands without root
Without flowers bears fruits;
No leaf, no branch, and eight
Sky-mouths thundering
Dance done without feet
Tune played without hands,
Praises sung without tongue,
Singer without shape or form…

(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p.49)

The most important of his mystical poems are those where Kabir explains the true nature of human soul, and God, unraveling all mysteries about Him, the tone is interestingly personal, as he is not other than Him-

The refrain is na *main dharmi, nahin adharmi –*

I am neither pious nor ungodly,
I live neither by law nor by sense,
I am neither a speaker nor hearer,
I am neither a servant nor master
I am neither bond nor free,
I am neither detached nor attached.
I am far from none: I am near to none.
I shall go neither to hell nor to heaven.
I do all works; yet I am apart from all works.
Few comprehend my meaning: he who can comprehend it,
he sits unmoved
Kabir seeks neither to establish nor to destroy.

(*Songs of Kabir,* p54)

Thus we see Kabir has adopted various ways to explain the nature and function of God and the reality of the world, he seems influenced by almost all the existing thought-currents of his times, he borrows their vocabulary but his vision is quite clear and constant, he puts forth it with straightforwardness and inimitable honesty. He explains how all difficulties and contradictions have resolved since his soul has united with his lover (God), the refrain is-'*santo sahaj samadh bhali'*-

O Sadhu the simple union is the best.
Since the day when I met with my Lord,

There has been no end to the sport of our love.
I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my body;
I see with my eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty everywhere:
I utter His Name, and whatever I see, it reminds me of Him; whatever I do, it becomes His worship.
The rising and the setting are one to me; all contradictions are resolved.
Where I go, I move round Him.
All I achieve is His servce:
When I lie down, I lie prostrate at his feet...

(*Songs of Kabir,* p30-31)

5.5.3. Kabir's Revolutionary Spirit

Learners, you have already seen in the earlier sections that Kabir believed in the One-ness of human-soul with the Ultimate Soul (*Adwaitvaad*) and emphasized the sincerity and devotion of human soul towards God, Hence, in life and works, Kabir comes out as a social reformer and criticizes the institutionalized religions and their practices-all hypocrisies, falsities and shams that go on in the society in the name of God or religion. His poetry gives voice to a revolutionary spirit who out -rightly rejects all rituals and religious practices that establish discriminations of caste, creed or outward behavior among human beings and go against the welfare of all creatures. His criticism of the pretensions of so-called religious people becomes most significant when we see how his age witnessed sharp caste lines and strict following of religious practices among the various sects of the Hindus and the political dominance of the Muslims.

Kabir fearlessly denounces the Hindu for their hypocrisies of taking baths in holy rivers, keeping fasts smearing ashes on foreheads or wearing dyed garments or worshipping the idols- the refrain is '*man na rangaye*':

The yogi dyes his garments, instead of
dyeing his mind in the colours of love;
He sits within the temple of the Lord, leaving
Brahma to worship a stone.
He pierces holes in his ears, he has a great beard
and matted locks, he looks like a goat:
He goes forth into the wilderness, killing all his
desires and turns himself into an eunuch:
He shaves his head and dyes his garments; he
Reads the Gita and becomes a mighty talker.
Kabir says: "you are going to the doors of death,
bound hand and foot!''

(*Songs of Kabir*, p44)

Kabir does not spare the Muslims who offer prayers five times a day in the mosque

The refrain is- *na jane tera sahib kaisa hai-*

I don't know
What sort of Master
You have.

Is He deaf
That the mullah must screech
From the mosque?...
(*Kabir: The Weaver's Songs* p202)

He is against all discriminations among humanbeings so openly condemns Hindus for their vice of untouchability:

Pandit, look in your heart for knowledge.
Tell me where untouchability
came from,since you believe in it
Mix red juice, white juice and air-
a body bakes in a body
As soon as the eight lotuses
are ready, it comes
into the world.Then what's
untouchable?...
(*The Bijak of Kabir* p55)

Kabir does not believe in those disintegrating practices of religion which spread hatred in society instead of harmony, so he questions both the Hindus and the Muslims and scolds them for their falsities and shams:

Brother, where did your two gods came from?
Tell, who made you mad?
Ram, Allah, Keshav, Karim, Hari, Hazarat-
So many names.
So many ornaments, all one gold,
It has no double nature.
For conversation we make two-
This namaz, that puja,
This Mahadev, that Muhammed, this Brahma,that Adam,
This a Hindu, that a Turk,
But all belong to earth.
Vedas, Korans, all those books,
Those Mullas and those Brahmins-
So many names, so many names,
But the pots are all one clay.
Kabir says, nobody can find Ram,
Both sides are lost in schisms
One slaughters goats, one slaughters cows,
They squander their births in isms.
(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p50-51)

Thus we see that Kabir is a great secular and revolutionary poet. He ruthlessly discards all the proud pretentions of religious practices of his time and advocates love among mankind beyond religious or sectarian parochialism. He is a pioneer of those great seers and poets who prioritized humanity over religious institutions in the world, afflicted by religious idiosyncrasies and fanaticism.

5.5.4. Kabir's Univeralism

In the above discussion, you have seen how Kabir expressed his love for the Almighty in many ways and emphasized the value of humanity in thought and action and vehemently criticized all false behavioral patterns and practices that create divisions in the minds of the people and promote disharmony and hatred among mankind. His poetry is not merely a weapon to curb the ill-practices of the institutionalized religions but it fundamentally focuses on those qualities of day to day life which ensure a healthy and virtuous life of an individual, and herein lies his universalism.

Kabir strongly believes that humanbeings are subjected to innumerable sufferings because of their false assumptions and allurements in this material world. He calls these worldy traps *Maya*, and warns his audience to renounce it, fully knowing that it is a difficult task .The refrain is-'*avadhu, maya taji na jay'*

Tell me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya?
When I gave up the tying of ribbons, still I tied
my garment about me:
When I gave up tying my garment, still I covered
my body in its folds.
So, when I give up passion,I see that anger
remains;
And when I renounce anger, greed is with me
still;
And when greed is vanquished, pride and vainglory
remain;
When the mind is detached and casts Maya away,
still it clings to the letter
Kabir says, "Listen to me, dear Sadhu! The true
path is rarely found."

(*Songs of Kabir,* p.3)

Kabir's message is quite clear that no individual can enjoy rapport with God without renouncing or controlling the impulses of sex, anger greed, infatuation and pride- the strong vices of human life.

Further Kabir extols the path of simplicity (Sahaj-yoga)–a life of love, hope and contentment-

sai itna dijiye, jamme kutumb samaye
main *bhi bhunkha na rahun, sadhu na bhunkha jaye*

(O God, bless me with the means that are sufficient to run my family, my hunger should be satisfied, and no noble-soul should go unfed from my house.)

Kabir attaches prime importance to human love, it is his greatest mantra to achieve God and happiness -it is the other name of self-effacement-

kabir yahu ghar prem ka, khala ka ghar nahi
sees *utare hathi kar ,so baithe ghar mahi*. (Singh, p 251)

(Kabir says that this world is the home of love, it is not cozy like maternal home, one who can efface his self for others, is only entitled to enter in it)

Kabir is deadly against man's lust for sensual pleasures and immoral relationships in day-to-day life-

per naari raata phire,chori bidhta khaye
diwas *chaar sarsa rahe,ant samula jaye*. (Singh, p 50)

(He who has infatuation for others wife, and enriches himself by thefts, may be prosperous for some days, at last, he is ruined completely.)

Kabir's another message that has universal appeal is his insistence to entertain critics because they hep a lot to improve one's life:

nindak niyare rakhiye,aangan kuti bandhay
bin *savan pani bina,nirmal kare subhay*. (Singh p 273)

(You should keep your critics near, taking care of them, they can wash out all your blemishes without water and soap)

In the same way, Kabir keeps on reminding the people of the world that humanbody is mortal and this life has no meaning if it is not used properly:

yah tan kancha kumbh hai,liya phire tha saath,
d*abka laaga phoot gaya,kachhu na aaya haath*. (Singh, p 66)

(This human-body is like an immature pitcher that is carried by men. When it is hit by,it breaks,and the result is nothing.)

Or

paani kera budbuda, as maanas ki jati
dekhat *hi chhip jayega, jiyon taara parbhati*. (Singh, p 6)

(Just as bubbles of water dissolve into nothing in a moment so does the life of a man, it is as shadowed as the light of the stars.)

Thus, we see thatKabir is a great devotee of God as well as the poet of universalwisdom; his many couplets have inspired generations to lead a simple, truthful and noble life of action.

5.6. KABIR'S LANGUAGE AND STYLE

In the foregoing sections, you have come to know about the thought-content of Kabir's poetry, now we will see how Kabir has handled language to suit his thought-content. As students of literature, you know it very well that language is but a means to communicate feelings and ideas. Kabir was illiterate and his target audience comprised of the masses of different classes. Hence he chose to express his experienced truth in the colloquial language of the commonman. Some critics have found fault with his language and regarded it rough and unpolished. But an examination of his poetry rejects such charges. Only the textual evidence of a few couplets from his works can prove that

Kabir's language hasthe potential to convey great truths in a simple language, he can define a concept as complex as Brahm in simple words:

jake mooh maatha nahi,naahi roop, kurup,
puhup *baas te patla ,aisa tatve anoop.*(Singh, p 60)

(This Brahm is such a unique entity that has no mouth, no forehead, neither handsome nor ugly; it is thinner than the fragrance of a flower.)

In the same way, he delineates the nature of the human soul and its integrity with the Ultimate Soul, and the nature of Maya-the factors responsible to distance Soul with the Ultimate Soul, in an impressive language, easily understood by the masses:

maya mui ne man mua,mari mari gaya sharir
aasa *tishna na mui, yon kah gaya kabir*. (Singh p 62)

(Neither the Maya dies nor the desires of the mind, though the human body decays, neither the expectations nor the lust come to end, this is the truth told by Kabir.)

Kabir uses this conversational language not only to reveal complicated philosophical concepts but also to satirize the pretensions of the so-called religious people.

kar main to maala phire,jeebh phire mukh mahi
manuba *to chahu-disi phire,yah to sumiran nahi.*(Singh, p63)

(You count beads in your hands, your tongue mutters God's names in the mouth, but your mind wanders towards the worldly things, this is not worshipping to God.)

Besides this simple way of narration, Kabir's poetry gives ample examples to show his choice of words, the use of metaphors and similies, and the use of local words and idioms, they come quite naturally in his language and make his poetry poignant as well as impressive.

When we analyse Kabir's language stylistically, it becomes clear why Kabir's poetry is so popular and so impressive to his readers and audiences. Many critics have noted that the reader is central in Kabir.He begins with number of addresses, establishes intimate relationships with his readers, and then exposes their pretensions by putting questions, riddles, and surprising upside-down language. A number of poems begin with addresses: Hey Saint, Brother, Brahmin, Yogi, Hermit, Friend, Fool! and very soon Kabir swings to attack their falsities by questioning them:

Pandit,do some research
And let me know
How to destroy
Transciency?

(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p10)

Or

Now you, Mr Qazi, what kind of work is that,
Going from house to house
Chopping heads?
Who told you to swing the knife?
(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p10)

Further we see, he forwards riddles to extract the answers to the most complex subjects such as the nature of God:

What will you call the Pure?
Say, creature, how will you mutter the name
Of one without hand or foot,

Mouth, tongue or ear?
(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p13)

And sometimes he refers to the functioning of Maya in the world through his *ulatbansi*- the upside-down-language:

The cow is sucking at the calf's teat,
From house to house the prey hunts,
the hunter hides.
(*The Bijak of Kabir,* p51)

Thus we see that Kabir's poetry has the potential to unravel not only the complex mysteries of man's existence and God but also to awaken the social consciousness of the people in a fashion of speech that is perfectly in tune with the sensibility of his common-folk listeners.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. Explain the different relationships which Kabir establishes with God?
2. Write a short note to define Kabir's mysticism?
3. What rituals of the Hindu and the Muslim are criticicized by Kabir and why?
4. Give some texual examples to prove that Kabir was a social reformer?
5. What are the essentials of a good life celebrated by Kabir that have universal appeal?
6. Write a critical note on the salient features of Kabir's language and style.

5.7. HOW TO STUDY KABIR

As students of literature, you know it quite well that literature is an experience to be shared. You cannot evaluate Kabir in isolation. A poet is the creation of his times; you have to check up those currents of thoughts that made Kabir so vocal against the shams and falsities of his times. Kabir, the man, may be the creation of the legends we hear about but his works have to be referred to the socio-cultural scenes and Kabir's response to them deserve to be analyzed and compared with the other Bhakti-poets of his times, and you have to see how the words of Kabir still have relevance in your context and the world, and this whole practice depends on how much Kabir's works are closely studied by you. You are advised to study Kabir in your own language before coming to English translations; it would make your understanding better and perception clearer. It would also give you an understanding about the limits of translation.

5.8. SUMMING UP

You have seen how Kabir took birth in a time that was torn apart by different religious orthodoxies which passed in the name of religion. Kabir takes notices of them and exposes their falsities by expressing his own vision of reality. Without propagating any 'ism'or ideology, he simplifies the complex concepts of the nature of God, the entity of the soul, the functioning of Maya that hinders in the union of the soul and the Ultimate Soul, the mortality of this world and human-life and gives the message of love,

brotherhood and communal harmony not only to his Age but to the whole world. His revolutionary ideas about religion and his thrust on a pious life of duty and devotion rank him with the greatest of seer-poets of the world. Though Kabir was charged of being a heretic and atheist in his life and works, later critics have hailed his all-embracing humanism as well as his revolutionary zeal. For a reader in the 21st century,he seem most modern and relevant, his whole poetry is a spirited plea for a world of human beings, free from biases of caste and creed - an appeal for simplicity in thought and deed, and an immaculate love for the Almighty and His children.

5.9. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to the discussion given at 4.3.1;you can also take help from the Internet.
2. Refer to Section 4.3.1. and take down your notes, keeping in the mind the fact that each legend has a hidden message.
3. Refer to the discussion given at 4.4.

II

1. Refer to the section 4.5.1.
2. Refer to the section 4.5.2.
3. Refer to the section 4.5.3.
4. Refer to the section 4.5.3. You can collect textual examples from other sources also.
5. Refer to the section 4.5.4.
6. Refer to the section 4.6

5.10. GLOSSARY

Ram: Most often in Kabir's texts 'Ram' is an invocation of'Nirguna Ram', the poet's paradoxical term for godhead or ultimate reality without attributes.

***Maya*:** illusion; generally, a representation of the world around as 'unreal' and as consisting of illusory appearances. In Kabir, all attachments and allurement that check soul's unity with the Ultimate Soul.

***Adwaitvaad*:** The philosophy that human soul is integral to the Ultimate Soul, there is no biological difference in man and God.

***Sahaj*:** For Kabir, the*sahaj sthiti* is the simple state in which an individual merges with his atma, which is identical with nirguna godhead or reality

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5.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the nature of Kabir's devotion to God.
2. Illustrate with texual examples that Kabir is a social reformer.
3. Write a crical essay on Kabir's humanism.
4. Discuss Kabir's language and style on the basis of your readings.

UNIT 6 SELECTIONS FROM GHALIB

6.1. INTRODUCTION

It seems quite ironical that the most turbulent period of human history coincides with the birth of great creative minds in the field of literature and arts. Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan whose pen name was Ghaliband Asad or Asad or Ghalib earned a great name and fame as a classical Urdu and Persian poet at a crucial juncture of Indian history when the Mughals were eclipsed and displaced by the British and finally deposed, following the defeat of Indian mutiny in 1857. Ghalib's life and works in poetry and prose not only bear a testimony to the despondent mood of the Age but also highlight and celebrate those virtues of human spirit which endure all oddities of human life and make life more beautiful and worth living. Ghalib is undoubtedly, one of the most popular and influential poets of Urdu language, not only in India and South Asia but also in all the countries of the world where the communities of the diaspora have settled.

6.2. OBJECTIVES

- This unit aims to enable you to understand and develop your insights into the following aspects of Ghalib's poetry:
- To be aware about Ghalib's life and important events related to his life.
- To give a brief introduction of his works.
- To make you aware about the salient features Ghalib's poetry and his vision of life.
- To help you in the critical evaluation of Ghalib's poetry.
- To discuss Ghalib's relevance to the present times.

6.3. GHALIB AND HIS WORKS

6.3.1. Ghalib the Man

Ghalib was born in the city of Agra, of parents with Turkish aristocratic ancestry, probably on December 27th, 1797. His paternal grandfather, Mirza Qoqan Baig Khan, was a Saljuq Turk who had immigrated to India from Samarkand during the reign of Ahmad Shah (1748-54). He worked at Lahore, Delhi and Jaipur, was awarded the sub-district of Pahasu (Bulandshahr, UP) and finally settled in Agra (UP, India). He had four sons and three daughters. Mirza Abdullah Baig Khan and Mirza Nasrullah Baig Khan were two of his sons. Mirza Abdullah Baig Khan (Ghalib's father) got married to Izzat-ut-Nesa Begum, and then lived at the house of his father-in-law. He was employed first by the Nawab of Lucknow and then the Nizam of Hyderabad, Deccan. He died in a battle in 1803 in Alwar and was buried at Rajgarh (Alwar, Rajasthan). At that time, Ghalib was about five year old. He lost his uncle too, when he was only nine. So, he spent a good part of his early boyhood with his mother's family. He was married at an early age of thirteen to Umrao Begum, the daughter of Nawab Ilahi Bakhsh (brother of the Nawab of Firozpur Jhirka) but none of his seven children survived beyond infancy. After his marriage he settled in Delhi and lived there till his death on February 15th, 1869. He was buried at Nizamuddin in Delhi in the traditional graveyard of the Loharu family.

In Delhi, he learnt Persian and gained the knowledge of other subjects from Saykh Muazzam who was one of the eminent teachers of Ghalib's time. In 1850, Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II bestowed upon Mirza Ghalib the title of "Dabir-ul-Mulk". The Emperor also added to it the additional title of "Najm-ud-daula". The conferment of these titles was symbolic of Mirza Ghalib's integration into the aristocracy of Delhi. He also received the title of 'Mirza Nosha' from the Emperor, thus adding Mirza as his first name. The Emperor appointed him not only as his poet instructor but also the royal historian of Mughal court. However Ghalib's life most often depended on pensions received by the British government or royal patronage of Mughal Emperors or on credit or the charity of friends. Ghalib was very conscious of his Mughal nobility and aristocracy, he loved wine and gambling and never compromised with his freedom of spirit and self -esteem. Like his poetry, his life always celebrated the joys and the sorrows with all humanly gusto and fervor without any grumbling.

"Azad rauh hun, aur mera maslak hai sulhe kul
Hargiz kabhi kisi se, adavat nahi mujhe"

6.3.2. Ghalib's Works

• **1816:** Ghalib compiles his first Urdu divan, which is now known as the *Nuskhah-ai-Amroha* or the *Nushkhah-ai-Bhopali.* The original manuscript has since disappeared, but printed editions of it exist, one by Akbar Ali Khan Arshizadah (Rampur, 1969), one by Nisar Ahmad Faruqi (Lahore, 1969).

• **1821:** Ghalib compiles the second version of his Urdu divan, which is now known as the *Nushkhah-ai-Hamidiyah*. This manuscript was printed first in 1921, edited by Mufti Anvaar ul-Haq of Bhopal with the famous unfinished preface by Abdur Rahman Bijnori; and again much later (1970's) in facsimile editions from Lucknow and Lahore. The original is reported to have disappeared from the State Library in Bhopal in 1947, and has recently been reported by S. R. Faruqi to have resurfaced. This version contains most (though not all) of the ghazals from 1816, and many new ones. The present whereabouts of this divan are not known.

•**1825:** Ghalib compiles the third version of his Urdu divan, which is now known as the *Nushkhah-ai-Sherani*; this manuscript, discovered by Haafiz Mahmud Sherani, is now in Punjab University, Lahore; it was published by Punjab University in a facsimile edition, 1969. This version contains most (though not all) of the ghazals from 1821, and many new ones.

•**1828, June:** Ghalib participates in Persian mushairahs; some linguistic objections are raised against his poetry by pupils of Mirza Muhammad Hasan Qatil; he replies to them in his masnavi *Baad-ai Mukhalif*, written in a conciliatory tone but insisting on his view that Indian Persian writers are not authoritative for usage and idiom

•**1828, Sept:** Ghalib compiles *Ghul-ai-Rana*, a selection of his Urdu and Persian poetry, for his friend Maulvi Siraj ud-Din Ahmad; the manuscript was missing for almost a century but then was found by Sayyid Naqi Bilgrami, and published by Malik Ram in 1970.

•**1834-35:***Maikhana-aiaarzu-Saranzaam*, his Persian divan, is published by Matba Dar us-Salam, Delhi, 506 p.; the compilation is supervised by Navab Ziya ul-Din Ahmad

Khan of Loharu (younger brother of the ruler) and others. This work contains 275 *ghazals* with 6,673 *shi'rs*. This manuscript has now vanished.

•**1841, Oct:** *Deewan-ai Ghalib* in Urdu is published by the Sayyid ul-Mataabi' Press (also known as Sayyid ul-Akhbar Press), Delhi, in 108 p.; it has a Persian introduction by Ghalib; an endnote by Ziya ud-Din Ahmad Khan dated 1838 saying that the total shi'rs are 1,070 (though it's actually 1,095). This edition is in the Saulat Public Library, Rampur. A facsimile edition was published by Kalidas Gupta Raza (1999).

•**1847, May:** *Deevan-ai Ghalib* in Urdu, 2nd ed., Matba Dar ul-Salam, Delhi, 98 p.

•**1849:***Panaz Aahnag*, Persian work in 5 sections: rules of address; rules of Persian grammar; his Persian verses; misc. quotes and references; some of his Persian letters; published by Matba Sultani, Delhi (Red Fort), 493 p. Kalidas Gupta Raza published a facsimile edition of the letters part

•**1852,** second half: Ghalib translates a prose text of Muhammad Salim in the form of a Persian masnavi, maybe at Bahadur Shah's behest; it's printed by the Matba Sultani; it's finally included in his Persian kulliyat, 1863.

•**1853, April**: *Panaz Aahnag*, a second edition, Dar us-Salam, 444 p. (orig. 1849)

•**1854/55:***Mahar-ai Neem-Roz*, first part of the Timurid history (creation of the world up to Humayun), published by Matba Fakhr ul-Matabi, Delhi, 116 p.; it's reprinted twice more in the same year, but all the printings are called the 'first edition'.

•**1856, second half**: *Quadir Namah*, mnemonic rhymes for children, published by Matba-e Sultani, Red Fort, 8 p.

•**1858, Nov:***Dastnabu*, Ghalib's 'old Persian' (with Arabic words avoided) account of 1857, published by Matba Mufid-e Khala'iq, Agra, 80 p.; much admired by British officers.

•**1861, July 29:***Deevan-ai Ghalib*, Urdu, third edition, Matba Ahmadi, Shaahdara, Delhi; it is full of misprints and inaccuracies, and is rejected by Ghalib and published without his permission and against his will.

•**1862, 22 March**:*Quati-ai Burhaan*, his Persian polemic attacking*Burhaan-ai Quati* `, Naval Kishor, Lucknow, 98 p.

•**1862, June**: D*eevan-ai Ghalib*Urdu, revised fourth edition, Nizami Press,Kanpur;104 p.

•**1863, June:***Qullliyat-ai Nazam-ai Farsi*, Munshi Naval Kishor, Lucknow, 562 pages;10,424 shi'rs

•**1863, latter half:***Deevan-ai Ghalib*, Urdu, fifth edition, Matba Mufid-e Khala'iq, Agra, 146 p.

•**1864:** Ghalib's Persian masnavi*Abar-ai Ghauhar-baar*, separately printed by Akmal-e Mutaabi', Delhi; though it was already in his Persian kulliyaat

•**1864:** 2nd ed, *Quadir-Namah-ai Ghaib* , Mahbas [Prison] Press, Delhi

•**1865,** Aug:*Naamah-ai Ghalib*, another Urdu pamphlet, part of the*Quti* controversy, Matba-e Muhammadi, Delhi, 16 p.; it's now included in *Urd-ai-Hindi*.

•**1865:***Dastanbu*, second ed. (orig. 1858), Rohilkhand Literary Society Press, Bareilly

•**1865**, **Dec:** *Durfash-ai Quavirani*, a revised ed. of*Quati-ai Burhaan*, Akmal ul-Mataabi' Press, Delhi, 154 p.

•**1866: vol. 2** of*Insha-ai Urdu*, ed. by Maulvi Ziya ud-din Khan of Delhi College, published by Matba Faiz-e Ahmadi, Delhi, with selections of Ghalib's Urdu prose.

•**1866-67:** masnavi *Dua-ai Sabah*, a Shi'ite masnavi that Ghalib translates from Arabic into Persian.

•**1867:***Tegh-ai Tez*, Urdu pamphlet, part of the*Quati* controversy, Akmal ul-Mataabi', Delhi, 32 p.

•**1867, Feb. 18:*Niquat-ai Ghalib***, model Persian letters selected for schoolboys, and a small text on Persian grammar, Siraji Press, Delhi, 16 p., composed by request of Master Ra'e Bahadur Pyare Lal.

•**1867, April 11:***Hanghamah-ai Dil-Aashob*, part 1, containing verse texts from Ghalib and others; in Urdu, connected with the*Quati* controversy.

•**1867, August:** *Sabad-ai Cheen*, a Persian masnavi already published in his *Qualliyaat*; Matba Muhammadi, Delhi.

•**1868, Jan:** *Qulliyat-ai Nasar ai-Faarsi*, Persian prose (*Panz Aahnag, Maher-ai Neem Roz)*, Naval Kishor Press, Lucknow, 212 p.

•**1868, Oct. 27:***Urd-ai Hindi*, a collection of his Urdu letters made by Munshi Mumtaz 'Ali and others, initially against his opposition; Matba Mujtaba'i, Meerut, 188 p.; Ghalib objects to many errors, and works on a new edition

•**1869, Mar. 5:***Urdu-ai Mualla*, Part I; a second collection of his Urdu letters; Akmal ul-Mataba, Delhi, 464 p.

•**1899:***Urdu-ai Mualla*, Parts I and II; Matba Mujtaba'i, Delhi

[Excerpts from: http://sahapedia.org/mirza-ghalib]

6.3.3. Ghalib's Letters

Ghalib is remembered not only as a great Urdu poet but also as an exceptional writer of letters. His letters written to his friends and contemporary poets are significant contribution to Urdu prose. He led the foundation of simple and popular Urdu and pioneered the conversational style in Urdu letter writing. Somewhere he says him, *Sau kos se ba-zaban-e-qalam baatein kiya karo aur hijr mein visaal ke maze liya karo* (from hundreds of miles talk with the tongue of the pen and enjoy the joy of meeting even when you are separated). He freed the existing mode of letter writing from exhaustive adjectives of address very popular before him. His letters begin informally with the name of the addressee and he writes as if he talks. His letters abound in humor and self-criticism. In one of his letters he writes *Main koshish karta hoon keh koi aesi baat likhoon jo parhay khoosh ho jaaye* (I want to write lines such that whoever reads them would enjoy them). Ralph Russell has done a significant job by translating his letters into English in the book 'The Oxford India Ghalib' published from Oxford University Press, 2003.

6.4. GHALIB'S TIMES

We know that the grandfather of Ghalib had come from Samarkand to India in the times of Shah Alam. Despite his nobility, he could not get proper regard and honour in Delhi because the kingdom of Delhi was on the decline. The Royal Court honoured him with only 50 horses, flag and the drums, besides a pargana of Maasu. In the last days of Shah Alam Delhi was almost destroyed and the courtiers were seeking shelter here and there. Owing to this chaos he lost his jageer too. The father of Ghalib - Abdullah Baig sought help from Nawab Asaf-ud-Daullah in Lucknow and later was appointed an officer under the government of Nizam Ali Khan Bahadur of Hyderabad. Later he left Hyderabad to join the services of the king of Alwar where he died in a battle. After his father's death, Ghalib was brought up by his uncle Nasurullah Baig. But after the death of his uncle, his only source of income was the annual pension of Rs.750 which he received in lieu of the jageer from the government. Ghalib appealed to increase this pension even upto England but it proved futile. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah gave him an annual honorarium of Rs 500 but after two years it stopped as the Nawab of Awadh was imprisoned by the Britishers in Calcutta. In 1842, he was offered a teaching proposal by Thomson for Delhi College but Ghalib did not accept it as he was offended by cold behaviour of the employer. In 1849, Emporer Bahadur Shah Zafar conferred royal titles on him and appointed him his poetry instructor. Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan of Rampur also helped him financially but after the mutiny of 1857 his salary from the Delhi court and the pension from the British government ceased and he was suspected to be a rebel because of his proximity with the Emperor. Ghalib had to pass this difficult phase of his life by credit from his friends and acquaintances. Later in 1859, Nawab of Rampur fixed his monthly salary for ₹100 and he could resume his pension from the government which continued till his death. In the last phase of his life, Ghalib was almost confined to his bed; he ate very less and could hardly see or listen. Hence, Ghalib's life passed through that critical juncture of Indian history when the Mughal sultanate was on its verge of perish and, after the 1857 Mutiny, the British colonizers were playing all foul games to seize political power in India. Ghalib's works exhibit the prevalent mood of this time and present how Ghalib responded to these circumstances with his vision.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. Describe in your own words the state of Delhi when Ghalib composed poetry in Delhi.
2. How the mutiny of 1857 affected the fate of Ghalib?
3. Give a sketch of Ghalib's life and major events.

6.5. THE SALIENT FEATURES OF GHALIB'S POETRY

Ghalib was a born poet; he wrote what he felt in different situations of his life. When we study his poetry we should take care to see what he said and more importantly, how he said. He is a great poet of love and the beauty of life. There is no feeling or emotion related to love and beauty that has escaped his poetic imagination. Besides his experiences of love, his poetry explores the truth of this life and death in the universe and

puts forth his vision of life. The salient features of Ghalib's poetry can be studied under the following headings:

6.5.1. Celebration ofSelf

Ghalib glorifies himself in his poetry and extols his own qualities as poet in numberless verses such as

'hain aur bhi duniya main sukhanvar bahut achchhe,
kehte *hain Ghalib ka hai andaaz-e-bayan aur…'*

(Although there are many good poets in the world but it is said that Ghalib's mode of narration is quite distinguished)

Similarly, he gives vent to innumerable desires which lie deep in his heart unfulfilled. See this beautiful ghazal:

Hazaaron khwahishen aisi ke har khwahish pe dam nikle,
Bohat niklay mere armaan, lekin phir bhi kam nikle

Daray kyon mera qaatil? Kya rahega us ki garden par?
Voh khoon, jo chashm-e-tar se umr bhar yoon dam-ba-dam nikle

Nikalna khuld se aadam ka soonte aaye hain lekin,
Bahot be-aabru hokar tere kooche se hum nikle

Bharam khul jaaye zaalim! Teri qaamat ki daraazi ka,
Agar is tarahe par pech-o-kham ka pech-o-kham nikle

Magar likhvaaye koi usko khat, to hum se likhvaaye,
Hui subaha, aur ghar se kaan par rakh kar qalam nikle

Hui is daur mein mansoob mujh se baada aashaami,
Phir aaya voh zamaana, jo jahaan mein as-e-jaam nikle

Hui jin se tavaqqa khastagi ki daad paane ki,
Voh ham se bhi zyaada khasta e tegh e sitam nikle

Mohabbat mein nahin hai farq jeenay aur marnay ka,
Usi ko dekh kar jeetay hain, jis kaafir pe dam nikle

Zara kar jor seene par ki teer-e-pursitam niklejo,
Wo nikle to dil nikle, jo dil nikle to dam nikle

Khuda ke aste parda na kaabe se uthaa zaalim,
Kaheen aisa na ho yaan bhi wahi kaafir sanam nikle

Kahaan maikhane ka darwaaza Ghalib aur kahaan vaaiz,
Par itna jaantay hain kal voh jaata tha ke ham nikle

Hazaaron khwahishen aisi ke har khwahish pe dam nikle,
Bohat niklay mere armaan, lekin phir bhi kam nikle…

English Translation

Thousands of desires, each worth dying for...
Many of them I have realized...yet I yearn for more...

Why should my killer (lover) be afraid? No one will hold her responsible
For the blood which will continuously flow through my eyes all my life

We have heard about the dismissal of Adam from Heaven,
With a more humiliation, I am leaving the street on which you live...

Oh tyrant, your true personality will be known to all
If the curls of my hair slip through my turban!

But if someone wants to write her a letter, they can ask me,
Every morning I leave my house with my pen on my ear.

In that age, I turned to drinking (alcohol)
And then the time came when my entire world was occupied by alcohol

From whom I expected justice/praise for my weakness
Turned out to be more injured with the same cruel sword

When in love, there is little difference between life and death
We live by looking at the infidel who we are willing to die for

Put some pressure on your heart to remove that cruel arrow,
For if the arrow comes out, so will your heart...and your life.

For god's sake, don't lift the cover off any secrets you tyrant
The infidel might turn out to be my lover!

The preacher and the bar's entrance are way apart
Yet I saw him entering the bar as I was leaving!

Thousands of desires, each worth dying for...
Many of them I have realized...yet I yearn for more.

(http://bhuwanchand.wordpress.com/2013/07/29/hazaaron-khwahishen-aisi-mirza-ghalib/)

6.5.2. God is Love

The word 'Ghazal' originally means 'conversation between lovers'. In Ghalib's Ghazals, poet lover expresses his passionate, all-consuming love for his beloved. Ralph Russell rightly observes "Ghalib writes of being overwhelmed by love, of powerlessness in the face of love, of the joy of loving even if one's love is not returned, the even greater joy if it is returned; he also speaks of the compulsion to love, even if she whom he loves spurns him, violates all the religious commands of the community in which he and she live or, having once loved, is not true to him." (Ralph Russell, p.291). Ghalib's love is unconditional –

No one can govern love, Ghalib, this is a kind of fire
No one can kindle; and, once kindled, no one can put out
All that she is, puts Ghalib's soul in turmoil
All that she says, and hints, and looks and does
With only half your charm you lay the base of a new world
A new earth is create is created and new heavens start to turn

He who sits in the shade of his beloved's wall
Is Lord and King of all the realm of Hindustan
I shall write to you even without cause
Simply to write your name fills me with love
Without you, just as wine within the glass is parted from it
My soul is in my body, but is not a part of it
No, she does not bow down to God
Yes, she is faithless too. Now go!
If I had prized my heart and faith
Would I have gone into her lane?

(Russell's translation, p.291)

Thus, Ghalib's style is explicitly individual and passionate:

Wo aaye ghar mein hamare khuda ke kudarat hai...
Ye jo hum hijr mein divar-o-dar ko dekhte hain
kabhi saba ko kabhi namabar ko dekhte hain
wo aaye ghar mein hamare khuda ke kudarat hai
kabhi hum un ko kabhi apne ghar ko dekhte hain
nazar lage na kaheen usake dast-o-bazu ko
ye log kyon mere zakhm-e-jigar ko dekhte hain
tere javahir-e-tarf-e-kulah ko kya dekhen
hum auj-*e-tala-e-lal-o-guhar ko dekhte hain*

(http://paperpkads.com/shayari/tag/mirza-ghalib-shayari)

He is ready to accept love in any form, though he knows the path of love is very difficult:

Yeh ishq nahin aasan, bas itna samajh lijiye;
Eik aag ka dariya hai, aurr doob ke jaan hai
Ishq par zor nahin hai yeh who aatish Ghalib;
Jo lagaye na lagey, aur bujhaye na baney
Ishq ney Ghalib nikamma kar diya;
Warna *hum bhi aadmi they kaam key*...

(http://aseemarorablog.blogspot.in/2010/09/mirza-galib-ke-lafz)

Ghalib is such a singer of love's beauty that his love does not recognize earthly chains and attains the height of mystic love, one can easily equate 'you' of his most of the Ghazals to mean God:

Though I have passed my life in pledge to all the age's cruelties
Yet never was the thought of you once absent from my mind.

(Russell's translation, p.300)

6.5.3. This World is Heaven: Ghalib was a liberal mystic. He did not believe in rituals and fundamentalism. He was a seeker of truth. He disdained orthodox views about religion and heaven. In this sense he followed the Sufi and the mystic tradition without making any claims. Once he stated:

The object of my worship lies beyond perception's reach;
For men who see, the Ka'aba is a compass, nothing more.
(William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*, p.41)

He does not believe that there is heaven beyond this earth, he once wrote in a letter to a friend:

> In paradise it is true that I shall drink at dawn the pure wine mentioned in the Qu'ran, but where in paradise are the long walks with intoxicated friends in the night, or the drunken crowds shouting merrily? Where shall I find there the intoxication of Monsoon clouds? Where there is no autumn, how can spring exist? If the beautiful houris are always there, where will be the sadness of separation and the joy of union? Where shall we find there a girl who flees away when we would kiss her?
>
> (William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*, p.41)

Ghalib believed that God lies in the hearts of human beings and could be reached less by ritual than by love. So it was accessible to both the Hindus and the Muslims. In one of his poems*Chirag-i-Diar*, which he composed during his trip to Benaras in 1827, he bemoaned the loss of goodness and faith, fidelity and love from the land of Hindustan and refers to the almighty power that has avoided the catastrophe of doomsday in his land. He believed that God reveals Himself in many forms and the worship of His true lovers is acceptable to Him, no matter in what form people worship him. He opines:

> One must be constant to the end; this is the essence of the faith
> The priest dies in his temple- let the Ka'aba be his burial place

Or he says:

> Our creed is oneness, and our cry, Abandon rituals
> So that communities dissolve to constitute one faith.
>
> (Russell's translation, p.305)

6.5.4. Fraternity is Man's Religion

To Ghalib, the poet and philosopher, to love God means to love fellow human beings. He phrases it simply:

> The object of creation was mankind and nothing else
> We are the point round which the seven compasses revolve…
>
> (Russell's translation, p.306)

For him, man is the finest of God's creations and is higher than the angels, he often wonders mystically about God's treatment of his noblest of created things in this manner:

> Those whom You frown upon toil upon with neither bread nor water
> Those whom You favor, sated, are still plied with heavenly food
>
> (Russell's translation, p.306)

He is puzzled that on one hand God predestined everything; on the other hand He gave free will to everybody but he complains modestly:

> He hid in this handful of dust two lightening's poised to strike
> One the harsh law of fate and one the sorrow of free will
>
> (Russell's translation, p.306)

He questions this divine scheme on behalf of all suffering mankind:

> The angels write and we are seized. Where is the justice there?

Did we have no one present when they wrote their record down?
(Russell's translation, p.307)

In many verses like these, Ghalib questions the mystery of God and human life and expresses close affiliation and sympathy for suffering fellow human beings:

When all is You, and nought exists but You
Tell me, O Lord, why all this turmoil too…
(Russell's translation, p.307)

6.5.5. Metaphors of Wine and Music

Ghalib was a mystic poet to whom the impulses of the heart mattered supreme. His romantic poetry abounds with metaphors of wine and music without which romantic love cannot be imagined. As we know, wine is prohibited in Islam and music was disapproved by orthodox zealots of the religion. In Ghalib's poetry, they become metaphors to oppose worldly wisdom and austere attitudes of institutionalized religions, which give no scope to free and generous thinking to each individual. Like other Urdu poets, Ghalib uses symbols of wine, wine drinkers and the tavern in the sense of love, lovers and this world, which have literal as well as metaphorical meanings. He writes:

The pious bow in prayer to God; no radiance lights their forehead
See how the wine lights up the faces of the wine drinkers!
(Russell's translation, p.309)

Or sometimes in humorous vein he writes:

Beneath the shade of every mosque should be a tavern
Just as the eye, your reverence is near the brow.
(Russell's translation, p.309)

Thus we see how Ghalib's poetry touches all spheres of man's life, sometimes he regales in the romantic love, at other, he ruminates about the mysteries of this universe and God but whatever he opines strike us with its forcefulness and novelty of expression. It is so because his statements are the expressions of his own beliefs and practice. His humanism and all pervasive love endear him across communities and countries. He attracts his readers more passionately because his life and poetry are in close harmony. He was confident that his poetry would be valued deservedly after his death just as wine is valued when it grows old.

Today none buys my verses wine, that it may grow in age
To make the senses reel in many a drinker yet to come
My star rose highest in the firmament before my birth
My poetry will win the world's acclaim when I'm gone.
(Russell's translation, p.324)

Ghalib's words proved true.

Self Assessment Questions II

1. Give some examples of Ghalib's self glorification.
2. What are the features of Ghalib's love for God

3. Discuss Ghalib's humanism
4. Explain the symbols of wine and tavern in the poetry Ghalib. Support your answer by textual quotes.
5. Find out five best ghazals of Ghalib on internet and analyze its imagery.

6.6. GHALIB'S LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Ghalib had trained himself in the Persian poetic tradition. In the 18th century, Nasir Ali and Baidil were two famous poets in Persian language. In the early phase of his poetic career, Ghalib followed Baidil, this amounted to the use of difficult words and the expression of complicated feelings. In this period, he composed Urdu poetry only occasionally. Urdu seemed too weak a medium to handle the intricacies of Persian vocabulary. This overdose of Persian verbosity made his early poetry often obscure, there are instances when Ghalib was ridiculed for this obscure style owing to his Persian influence. Ghalib, being a jovial fellow, brushed aside such charges but he felt sad too.In the second phase of his poetic career, he seems to come out from the spell of Persian vocabulary,and gradually depended more and more on his free consciousness and personal experiences in the language of the common people.In the poetry of this period,he does experiments and moves ahead like a Romantic,breaking new grounds of thought and poetic form.It is the period when he gets expertise in saying new things in new idiom and highlights his own self,he is neither a friend nor an enemy to any one,and views life and the world humorously:

Bazichaye atfaal hai dunia mare aage
Hota hai shabo-roz tamashaa mare aage
Imaan mujhe roke to khaiche hai mujhe kufr
Ka'aba *mare peechhe hai kaleesa mare aage.*

Ghalib's third phase of poetry is melancholic,his failing health brought in a despondent note in his poems.But the poetry of this period is significant because of its simplicity of expression and vividness of description.The touch of pathos has made it smooth,chaste and bewitching in its flow.It appears a river has come out of rocks and valleys above the range of mountains to the plains where everybody can take a dip and feel relaxed.

6.7. SUMMING UP

Ghalib is undoubtedly one of the greatest poets of Urdu language. His prose especially his letters are significant contributions in the field. Ghalib lived and wrote in a time when Mughal Sultanate was losing grounds for the colonial powers of the British. His life and works represent this crucial juncture of Indian history. The poetic career of Ghalib is indicative of the influence of Persian language and culture that it exerted on the common life and thinking of Indian men of letters. Ghalib shed off the complex verbosity of the Persian language and made Urdu a capable vehicle of poetic expression and philosophical thoughts.

His poetry sings of the joys and sorrows of human life and celebrates human-self, discarding man made barriers of caste, class and creed and gives the message of

communal harmony and universal brotherhood that has quite relevance in the modern times.

6.8. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESMENT QUESTIONS

I

Carefully read section 6.4.and frame your answers one by one.

II

1. Refer to the section6.5.1.
2. Refer to the section 6.5.2.
3. Refer to the section 6.5.4.
4. Refer to the section 6.5.5.
5. It is your self-research project
6.

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6.10. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on the life and times of Mirza Ghalib.
2. Critically analyze the main features of Ghalib's poetry.
3. Account for the popularity of Ghalib's Ghazals.
4. Discuss the relevance of Ghalib's poetry in modern times.

UNIT 7 RABINDRA NATH TAGORE: SONGS FROM *GITANJALI*

7.1. INTRODUCTION

The third great Indian poet that you have in your course after Kabir and Ghalib is Rabindra Nath Tagore. You know by this time that social situation and Indian sensibility played a major role in determining the course of development of Indian Writing in English and in English Translation. Although all the three writers lived in different social situations yet all of them maintain a distinct Indian-ness in their works. Kabir was a mystic and a saint of the fifteenth century. He was a nirgun upasak (a worshipper of God which is without attributes or forms). Ghalib on the other hand was a classical Urdu and Persian Poet from the Mughal Empire during British colonial rule. R.N.Tagore's literature perhaps is a heady mixture of these two and much more. He chose to write his own script of life and was one of the first Modern Indian poet and writer who put India on the world literary map. A versatile genius who wrote in all the genres of literature, he deservedly got the Noble prize for Gitanjali in 1913. Thus his reputation in Indian Literature in English is permanently secured.

He is a composer of great variety of literature. However, today we mainly remember him for his poems. Most of the original poems are in his native tongue Bengali. He transcreated nearly all of these poems in English.Humanism and Universal Brotherhood stand out as two of the most distinguishing qualities of his poems. These two virtues in present times are rare to find. He through his wonderful songs sang of spiritual love in a voice which is uniquely Indian. His pinnacle of success in poetry is Gitanjali. The original work was in Bangla and he transcreated it in English in 1913. We will discuss this Magnum Opus in detail in section 6.4. His poems have been interpreted in so many ways that it is embarrassment of riches for the modern reader to explore them. Therefore his poetry is all the more relevant today as the virtues he sang were the curious mixture of multiple meanings.

7.2.OBJECTIVES

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

- The salient features of Tagore's poetic genius.
- The broader understanding of Gitanjali as a whole.
- Thorough thematic patterns of the first four songs of Gitanali.
- Tagore's subtle touches of "Indian-ness" in Gitanjali.

7.3. RABINDRA NATH TAGORE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861-1941) was born in what is now called the state of West Bengal in India. He belonged to one of Bengal's most illustrious families. He was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the BrahmoSamaj, which was a new religious sect in nineteenth-century Bengal. His grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore was anentrepreneur and founder of the great Tagore family of Jorasanko, Calcutta. Thus R N Tagore soaked into the new creative wave of Renaissance.

He was educated at home and although at seventeen he was sent to England for formal schooling, he did not finish his studies. However, he was deeply influenced by the English Writers, especially Shakespeare, Thomas Browne, Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. After returning from England, he started writing poems in Bangla. His career took off with the works like *SandhyaSangit, PrabhatSangit* and the play *Prakritirpratishod.* In 1901, he established Shantiniketan, which manifested his ideal of "the union of all sections of humanity in sympathy and understanding, in truth and love." It is during this time that family bereavements took its toll on Tagore. The partition of Bengal in 1905 and his disillusionment with Swadeshi Movement further sharpened his Indian sensibilities. Success of Gitanjali and knighthood followed in 1913 & 1915 respectively. After this euphoria, came the phase of foreign tours where there were mixed reactions regarding his poetic skills. Several Honors' like 'Honorary Doctorate of Literature' by Oxford University were bestowed upon him in his later stages of life. This Indian literary giant breathed his last on 7th August, 1941.

A glance at the prolific output of Tagore is sufficient to make us wonder about the speed with which he wrote his works. His poetic output in itself forms a substantial amount. It also suggests a gradual evolution of his poetic genius. His first significant work is Sandhya-Sangeet (1882) followed by PrabhatSangeet (1883). The next important landmark is Manasi (1890) where he seems to give away the adolescent fantasies and steps into Manhood. Sonar Tari in 1894 established him as a Nature Poet. Other works like Chitra-urvashi and caitali represent the ending of this phase in Tagore's poetic evolution.

Ksanika, Naibedya, Samaran, Sisu, Utsarga and Kheya belonged to pre-Gitanjali period. Then followed the trio *Gitanjali* (Bangla, 1910 and in English in 1912), *Gitamalaya* in 1914 followed by *Gitali* in the same year. Here Tagore reaches to the peak of his poetic powers. The collections of lyrics which followed next were Balaka, Purabi, Mahua, Banabani and Parises. They reveal a further ripening of Tagore's vision which now grows more dynamic and profound. These are experiments in new metrical forms, particularly in Free verse.

Tagore continued to write up to the very end of his days. The last phase of his poetic career begins with Punasca in 1932 and ends with SesLekha in 1941. The other two notable works being *Arogya* and *Janmadine*. These later poems are marked by an intense realism of vision and show remarkable attempts to demystify the animal and the natural world. *My Life in My Words* is an attempt by him to creatively construct his autobiography by arranging some of his communications and personal essays in a chronological order. *My Reminiscences*is also a similar kind of work which isnot just merely a collection of memory but a stroke of paint, touching upon many topics related to literature, childhood, and education and so on.

7.4. *GITANJALI*: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

By now you have learned the essential facts about the Renaissance Man of Modern India- R N Tagore. The most representative and enduringly popular work of Tagore is as earlier stated- *Gitanjali.* The original version of *Gitanjali* was written in 1910 and the English version came out in 1912. The original Bengali collection of 157 poems was transcreated

into The English *Gitanjali* or *Song Offerings* by Tagore himself. It is a collection of 103 English poems first published in November 1912 by the India Society of London. It contained translations of 53 poems from the original Bengali Gitanjali, as well as 50 other poems which were from his drama Achalayatan and eight other books of poetry - mainly *Gitimalya* (17 poems), *Naivedya* (15 poems) and *Kheya* (11 poems).

The word “Gitanjali” is composed from "geet", song, and "anjali", offering, and thus means – "An offering of songs".The word for offering, anjali, has a strong religious meaning, so the title may also be interpreted as "prayer offering of song". It is a collection of devotional songs in IndianBhakti tradition. The central theme of Gitanjali is the soul’s journey to eternity. There are various themes running side by side to the main theme. Humanitarian vision and Universal Brotherhood are the other two important themes. The work immediately appealed to the Western World. W B Yeats was so influenced by it that he wrote an Introduction to the English version of it.

All the 103 poems in Gitanjali are organized architecturally. They are arranged in groups, and each group follows the other logically and inevitably. Each coming poem seems to be a further elongation of the previous one. Gitanjali can be thematically divided into 7 groups. They are as follows:

- First group (song 1 to song 7) - it deals with the vastness and immensity of God’s love.
- Second group (song 8 to song 13) - it describes the proper way to realize God. It says that God is to be found with the tillers and the path makers who are the humble sons of the soil.
- Third group (song 14-36) ¬– it describes the poet’s intense yearning for union with God. The pains of separation and hurdles have been also described.
- Fourth group (song 37-57) – it emphasizes the sense of freedom of the poet and his country.
- Fifth group (song 58-70) –it reveals the maya of the Almighty and also shows how the creator (God) himself participates in the joys of the poet.
- Sixth group (song 71-78) – it explains the way out from this illusionary world. It further goes on to underline the importance of service and love towards God by man.
- Seventh group (song 79- 103) – the last group deals with the eternal and inevitable truth of death. According to the poet, it removes the veil, breaks the entire barrier and makes his union with God possible.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. What were the prevalent social conditions at the time when*Gitanjali* was composed?
2. Discuss the early influences on Tagore’s poetry.
3. Write a note on the thematic patterns of Gitanjali.
4. Trace out the thought patterns of Gitanjali explaining the 7 core divisions.
5. Now let us look at the 4 songs prescribed in your unit in detail.

7.5. SONG 1

> Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.
>
> This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.
>
> At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.
>
> Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

The first song of *Gitanjali* sets the tone for the other songs to follow. The importance of the 1st song cannot be underestimated in any poetry collection. This fact is all the more important in understanding Gitanjali. The absolute humility and the immortality of human soul are evident in this song. The various symbols like flute of a reed, hills and dales suggest the rich use of Indian Vaishnav Bhakti tradition. The imagestrongly resemblesLord Krishna playing with his flute over mountains and valleys. The thematic tones of songs are in the tradition of an Indian mystic Saint.

7.5.1. Substance of the Song

Song number 1, in any case, is the most important song in understanding the broader thematic framework of Gitanjali.

The poet begins his "song-offering" by being extremely humble to God. He in absolute humility gives credit to God for being what he is today. Human body is a weak vessel that is very vulnerable. God fills this vessel time and time again, thus making human life immortal.

Then poet compares himself to a flute and God to be a flute player. God the musician plays upon his flute and breathes eternally new melodies. Poet's faith in divine power is so wonderfully put across in these lines. It is the Almighty who is responsible for the divine inspiration.

God's immortal touch is too much to take for the poet's little heart. It loses itself in an inexpressible joy. In these heavenly inspired moments, poet becomes one with God. In unexplainable moments like these the mystic union of man and God takes place.

God by nature is generous and kind. He is ever showering his bounties on his devotees. The extreme humbleness of human being is shown here. The inability of the poet to take these immeasurable gifts further confirms it. God had continued to pour his blessings through the ages, and still his blessings are not exhausted. God's gifts are infinite, only man because of its inability to receive it has become poor and wretched.

7.5.2. Critical Appreciation of the Song

The beauty of the song lays in the fact that poet creatively and aptly uses symbols that accurately fit into the song. The use of frail vessel and little flute of a reed for human body suggest the subtle and supreme mastery over thoughts. The fact that both the symbols can be interchangeably used for human body and human soul shows the greatness of using symbols. The highly abstract concept in this song is wonderfully

conveyed through solid, concrete images. The inability of the poet to hold the innumerable gifts that God bestows upon him is also described in an unusual way. The poet seems to be rejoicing at this inability and is in the mood of mirth making. The mystery of age old Indian spiritual tradition is touched upon in the last two lines of the song. God keeps on pouring his precious gifts of love and humanity and the ever receptive poet keenly collects them. The eternal soul's journey thus never ends.

7.6. SONG 2

> When thou commandest me to sing it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.
>
> All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony---and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.
>
> I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.
>
> I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.
>
> Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

The uniqueness of this song lies in the continuation of the great humility that he builds in the first song. The absolute nothingness of the poet is in the sharp contrast to the magnanimity of the God. The poet turns into a singer here who in an inexpressible joy forgets himself while singing the glory of the God.

7.6.1. Substance of the Song

It is only under divine inspiration that the poet can sing. When inspired in this way, his heart breaks with pride and joy. The tears of utter joy come pouring from his eyes. In such moments, his soul becomes one with the divine. Thus the first paragraph gives an account of the mystic bliss that happens with the face to face communion of God and man.

All the bitterness of life melts in the absolute blissof the God. The discordant elements melt into one complete harmony. Spiritual peace descends on the human soul. Thus music has a refreshing and uplifting effect on the human soul. The human soul becomes like a happy bird with its wings spread out. It travels far and wide to the distant sea of eternity.

The poet knows that God takes pleasure in his song. The harmony of discordant notes is the basis of song. Such harmony actually leads to the God's creation. It is only through music that poet can actually reach him.

The poet only hopes to touch his feet with the out-spread wings of his soul. Thus the image of the bird is continued in these lines. One thing that is noteworthy here is that even in the moments of mystic inspiration, he does not hope to have a full glimpse of him.

Intoxicated with the ecstatic joy, resulting from this inspired singing, he forgets that he is the servant of God. In such moments of spiritual ecstasy he begins to feel equal to God whereas in actual reality he is the most humble servant to God.

7.6.2. Critical Appreciation of the Song

The poet continues his brilliant nature imagery in this lyric.The human soul is compared to a bird with its outstretched wings and the sea is likened to the infinite. This lyric reveals Tagore's love for music. All that is discordant in human soul is purified by music. All wicked elements are converted to harmony and human soul is encircled with peace and bliss. The interrelationship between music and spiritualism is beautifully shown here. The poet composes and sings beautiful songs and lyrics in the worship of God. In such a blessed and serene mood he feels himself face to face with him.

7.7. SONG 3

> I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.
>
> The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.
>
> My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

The poet wonders at the amazing creations of God in this world. It is that power which runs through each element of this universe. The healing capacity of spiritual power is limitless. At the time of joining the song poet becomes speechless. In a very subtle complaint, he makes God responsible for his involvement with the materialistic world.

7.7.1. Substance of the Song

God is the master musician. Sweet music results from the harmony of jarring notes. This kind of harmony can only be brought out by a skilled musician. All the warring elements change into a perfect harmony because of his artistic touch. God is the master musician and this universe is his music.

The poet listens to the sweet song of his master with amazement. His music illuminates the universe. He is a life giving element that sparks all the things of the world. Like a holy stream his music rushes on and thus overcoming all the obstacles on the way.

The poet strives hard to imitate God and sing like him. But he cannot do so. His voice fails and he simply cannot utter a word. He cries out in extreme bewilderment. Human insignificance and imperfection as compared to the divine is brought out here. It is because he is entrapped in maya which is referred here as the endless music of God. The sweet harmony of God's music is constantly sounded through the universe. The poet seems to be held captive by it.

7.7.2. Critical Appreciation of the Song

The poet uses here synesthetic imagery in which one sense is spoken in terms of another. The divine music is compared to light, life breath and to a strong current of water.

The spirit of curiosity pervades in the entire lyric. The poet almost quizzically looks at the wonderful music created by God.

In a state of complete humbleness he gives in to the amazing creations of God. The image of music is given here in the sense of light that illuminates the whole world. This light radiates through all objects and is to be seen in every particle of this universe. The spiritual music like a holy stream rushes on to every nook and corner of the world.

7.8. SONG 4

> Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.
>
> I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.
>
> I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.
>
> And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.

God's presence is all pervasive. He pervades man's body, mind, heart and action. Therefore, it is the duty of man to keep himself pure and free of all evil. By doing this his body, mind and heart may become the temple of God in the real sense of the word.

7.8.1. Substance of the Song

The poet addresses God as the life of his life. He is the maker, the very source of his life and soul. He will try to keep his body pure so that it may be worthy of his touch for it. It is this touch alone which gives life and vitality to the different parts of his body.

God is that absolute truth which illuminates the mind of man. Truth, wisdom and knowledge enter because of this truth. Knowing this fact, he would keep his mind entirely free from all falsehood.

God is absolute love. Therefore, the poet will drive out all evil passions from his heart. In the heart of the poet the flower of love will bloom forever. It would mean that God will permanently dwell in the temple of his heart.

It is God who is the source of his power. He has endowed the poet with the talent to act. So it will be his effort to reveal his glory through his actions.

7.8.2. Critical Appreciation of the Song

The poet suggests here that self-purification is the essential condition of attaining union with God.

By referring God as the life of my life the poet whole-heartedly believes that he is the origin of his life. We are here reminded of Shelley's famous lyric "Hymn to the spirit of Nature":

"Life of life! Thy lips enkindle

With their love the breath between them"

It is the awakening of the inner conscience that leads to the unraveling of newer truths. So God as the ultimate reality is emphasized in this lyric.

God as the permanent source of eternal happiness is re-emphasized. The concept of eternal bliss seems to be inspired from the old store-house of Indian traditions- Vedas.

Self Assessment Questions II

1. Discuss the critical importance of the first song of Gitanjali.
2. Define the elements of humbleness in the second song of Gitanjali.
3. Critically discuss the synesthetic elements of the third song of Gitanjali.
4. Discuss the importance of complete surrender to God with reference to song 4 of Gitanjali.

7.9. SUMMING UP

In this unit you have studied:

- The broader social context when Gitanjali was being written.
- A glimpse at the prolific poetic career of Rabindranath Tagore.
- The intricate multi layered patterns of Gitanjali.
- The thorough explanations of the first four songs of Gitanjali.

7.10. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to Section 6.1.
2. Refer to Section 6.3.
3. Refer to Section 6.4.
4. Refer to Section 6.4

II

1. Refer to 6.5.2
2. Refer to 6.6.2
3. Refer to 6.7.2
4. Refer to 6.8.2

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7.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Give a general estimate of Tagore as a poet.
2. Discuss the importance of Gitanjali as a central poetic milestone in
3. Indian Literature in English.
4. Discuss Tagore's unique poetic style.
5. Discuss the present contextual relevance of *Gitanjali*.

UNIT EIGHT SRI AUROBINDO AND HIS *SAVITRI*

8.1 INTRODUCTION

We came across the writings of Indian Rishis in Block One where we studied selections from the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Mahabharata. In Sri Aurobindo, particularly in his *Savitri*, we meet a modern Indian Rishi who makes the same ancient tradition come alive again, albeit in a new tongue, English instead of Sanskrit.

What is significant is that Sri Aurobindo has not written a new tale but given a contemporary rendering to the ancient tale of Savitri and Satyavan as narrated in the Mahabharata. Such a poetic feat of successfully narrating again an ancient tale reminds of Tulsidas who achieved the same in another age with the story of Rama that had first been told by Valmiki.

Savitri too like Rama represents the supreme immortal Godhead of the Indian pantheon. That we may make a basic acquaintance with the Force that this Goddess is, we have chosen Book Four from *Savitri* where the poet in detail portrays her birth and growth.

8.2 OBJECTIVES

- After going through this Unit, you will be able to:
- List the significant events of Sri Aurobindo's life.
- Analyse the uniqueness of Savitri's position among Sri Aurobindo's works and also the significance of the poem's subtitle, 'A legend and a symbol'.
- Demonstrate how Sri Aurobindo's earlier works lead to *Savitri*.
- Analyze the growth of Savitri's divinity.

8.3 INTRODUCING *SAVITRI*

The first section provides a brief biography of the poet with a view to appreciate how English came to be for Sri Aurobindo his native tongue, and how in spite of being burdened with a legacy of Englishness he came to rediscover his roots in the timeless traditions, *sanatan dharma*, of his own culture.

The second section explores how *Savitri* occupies a unique position among Sri Aurobindo's writings. *Savitri* is not just another poem written by Sri Aurobindo; it embodies the culmination of his search, his Yoga, the purpose of his birth. As such, Book Four, which narrates the birth and growth of Savitri, becomes doubly significant. It throws light on the significance of our own lives on earth and also hints how we should approach the mystery of Sri Aurobindo's life and works.

8.3.1. Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on 15 August 1872. His maternal grandfather Rishi Rajnarain Bose was, according to Iyengar, "an early synthesis of the East and the West" and was an important figure in the Indian Renaissance movement. Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. KrishnadhanGhose had studied Medicine at Aberdeen University in England and was

an avowed Anglophile. Brought up at home by an English nurse, and sent at the age of five to the Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling where he moved mainly with English children, Sri Aurobindo learned to speak English as a matter of course.

At the age of seven he was taken, along with his two elder brothers, to England and left there under the tutelage of a clergyman's family, the Drewetts, who had the express instructions from DrKrisnadhanGhose that the children "should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence" (*CWSA Vol. 36*). During his five years' stay with the Drewetts, where he had his lessons at home, Sri Aurobindo found enough time to read on his own Shelley, Keats, Shakespeare and the Bible. It was here, at the age of ten, that he started writing his first poems for *Fox's Weekly*. In September 1884 he was admitted to St. Paul's School, London — the same where John Milton had gone earlier and whose company he would join later as an epic poet — and remained there till December 1889. Here, on his own admission, he "spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry" (*CWSA Vol. 36*). During his last two years at St. Paul he won the open Senior Classical Scholarship of £ 80 per year and also registered as a candidate for the Indian Civil Services examination.

He passed the I.C.S. examination in July 1890, securing the eleventh place, and scoring record marks in Greek and Latin. In October 1890, he joined the King's College, Cambridge, and in 1892 passed the First Part of Classical Tripos examination securing a first division with distinction. He also won "all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse". G.W. Prothero, one of Sri Aurobindo's senior tutors at Cambridge, wrote of him: "Besides his classical scholarship he possessed a knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of undergraduates, and wrote a much better English style than most young Englishmen" (quoted in Iyengar).

Sri Aurobindo as a probationer had successfully completed the two periodical and the final examination but "felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do" (*CWSA Vol. 36*). Before leaving England after the completion of his studies, he met the Gaekwar of Baroda and secured an appointment in the Baroda State Service.

In Baroda, he worked for some time in the Land and Revenue department, but was soon shifted to the Baroda College where he served in various capacities, as a lecturer in French, a Professor of English, Vice-Principal and finally as the acting-Principal. He served in the Baroda State Service till 1906.

During his fourteen years' stay in England, he had grown up in complete ignorance of Indian culture, literature and religion. During the next fourteen years in Baroda he worked methodically to fill these gaps in his intellectual culture. He undertook a sustained study of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and other Sanskrit classics including the works of Kalidasa. "Most of the scholarship, which he wears lightly, behind his writing was acquired during this period of intense*jnana-yoga*", writes SisirkumarGhose.

Even "at the age of eleven Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it" (*CWSA Vol. 36*). In England he had joined the 'Lotus and Dagger', a secret society working for the liberation of India, and delivered revolutionary speeches at the meetings of Indian Majlis. His deep commitment for India's freedom took a definite form during the Baroda period. He started by contributing political articles to various journals like *InduPrakash* and *Yugantar*, and supported with money and guidance the revolutionary freedom movement from behind.

When the partition of Bengal became an accomplished fact in 1905, Sri Aurobindo left Baroda for Calcutta and joined the *BandeMataram* as an assistant editor. On 15 August 1906, his thirty-fourth birthday, the Bengal National College was opened with Sri Aurobindo as its first Principal. He wrote and spoke openly against the Moderates and led the Nationalist delegation to the Surat conference of Indian National Congress in 1907. It was here at his orders and with him in the chair that the first schism in the Congress took place. On May 2, 1908 he was arrested in the Alipore Conspiracy Case and sent as an undertrial prisoner to the Alipore jail. He was acquitted and released on 6 May 1908. By now he had become a national hero and a grave threat to the British Empire. Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India wrote to the Government in England: "It was well known that Arabindo was the most dangerous man with whom we had to deal" (quoted in Manoj Das).

All along Sri Aurobindo's spiritual personality had also been taking a definite direction. Keshavmurti has pointed out that a "great *tamas*" had enveloped Sri Aurobindo "from the days of his childhood at Darjeeling". On his return from England, "a vast calm… descended upon him at the moment when he stepped first on Indian soil after his long absence, in fact with his first step on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay" (*CWSA Vol. 36*). He met Swami Brahmananda while at Baroda and started practicing *pranayam*. He had definitive experiences of mystical nature, especially the one at a Kali temple and another at the Shankaracharya temple in Kashmir. He met Vishnu BhaskarLele, a Maharashtrian yogi, and after three days of meditation with him attained the Nirvana. But the most powerful and decisive experience of God awaited him in the Alipore jail. He spoke of it in great detail in the now famous Uttarpara Speech delivered on 30 May 1909:

> I looked at the jail… it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree… it was Srikrishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade.… It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Srikrishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover…. I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva…. I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the Prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Srikrishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. (*CWSA Vol. 8*)

For the next nine months after his release from jail Sri Aurobindo dilly-dallied with his political work; in fact, he brought out two new political weeklies, *Karmayogin* and *Dharma*. But Krishna would not let him wander again. On the night of February 14, 1910, as he sat discussing editorial matters with his assistants, a definitive Divine Command, an '*adesh*' came to him and in ten minutes he packed everything and left

Politics. He retired to the French colony of Chandernagore and "plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity". Another *adesh* followed directing him this time to go to Pondicherry.

Sri Aurobindo reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910. In March 1914, he was joined by a French lady, MirraAlfassa, later known as the Mother, and her husband, Paul Richard. The Mother was already a spiritual adept of very high attainments and Richard had a deep interest in philosophy. Under the joint editorship of the three, a philosophical monthly journal, *Arya* was launched on August 15, 1914. But soon the World War called Mirra and Richard back to France and Sri Aurobindo was left alone to write sixty-four pages of *Arya* every month. By a quirk of fate the poet had become a philosopher. "I never, never, never was a philosopher," wrote Sri Aurobindo in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, "I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher!"*Arya* ceased publication on January 15, 1921, but in six and a half years it had given to the world all the major works of Sri Aurobindo, except his poems. *The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, The Secret of the Veda, The Isha Upanishad, The Ideal of Human Unity, Essays on the Gita, The Human Cycle, The Future Poetry, The Foundations of Indian Culture*, all appeared in that order in the pages of *Arya*.

The number of Sri Aurobindo's disciples in residence had been increasing, so when the Mother finally returned to Pondicherry in 1920 she took over the management of Sri Aurobindo's household and transformed it into 'Sri Aurobindo Ashram'. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga attained a landmark, decisive 'Overmind-Siddhi', 'the descent of Sri Krishna into the physical', on 24 November 1926. On the same day Sri Aurobindo retired into a complete seclusion to work for 'the Descent of the Supramental', a Realisation not yet attained on earth.

India's Freedom on 15 August 1947, Sri Aurobindo's seventy-fifth birthday, came as a birthday gift to him. In a message to All India Radio on this momentous day he said, "As a mystic I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power on the work with which I began my life".

The first draft of *Savitri* dates back to 1899 and the last revision was completed on 10 November 1950. Less than a month later, Sri Aurobindo gave up his body and entered into *Mahasamadhi* on 5 December 1950. In every sense *Savitri* was for him his life's work, his magnum opus.

8.3.2. *Savitri*

8.3.2.1 The Need for a New Orientation

To be able to appreciate Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* one needs an altogether different mental orientation than the one grounded solely in the Western aesthetics and intellectual culture. Western poetics deals with a body of poetry which is devoid of any profound mystical tradition and is essentially fictional, imaginary or else mythical. It concedes the fictionality of human reality, and then extends the same fictionality to the artist's vision. On the other hand, says Sri Aurobindo, "To the mystic, there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event" (*Letters*). We have only a few poets in the Western tradition who betray a genuine

mystical bent of mind – Blake, Emerson, Wordsworth and Rilke, for example – but none who could establish a distinct mystical tradition or even remotely approach the status of a Rishi.

Sri Aurobindo belongs to the tradition of Vedic Rishis who used poetry for creating a symbolic representation of Reality, not a myth or fiction either for edification or entertainment. Truth is the native home of Rishis and their mantric verses are an attempt to express the sublime ranges of Reality. The Vedas, therefore, refuse to reveal their sacred body of mystical meaning if approached with a spirit of scholarship. Critical theories are tokens of intellect and cannot unlock the doors of Spirit. One needs to meditate, discover and then carry as living companions those truths enshrined in the Vedas. Then, and only then, do Vedic poetry and Indian mystic icons impart their inner significance.

One reads a Romantic poet — Shelley or Wordsworth, and is uplifted for a moment by the sheer beauty of insight, maybe captured and enthralled by it for a season, but then one goes back invariably to that fictional world of unreality to live engrossed happily ever after. When we touch a Mystic, there is always the threat that our fictional unreality, our cherished ignorance (*avidya*) may come stumbling down and be reduced to debris of smithereens. The ego, therefore, refuses to commit suicide, to die like a moth. It will keep Truth at an arm's length,will supplicate in a temple or church but only to bring God to his service as the fulfiller of his desires. It lacks courage to face the bleakness of its psychological theatre, the inevitable result of seeing the false as false, and refuses therefore to acknowledge the fact of being

> Like one who searches for a bygone self
> And only meets the corpse of his desire. (*Savitri* 2)

A new orientation, a sincere courage to look into the burning splendours of Truth is what is required at the outset in approaching Sri Aurobindo's poetry.

8.3.2.2 The Evolution of *Savitri*'s Theme

There is always a central theme, a single major concern that runs through the entire body of an artist's work. It is as if the artist is born with a mission and all his life is a labour towards its fulfilment. Or it may be, as the Gita suggests, that everyone is born with a *shraddha*; nay, not only that, but every point in the matrix of manifestation is nothing but *Shraddha* (XVII, 3). Shraddha is not mere faith in the usual sense, nor a body of belief, but a secret, unrevealed splendour of Truth that opens its riches petal by petal through many cycles and stadia of our existence. The Truth of Sri Aurobindo, the entire burden of his poetic voice, is quite distinctly figured even in his early poems:

> Love, a moment drop thy hands;
> Night within my soul expands. (*CWSA Vol. 2,* 23)

The three words – night, love and soul – in these lines written at the age of eighteen (1890) neatly sum up the mission, poetic and otherwise, of Sri Aurobindo's birth. *Savitri*, therefore, is the crowning, but not an isolated, achievement of Sri Aurobindo's poetic career. Its theme, the triumph of love over death, seems to have gripped his imagination all through his long literary life.

The first clear formulations of the dialectical theme appear in two long poems, both mythical in cast, *Urvasie* (1896) and *Love and Death* (1899). Both the poems, like the earlier short ones, are about love and separation; but, for the first time, we find here a conscious attempt to define the forces that bring about this separation and block the path to union. *Urvasie* is Sri Aurobindo's first definite statement about love and the forces that oppose it. Wandering through many births and changing climes, Pururavus and Urvasie have returned again to renew their union. But no sooner has the bliss of union engulfed the lovers than there arises from the darkness a shadow that questions and denies any possibility of joy here on this earth. If it is the destiny born of karma winding through many lives that unites the lovers, a direr necessity of fate that follows its own law forces them to face the inevitability of separation as an unavoidable fact of earthly existence. However, the lover is a heroic being who will not easily give in to his fate without resisting it tooth and nail. Twice is Pururavusseparated from Urvasie— first by necessity and then by fate. And twice does he rise like a warrior-lover transmuting his pain and sorrow into a strength and power that shake the seated Gods in heaven and force them to bend their laws. Pururavus wins back his lasting union with Urvasie, but not before paying a price: he has to abandon the earth and retire to *Gandharva-Loka*with his beloved. What Pururavus achieves therefore is a partial, personal victory, not a total resolution of an eternal problem of life on earth.

Obviously, the poet too is not satisfied. He returns, therefore, after a gap of three years, to the same theme in *Love and Death* (1899). Pururavus, the Kshatriya had failed and now it was the turn of Ruru, the Brahmin to stand up and face the eternal opponent. Ruru, the protagonist of *Love and Death*, is the great-grandson of Brahma and in his veins courses the blood of Rishis and Gandharvas. The opponent too is redefined. Fate and cosmic laws cannot be the whole truth behind the Adversary. The poet plunges his gaze deeper and comes up with a precise name: he is Death. Priyumvada, Ruru's wife, dies from snake-bite. The lovers, this time, are separated not by an inscrutable fate, but, very precisely, by Death. Ruru has the Brahmin's knowledge of occult worlds and will dare even the Hades to return his beloved. But Death will not so easily yield. It reminds Ruru that sacrifice is the law of life and asks if he is ready for the bargain to sacrifice the latter half of his life, the period that promises him enlightenment, liberation and Rishihood. Ruru pays the price and wins back his beloved. The union of lovers is achieved, but no decisive victory or the resolution of the issue. Death still proves more powerful than Love. The poet has again not been able to discover a principle that can successfully surmount the Adversary.

It is significant that *Savitri* was conceived soon after *Love and Death*. This proves how profoundly was the poet involved in figuring out the deep, mysterious and almost insoluble riddle of this theme. It will take some time before *Savitri* emerges with a definite shape. In the meanwhile Sri Aurobindo wrote five full-length plays: *Perseus the Deliverer*, *Vasavadutta*, *Rodogune*, *The Viziers of Bassora* and *Eric*. In all of them "the theme has been developed and the problem set and solved in somewhat different ways but always leading to the same conclusion, 'Love conquering Death'" (Nolini Kant Gupta). At the end of a long search, finally, it was in the Mahabharata's tale of Savitri that Sri Aurobindo discovered a truth that shaped his thesis forward and provided the only answer that existed to an eternal Issue.

Savitri was Sri Aurobindo's lifetime's passion and he spent nearly half a century working on it. His own spiritual attainment of the highest Truth and the wide epic canvas of

Savitri helped him to look at the problem afresh. Here was no compromise, no bargain struck with the Adversary, but a complete triumph over him. But *Savitri* was not to be only about love and death, a problem singled out from a much wider whole: here was the Cosmic Structure in its entirety and full splendour, the Brahman, the Whole. Sri Aurobindo in this poem, much like his own Savitri, has brought down his own attainment as a gift to the earth, and bequeathed a nobler destiny to mankind. Not without reason, *Savitri* has been hailed as 'the sound-body of Sri Aurobindo'.

8.3.2.3 The Tale of Savitri in the Mahabharata and Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*

The original story is told in 700 succinct lines in the Mahabharata, VanaParva, cantos 291 to 297. Aswapati, the king of Madra, undertakes to perform an eighteen years long askesis in order to obtain progeny. As a result of this severe tapasya, the goddess Savitri is pleased and grants the king a boon that a daughter will be born to him. The daughter is thus named, after the goddess, Savitri. "Her eyes were like full-blown lotuses and she seemed in her beauty to be flaming with splendour; indeed, warded off by that fiery brilliance, no one approached her asking for her hand" (Mahabharata, VanaParva, canto 291, verse 27, trans. R Y Deshpande). So king Aswapati asks his daughter to go out and find her own mate. She visits many lands and kingdoms till she comes upon the forest hermitage of Dyumatsena, the blind and exiled king of Shalwa. Here she meets the king's son, Satyavan, and chooses him for her husband. She returns home to find Narad, the divine sage, sitting with her father. The sage on hearing her choice prophesies Satyavan's death in a year. The king asks Savitri to go out again and make another choice. But the princess replies, "only once can occur the division of property and only once a daughter given in marriage; having been made, a gift cannot be made a second time. All these three happen once and only once. May he be of a short or a long life, with virtuous qualities or without them; I have chosen him as my husband and I shall choose not again" (canto 292, verses 26-27). The king and the sage bless her marriage and she joins her husband in the hermitage. When only four days are left to the fated hour of Satyavan's death, Savitri performs a *tri-ratri-vrata* to prepare herself for the coming event. Finally, when the moment arrives, Yama himself comes to carry Satyavan's soul. As Yama departs with her husband's soul, the woman follows and requests him to hear what she has to say. She gives a long discourse on her knowledge of dharma, and Yama, pleased with her attainments, grants, one after another, five boons to Savitri. For her fourth boon she asks, "by our union, mine with Satyavan, let there be a hundred sons". Having granted this when Yama offers a fifth boon, Savitri reminds him that the fourth boon cannot be fulfilled without Satyavan being granted to live again. Yama releases Satyavan's soul with many further blessings. The last two cantos of the Mahabharata story narrate the fulfilment of boons granted by Yama.

Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*, though retaining the original outline of the legend, makes major departures from the Mahabharata story. Aswapati'stapasya, which in the original consists of ritualistic offerings and leading an austere life, is here transformed into an event of epic dimensions. Aswapati is not just a childless king offering prayers for progeny, but has become, in the hands of Sri Aurobindo, a symbol of earth's aspiration and a representative of humanity struggling to break away from the fetters of Ignorance; nay more:

> A pointing beam on earth's uncertain roads,
> His birth held up a symbol and a sign…

Affiliated to cosmic Space and Time
And paying here God's debt to earth and man
A greater sonship was his divine right. (22)

The first part of *Savitri*, spanning nearly half the epic, belongs wholly to Aswapati. With him the reader is led through a detailed cosmogony and structure of the manifested universe. We stand face to face watching, in the words of Sri Krishnaprem (alias Ronald Nixon, formerly, Professor of English at Lucknow University), the "vision and revelation of the actual inner structure of the cosmos and of the pilgrim of life within its sphere – Bhu, Bhuvah, Swah: the Stairway of the Worlds reveals itself to our gaze – worlds of Light above, worlds of Darkness beneath – and we see also ever-circling life ascending and descending that Stair under the calm unwinking gaze of the Cosmic Gods who shine forth now as of old. This and much more can be seen, not as some theory to be agreed or disagreed with, but as present living fact by any who can open their inner eye" (Roy, *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem*).

Similarly, Savitri's birth has a significance and purpose which it does not have in the original story. Granting the boon of a daughter to Aswapati, the Divine Mother tells him:

O strong forerunner, I have heard thy cry,
One shall descend and break the iron Law,
Change Nature's doom by the lone Spirit's power. (346)

Another important change is that of a whole book –'The Book of Fate'– being given to Narad. He discourses eloquently on the riddle of fate and free-will, and many other issues related to man and his destiny. There are no such discourses in the original. Narad's long speech is in response to the posers flung at him by the Queen, Aswapati's wife, when she hears the prophesy about Satyavan's early death. She is not even mentioned in the Mahabharata. The next major variation comes in the description of Savitri's tri-ratri-vrata: while no details of Savitri'ssadhana are to be found in the original, here in the epic this episode forms the body of a massive 'Book of Yoga' running in seven cantos and more than 3000 lines. Finally, the elaborate details of Savitri's dialogues with Yama, her journey into those mysterious realms, and her meeting with the Supreme Godhead, the fourfold Brahman are Sri Aurobindo's own additions to the legend.

From the above outline of Sri Aurobindo's departures from the original story it is clear that his major concerns are Yoga, Fate, Death, and a perfect and immortal life – a Life Divine – here on earth and for Man. Like Bhagirath of yore, Sri Aurobindo has brought forth his Savitri precisely for this purpose. This is the meaning and significance of her birth.

8.3.2.4 The Key to *Savitri*

Savitri, Sri Aurobindo's magnum opus, is in many ways an extraordinary poem. With a massive frame of twelve books divided into forty-eight cantos and an epilogue, and running into a staggering length of 23,837 lines, it is the longest epic in English language. As to its content, the Mother says that Sri Aurobindo "has crammed the whole universe in a single book.… Everything is there: mysticism, occultism, philosophy, the history of evolution, of the gods, of creation, of Nature. How the universe was created, why, for what purpose, what destiny – all is there". If its sheer magnitude – both linear and spatial – is not enough to make it anything but formidable, there is yet another difficulty to

account for: here is the Mother again —"I think that man is not yet ready to receive it. It is too high and too vast for him. He cannot understand it, grasp it; for it is not by the mind that one can understand *Savitri*" (quoted in Deshpande). No wonder, a great many scholars and academic pundits have shied away from approaching *Savitri*.

The key to the reading of *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* is to be found on its cover page in the subtext of the two words, legend and symbol. A legend is usually a traditional tale associated with a particular locality or person, popularly believed to be grounded in historical fact but not authenticated. The term is also used to describe tales of Christian saints. While a myth may concern itself with gods, supernatural and sacred, a legend necessarily is about heroes performing actions possible for ordinary humans. A legend is also something usually modified and handed over from generation to generation –'thus have we heard'or 'thus has it been told': in this sense it is akin to the Indian tradition of *shruti*, a divinely heard revelation. Sri Aurobindo possibly combines all these meanings in his use of the term legend for *Savitri*. The story revolves around a single person, Savitri; she is much too great than any saint, and yet remains fully human till the end; it is grounded in historical fact as narrated in the Mahabharata; and there are instances like Aswapati's and Savitri's sadhana, speeches of Narad and the Divine Mother, and Savitri's dialogues with Yama that can be understood in no other way but as revelations received by the poet. The Mother has told that "In truth, the entire form of *Savitri* has descended "en masse" from the highest region and Sri Aurobindo with His genius only arranged the lines…" (quoted in Deshpande). A legend may or may not be true. Is the legend of *Savitri* true? – To find an answer to this we must look into our second term, symbol.

What is a symbol and in which sense Sri Aurobindo calls his *Savitri* a symbol? "A symbol has been defined as the expression of some otherwise inexpressible truth" (Fraser); this is rather a lame and prosaic definition of a supremely poetic word. Symbolism, according to Sri Krishnaprem, is "like beauty itself: either you see it or you do not"; and "the nature of great art is always symbolic, because it takes birth in a realm whose only utterance is in symbol". As a flower manifests in form a beauty that is essentially formless, so does a symbol bring forth the revelation of a mystery that lies eternally transcendent beyond the utmost ranges of mind. However, symbolism in our age has become a lost and forgotten language, laments the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: "The very power of seeing the physical world in terms of spiritual values has disappeared". The Vedas, man's supreme symbolic utterance, remain therefore inaccessible to the uninitiated. It is a hard but unavoidable fact that until one opens one's inner eyes and a fairly-evolved aesthetic faculty to the hidden symbolic significances of the poem, *Savitri* will remain a closed book. Not for nothing did the poet name his opening canto, perhaps the most difficult and the most discussed one, 'The Symbol Dawn'. It not only offers the challenge of an impregnable door but hides as well the golden key to *Savitri*. Only when the reader awakes to the radiance of an inner dawn illumining his psychological space, the clearly mapped-out landscape of *Savitri* begins to unravel the infinity of its horizons.

In a letter written to one of his disciples, Sri Aurobindo explains the basic symbolism behind the main characters in the story:

> The tale of Satyavan and Savitri is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of

> the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. Satyavan is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; Savitri is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; Aswapati, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; Dyumatsena, Lord of Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.

Not only the characters named above, but all the gods and divine incarnations like Buddha and Christ are in reality "living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch". This is the key secret we must keep in mind while approaching mystical literature, ancient or modern, Eastern or Western. The truth enshrined in such books must become a living companion and not merely remain an idea to be debated about by intellect.

Self-AssessmentQuestions:

1. Explain briefly how English became his first language for Sri Aurobindo.
2. Write a short note on the growth of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual personality
3. Write a note on how *Savitri*'s theme is linked to Sri Aurobindo's earlier works.
4. Write a note on the major departures made by Sri Aurobindo from the tale of Savitri in the Mahabharata.
5. Explain briefly the meaning of the terms, legend and symbol.

8.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned:

- About Sri Aurobindo's life and the evolution of his poetic spirit
- About the evolution of *Savitri*'s theme
- To distinguish between a legend and a symbol, a distinction that helps a precise reading of *Savitri*

8.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.1
- Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.1
- Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.2.2
- Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.2.3
- Refer to the discussion given at 8.3.2.4

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8.7 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine how Sri Aurobindo's earlier works, especially *Urvasie* and *Love and Death* contribute to the growth of *Savitri*'s theme.
2. Discuss the significance of the subtitle, 'a legend and a symbol', in the reading of *Savitri.*

UNIT 9 SAVITRI, BOOK FOUR: *The Book of Birth and Quest*

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Savitri is divided into three parts comprising twelve books. Part One is devoted to King Aswapati, Part Two to his daughter Savitri, and Part Three to Savitri's confrontation with Yama.

Book Four, *The Book of Birth and Quest* is the first book in Part Two. Divided into four cantos, it traces Savitri's life from her birth to just before her meeting with Satyavan.

This book in many ways is at the centre of *Savitri*. It portrays the essential character of Savitri, shows the purpose of her incarnation in a human body and in the symbol of her divine birth reveals the mystical roadmap for the growth of human race.

9.2 OBJECTIVES

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

- Analyse the nature of mystical poetry
- List the reasons behind Savitri's birth
- List the stages of Savitri's growth
- Analyse the various dimensions of development that man is capable of

9.3 Book Four: The Book of Birth and Quest

The arrangement of *Savitri* in three parts resembles the three-tier structure of a mystical dome. Part One, spanning over 24 cantos and 348 pages, covers nearly half the epic. By exploring the comprehensive history of various mystic traditions and mapping out the occult splendours of a vast cosmogony, Part One makes an inviolable preparation of the groundwork for Savitri's incarnation. Part Two, opening with Savitri's birth in *The Book of Birth and Quest* and ending with Satyavan's death in Book VIII, lays bare the multifarious issues involved in the predicament of human existence. Part Three takes us to those inaccessible heights of the fiery mystical dome where burn in their eternal splendour the all-engulfing Savitri-Flames eating up the illusion of Yama and revealing to our gaze the ineffable Mystery of the Supreme Godhead, the Purushottama. Having thus invoked the whole Eternity to our view, the last book, *Epilogue: The Return to Earth*, is verily the *shantipaatha* of the Indian *yajna* that reposes us, though in a manner transformed, safely back to our earth.

The Book of Birth and Quest (Book IV) is not only structurally placed at the centre of *Savitri*, but is also, in many ways, central to the meaning of the whole poem. The nature of this extraordinary birth of Savitri carries a far-from-obvious significance. It holds the key to the meaning of all births, whether human, cosmic or divine. In exploring the mystery of this mystical divine incarnation, the phenomenon of *avatarhood*, there lies the possibility of our finding a resolution to many of our existential issues. The division of the Book in four cantos describing birth, growth, call and quest sums up quite accurately the travail and burden of human existence. This fourfold division also parallels the

fourfold order of Indian society and life: *brahmcharya* (celibate life a student), *grihastha* (householder), *vaanprastha* (withdrawal from society) and *sanyaas* (total renunciation).

9.3.1 Canto One: *The Birth and Childhood of the Flame*

Every birth is a cosmic event. To see 'human'birth only on the human scale of is one of those fluttering, insubstantial illusions created by the density of our material ignorance. Even Wordsworth, the Romantic, saw, albeit in vague intimations, the close relationship of human birth to heaven in his "Immortality Ode". Birth is always a coming forward into cosmic existence of that which was always there but hidden, screened and subliminal. Of course, each cosmic event measures differently on the Richter scale. If our human scales fail to register the magnitude of a divine birth, it is only because they are not tuned to it. The three magi in the Bible who were attuned to the highest consciousness knew the exact hour and place of Christ's birth.

Savitri's birth is an unprecedented event for earth. She is born as the incarnation of the Supreme Consciousness and comes to enact the final deliverancefrom the agony of Matter. It is the earth, aware of the purpose behind such a cosmic event, who rejoices therefore at her divine conception, and not Savitri's human parents or the city of Madra.

Existence reveals itself in three poises: transcendent, universal and individual. Thus, whatever exists, whatever takes place has a concurrent occurrence on all the three planes. Then again, the three planes are not separated but have a simultaneous existence: a trinity that is always one. What happens out there also happens here. To quote SisirkumarGhose: "It is not that the events recorded take place elsewhere, to 'other'people. Both events and locale are within us. Our lives are its grand theatre".

The cantos describing the birth, childhood and growth of Savitri call it the birth, childhood and growth of the Flame. What is this flame and in which manner is Savitri that flame? The birth of Christ and Krishna, religiously celebrated every year, is the birth of the Sacred in the dimness of our heart, "the miraculous birth" for which "the aged are reverently, passionately waiting" (Auden, "Musée Des Beaux Arts"). This is the birth of the psychic flame, the occult Fire, the godhead who shall be the priest and leader of our sacrifice. This birth is the first and last step of our voyage to the Unknown, for from now on someone other than us will take over the burden and responsibility of our crossing, someone who has the knowledge and certitude of our goal and who shall win for us all our victories. But this birth does not come easily; it demands a necessary preparation. We must have travelled a long rough-hewn way like the magi of yore before we can behold the sacramental marvel.

Canto one therefore begins with the portrayal of a cycle of seasons that work as if behind the scene preparing for the coming of Spring. This is the hour of love, the season of a wide efflorescence, which makes the sacred conception a possibility. The opening verse describing the earth in its mechanical, unconscious orbit is perhaps a more accurate symbolic rendering of the human situation:

> A Maenad of the cycles of desire
> Around a Light she must not dare to touch,
> Hastening towards a far-off unknown goal
> Earth followed the endless journey of the Sun. (349)

Man, the unconscious maenad, living in his senses, his body of earth, and feeding on his sensations, is nothing but a crude bundle of desires; and yet, his centre is 'a Light'within and the real traveller through an infinity of births is his soul, the Sun, and not his earth. Earth only follows the journeying Sun. Throughout the poem, as actually through all our life, man and earth, the particular and the universal, the microcosm and macrocosm, stand inseparably united as one. The physical and the psychic planes are one.

The image that follows connects the earth to human situation and reveals the structuring of thought in the poem:

> A mind but half-awake in the swing of the void
> On the bosom of Inconscience dreamed out life
> And bore this finite world of thought and deed
> Across the immobile trance of the Infinite. (349)

The description of the seasons transcends any narrow division of time in terms of its materiality. Here we find, woven in the richness of a symbolic rendering, theportrayal of a year and also of an age, of the historical space of human civilisation and also of man's timeless soul-space. Take a look at the onset of monsoon:

> Armies of revolution crossed the time-field,
> The clouds'unending march besieged the world,
> Tempests'pronunciamentos claimed the sky
> And thunder drums announced the embattled gods. (350)

The whole scene comes alive as a cosmic event of immense magnitude and is surely no mere simple weather happening on the physical plane. To Savitri's extra-sensory perception, "All objects were to her shapes of living selves . . . / Nothing was alien or inanimate" (357). The distinction between animate and inanimate, on which our world-view is so firmly founded, is certainly blurred in Sri Aurobindo's portrayal of earth and her seasons:

> Throngs of wind-faces, rushing of wind-feet
> Hurrying swept through the prone afflicted plains (350)

When the psyche prepares for its coming forward, all dividing walls of a fragmented world-view founder in their home of receding dark waters of ignorance. All distinctions between outer and inner, body and soul, matter and spirit appear as false impositions created by a fragmented mind.

All that has gone before – the seemingly mechanical movement of time, the cycle of seasons – is seen as the necessary preparation for the psychic birth. The structure involved in the portrayal of seasons reveals a curious pattern: summer, and autumn and winter together, are summed up each in a sentence of four lines, while rain and spring are given long passages of 48 and 47 lines. Rain, symbolising the birth and loud clamour of life, is presented in terms of "revolution", "tempests'pronunciamentos" and "thunder drums". Man and earth alike need to undergo a violent thrashing by the life-giving rain, thunder and lightning before they can be ready for awakening to another poise of living. It is only after passing through the shocks and tribulations of life that a calm of understanding dawns upon man. For, now after the rains, it is someone other than our superficial self who has awakened:

An inmost self looked up to a heavenlier height,
An inmost thought kindled a hidden flame
And the inner sight adored an unseen sun. (351)

Is this, the season after rains, a happening on earth, or is it an event in the recesses of man's psychological being, or both? The consanguinity of earth and man is continuously insisted upon by the poem and is not an imposition of reading on the text.

Having kindled the sacred Fire, that hidden flame, one is now ready to go through the long and chilling hours of autumn and winter. At the end of what seems an unending tunnel there waits for the brave and patient the rejuvenating spring. This is the birth of the heavenly psyche, our second birth in the realm of spirit implied in the Indian tradition of *dwija.*

Then Spring, an ardent lover, leaped through leaves
And caught the earth-bride in his eager clasp…
His voice was a call to the Transcendent's sphere (351)

Released from the dark ignorant night of egoistic existence one can breathe again the free air of "beauty and rapture and the joy to live". Such are the effects of Savitri's approaching steps. And she is not yet born, but only prepares for her coming!

The phenomenal logic of this birth is revealed as a two-way process: the truth secret and struggling for its emergence in the earth-matter calls by its labour a reciprocal intervening response, a direct descent, from our transcendent spheres:

Answering earth's yearning and her cry for bliss,
A greatness from our other countries came…
A lamp was lit, a sacred image made.
A mediating ray had touched the earth
Bridging the gulf between man's mind and God's;
Its brightness linked our transience to the Unknown. (353)

It is this sacred inner flame which relates the outer phenomenon to the eternal Reality beyond. However, this birth is no freak event; it is the fruition of a long and unending labour, an unending recurrence going on forever in the heart of life. Even as the sacred Seed descends from above, it is at the same time an actualisation of a Will hidden in matter's core. Coeval with earth and contemptuously dismissive of time, fate and death, this Will yet awaits its hour of coming:

Although our fallen minds forget to climb,
Although our human stuff resists or breaks,
She keeps her will that hopes to divinise clay…
Once more that Will put on an earthly shape. (354)

Not only in her origins but in her form as well, Savitri is quite unlike man's phenomenal being. Even in her birth and early years, she is conscious of her transcendent source, and though living aloof and content, her being is continuously flooded with "slow conscient light" and heavenly intimacies:

Her nature dwelt in a strong separate air
Like a strange bird with large rich-coloured breast
That sojourns on a secret fruited bough,

Lost in the emerald glory of the woods
Or flies above divine unreachable tops. (355)

This strange bird with rich-coloured breast that can fly above divine unreachable tops is surely no mortal bird but clearly the divine psyche.

Savitri's birth is no mere freak of God's *maya* but the fruition of a hard and gruellingaeoniclabour. It is the inevitable next step in Nature's evolutionary impulse, a prophecy of things to come:

As from the animal's life rose thinking man,
A new epiphany appeared in her.
A mind of light, a life of rhythmic force,
A body instinct with hidden divinity
Prepared an image of the coming god (357)

A being beyond man, 'a mind of light,'prepares for its hour of coming. J. Krishnamurti, the great Indian seer, is reported to have said towards the end of his life that his brain cells had started exploding into light. It is a recorded fact that when Sri Aurobindo left his body, this 'mind of light'got realised en masse in the Mother's body. A number of articles by Sri Aurobindo's disciples – in particular, by Sethna– have been devoted to this mysterious event. As the body grows conscious of and realises its hidden divinity, it shall herald the end of death, the end of ignorance. This is the goal held out by Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, and this is the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's Savitri-sadhana. All this and much more is prefigured in Savitri's birth and childhood.

While the beauty of a human being can be described in terms of body, mind and conduct, it is very difficult to describe the beauty of a goddess. Even to speak of spiritual beauty illuming body, mind and conduct is to fall short of the mark. A goddess is a Presence, and it is the presence of Divinity that vivifies everything around her. This presence is a quality that can only be communicated through symbols: it cannot be described. In the following lines the poet uses a cluster of images to evoke the mysteriousness of the Presence inhabiting Savitri's young body:

The body that held this greatness seemed almost
An image made of heaven's transparent light.
Its charm recalled things seen in vision's hours,
A golden bridge spanning a faery flood,
A moon-touched palm-tree single by a lake
Companion of the wide and glimmering peace,
A murmur as of leaves in Paradise
Moving when feet of the Immortals pass,
A fiery halo over sleeping hills,
A strange and starry head alone in Night. (358)

9.3.2 Canto Two: *The Growth of the Flame*

Canto Two, *The Growth of the Flame*, is divided into three segments. The first one is the largest of the three and, apparently, covers Savitri's early education. She carries in her the whole history of earth and man, and points out at once their future. In detailing her

growth and early work the canto reveals the two-fold purpose of Savitri's manifestation. First, she explores and masters the whole field of human achievement – his arts and sciences and no less his philosophy and spirituality. It is only in a total understanding of something that one moves beyond it; a half-understanding or misunderstanding always leads to a condition of bondage with the object of thought. Having mastered the highest reaches of human thought, Savitri now looks for fit instruments that can bear the descent of her heavenly force. Her next task is to nurture such vessels by bringing about a necessary mutation in their structure.

The first of the three movements in this canto covers Savitri's early growth and education. Savitri, or the newly born heavenly psyche in our own being, holds right from the beginning all heavens and earth in her natural grasp. To the eye that can read symbols everything stands transfigured: the country that harbours"the childhood of the incarnate Flame" is the ancient Madra in its pristine natural beauty, and also something more:

> A land of mountains and wide sun-beat plains
> And giant rivers pacing to vast seas,
> A field of creation and spiritual hush,
> Silence swallowing life's acts into the deeps,
> Of thought's transcendent climb and heavenward leap,
> A brooding world of reverie and trance (359)

Only at a dire critical peril can we ignore the nature of imagery here which is both physical and psychical at the same time, and which, in turn, demonstrates the real nature of our own universe.

One with the being of earth, her mother, "Earth's brooding wisdom spoke to her still breast". Savitri now decides to take up for scrutiny the whole field of human knowledge —"the knowledge of the thinker and the seer", "intense philosophies", sculpture, architecture, dance, music, poetry, all — and make it a springing board to dive into the Infinite. She takes no time to see that all our great efforts all through human history have been to create symbols, "to hear the unheard and glimpse the invisible," to give form to that which is essentially formless, to catch "into a body the Divine". All human scriptures, poetry and art are no more than preludes to a great discovery ahead:

> To her they seemed the great and early steps
> Hazardous of a young discovering spirit
> Which saw not yet by its own native light (361)

She bears a heavy burden of divine responsibility, carries in her the whole history of earth and man, and is a trail-blazer of their future:

> Over her watched millennial influences
> And the deep godheads of a grandiose past
> Looked on her and saw the future's godheads come (358)

The milestones of her learning and growth sketch the unerring roadmap for an evolving humanity, for a new culture and a way of life founded entirely on truth-light:

> The harmony of a rich culture's tones
> Refined the sense and magnified its reach

To hear the unheard and glimpse the invisible
And taught the soul to soar beyond things known, (359)

Sri Aurobindo in one sweep covers the whole purpose of education, from the training of senses to the awakening of soul. But first and foremost, "Adept of truth, initiate of bliss", the disciple is to be "A mystic acolyte trained in Nature's school". Learning must not remain limited to books and artefacts, "a rich culture's tones" but must grow out to include the close proximity of Nature, the only school that invites a direct apprehension of truth. Savitri, exemplifying the ideal student, learns, masters and brings to unheard of heights not only the traditional courses of study – ethics, training of senses, life, mind and psyche, language, philosophy, sculpture, painting, architecture, music, dance, crafts, poetry, mathematics and astronomy – but also the art of living, the greatest of all arts:

She laid the secrecies of her heart's deepmuse
Upon the altar of the Wonderful;
Her hours were a ritual in a timeless fane;
Her acts became gestures of sacrifice. (360)

The act of living in time is to become a ritual where every moment is imbued with a movement of the sacred. Time is a movement of the timeless. Every act must become an offering to the Highest, a sacrifice, a life lived for the Lord and not for the little self, the ego.

But however large one may extend their scope, Savitri is not be tied down to these limited fields. No less than "the art and wisdom of the Gods" can quench her thirsting spirit. She is kin to intimations of an immemorial aspiration "locked in the world and yearning for release," and needs therefore fit and ready vessels to carry forward her work. Herself of the Unborn, she needs to test her treasures and gifts, her mission and soul's issues, in a defined circle of the immediate.

"Aware of the universal self in all", of the essential unity of all life, she wishes to impose the consciousness of this unity on those around her so that she can share her gifts and "make them one with God and world and her". Love by definition means to give and give and give and never to demand anything in return. This is what Savitri is in her essential nature, the perfect Beloved from beginning to the end, and nothing else.

Such a rarity of beauty and bliss and love is too great and beyond the grasp of human mould, and yet is such an irresistible charm that none can stay out of her orbit:

A friend and yet too great wholly to know,
She walked in their front towards a greater light,
Their leader and queen over their hearts and souls,
One close to their bosoms, yet divine and far…
Desiring they clutched at her with outstretched hands
Or followed stumbling in the paths she made. (363)

All those who are drawn to her divinity represent the humanity in its diverse stages of growth, and represent equally the various members and personae in one's own being. They all respond to the psychic fire albeit in varying degrees. Some approach half-way, some are dragged reluctantly in spite of their resisting natures, but even those who are fairly advanced and are witness to the power and truth of psyche cannot always meet her utmost demands. Not to many is given the assurance of a lasting residing and secure

ascent to those sublime heights. The imperfection and darkness of our nether members often pulls us down to their known and secure fields:

> In man a dim disturbing somewhat lives;
> It knows but turns away from divine Light
> Preferring the dark ignorance of the fall. (366)

The ascending planes of Truth need to be assimilated and naturalised before we attempt a further ascent, or else they will appear magical, hallucinatory and at the worst 'unreal'. In the mountaineers'language, we need to pitch our base camp again and again and undergo that prolonged and necessary acclimatisation. Rare is the soul that opens its strong wings and takes a direct flight home; others must trudge the heavy and dolorous mountainous path. Savitri, the incarnate Flame, demonstrates the wonder and power of heavenly psyche, and exemplifies the peaks of human potential that man can harness if he lights that flame and allows it to burn in its resplendent glory. But few can bear the weight of her immaculate gifts:

> Among the many who came drawn to her…
> Some near approached, were touched, caught fire, then failed,
> Too great was her demand, too pure her force. (366)

Tied down "to life's dull ordinary round", most men are "prisoned by their human grain". But even if unable to understand or follow the wide sweeping movements of psyche, our human members yet remain enamoured of her. Having glimpsed even once the All-Beautiful who is also All-Bliss, our hearts can do nothing but to crave and follow her. Only at the end of a long and demanding journey does man discover the truesignificanceof Savitri:

> A key to a Light still kept in being's cave,
> The sun-word of an ancient mystery's sense,
> Her name ran murmuring on the lips of men (367)

Savitri in her munificence ever stoops to our lowly plains, grants our little longings, and fills our wave-deep lives with her grace and peace. She knows the great Denial inherent in man's nature, and is aware of her assigned task of uplifting the human race.

Thus moving between both 'Yes' and 'No' in the earth-nature, Savitri allows only her "earthly surface" to bear the charge of her other human selves. Nowhere as yet is seen her equal and peer. Though admired, adored and worshipped by all around her, hers is a lonely life:

> Whoever is too great must lonely live.
> Adored he walks in mighty solitude;
> Vain is his labour to create his kind,
> His only comrade is the Strength within.
> Thus was it for a while with Savitri. (368)

Vain is her labour to create her kind, and nowhere yet does she find her soul-mate, companion and peer. The lack of response to her transmuting touch from those around her makes her shelve the project for the time being. She will dare beyond the immediate and risk greater enchantments to fathom the knot of resistance and bring home more potent weapons of divine might.

9.3.3 Canto Three: *The Call to the Quest*

In its shortness, structural simplicity and bareness of details, Canto Three bears an innocuously deceptive appearance. The reader is often tempted to move over hurriedly to the richly laid out grandeur of the next canto. But a patient pause here in the simple undulating terrains of the Call can be unexpectedly rewarding. Canto Three is about awakening to the necessity of the quest while the next canto explores the meaning and nature of such a quest.

The canto puts forward an unobtrusive recapitulation of facts that make Savitri's descent possible. It is of significant note that it is Aswapati who receives the Call first and transmits it on to Savitri. The father is also the guru. It is in response to Aswapati's long and arduous *tapasya* for progeny that Savitri is born to him. *Savitri*, likewise, came to Sri Aurobindo as the boon-key to the riddle of human existence that had kept him much preoccupied in his earlier poems and plays: "But like a shining answer from the gods / Approached through sun-bright spaces Savitri" (372).

Aswapati's childlessness symbolises the failure of the human race to bring forth the Real, to fructify in any meaningful manner. It is the earth's anguish and pain at the failure of her imperfect sons that become articulate in Aswapati's aspiration and call forth the divine intervention of Savitri's birth –"A world's desire compelled her mortal birth" (22). Savitri accepts birth in order to confront Death, to bring to Earth her absolute and final deliverance from mortality and ignorance. She is an incarnation of love, but a love that comes armed with divine strength and wisdom. She needs therefore no help, as did her predecessors, Pururavus and Ruru, from various gods and goddesses: these divine beings are her own emanations.

As a solitary coïl sings untired of its one love-note on a fateful morn that seemed to come burdened with life's riches, earth's longings become in-gathered and find speech in a Voice from higher spheres. The transcendent and the cosmic are one: "What is there is also here; what is not here is also not there," says the Upanishad. Released from a sense-mind entrapped in the incessant demands of daily cares and mundane matters, Aswapati can lend ears to the mutterings of the earth, the source of universal Sorrow and the root of our existential angst. This is the first Awareness, the base of all others, the first of the Gita's eighteen-rung-ladder of Yoga, the *Vishad*-Yoga: 'Where but to think is to be full of sorrow'. But the awareness of sorrow brings also the concomitant birth of Compassion, the finger pointing a way out.

The Voice that speaks to Aswapati is akin to the voice that Moses heard on the Mount of Sinai, the voice that ever speaks to man in the silences of his being exhorting him to rise above his limited self and be the ungarbed entity within. It begins by jolting man out from his torpor:

> O petty adventurers in an infinite world
> And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,
> How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
> Around your little self and petty things? (370)

First the whip of chastisement to wake him from "the Inconscient's night", then the exhortation urging him to see deep within his secret Truth:

A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,
The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days,
Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells. (370)

But to scale those unreached heights, to bring forth his potentials, man must first understand the nature of his present existence. His glimmering torch of mind is less than a half awakening from the torpor of inconscience. The world he watches through this mind's lens is a fiction, an entrapment of illusion: he looks "at images and not at Truth", "The great Illusion wraps him in its veils". But Sri Aurobindo is a poet of hope, not of despair. His is a vision that pierces the darkness and sees beyond. The evolution of man into a higher being, his golden future, is inevitable, assured, a thing decreed. The Voice embodying an utter certitude shall speak, therefore:

Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts,
You shall awake into the spirit's air
And feel the breaking walls of mortal mind…
And blow your conch-shells at the Eternal's gate. (370)

It also outlines the goal for pioneers of humanity:

Authors of earth's high change, to you it is given
To cross the dangerous spaces of the soul
And touch the mighty Mother stark awake
And meet the Omnipotent in this house of flesh (370)

The transformation of life and matter is to be accomplished here on this earth, in our daily lives, and not in some *Vaikuntha* hereafter.

In the meanwhile, man – the transitional being, the author "of earth's high change", has to bear the daunting task of crossing "the dangerous spaces of the soul". It is not a gift to be given lightly: the child must grow into man and win it the hard way. None of our defences are admissible. Our glorious achievements are false counters that will not carry us a step forward. Our glorification of history, our religious adoration of great men is nothing but our refusal to see the Fire that burns untended in the heart within. No, a Dhritrashtra will not do! One must rise to the awareness that what is out there is also here. Speaking in a different context, Blake said: All scriptures and all great poetry have been written by one person – the Holy Ghost.

But dim in human hearts the ascending fire,
The invisible Grandeur sits unworshipped there;
Man sees the Highest in a limiting form
Or looks upon a Person, hears a Name. (371)

Not just this; no less stand condemned all our poetry, philosophy, wisdom and passion to ephemeral insignificance: "The sages ponder in unsubstantial air / The poets lend their voice to outward charm".

But as the Voice finishes at a rather lamenting note, "The gods are still too few in mortal frames", there approaches Savitri "like a shining answer from the gods". She is the answer to earth's aspiration, she is the vessel that the heavens need. Aswapati looks at his daughter and knows that she alone can change man's destiny. In that ingathered state he can descry the occult truth of his daughter:

This wonder of the divine Artist's make
Carved like a nectar-cup for thirsty gods,
This breathing Scripture of the Eternal's joy,…
Under that moon-gold forehead's dreaming breadth
Were seas of love and thought that held the world; (372)

She is the Creatrix herself who has projected the universe in her heart of love. As if this epiphany is not enough, a further revelation points out that what he watches is not a human face of his daughter but " large and brooding depths whence Love / Regarded him across the straits of mind…" (373).

Aswapati, aware of that which is hidden to Savitri herself, enunciates her mission and her need of a companion soul who will bring fruition to that mission. The beloved remains incomplete and inarticulate without the lover who completes and fulfils her. Savitri needs Satyavan, the son of God by the body of earth, the ground on which to fight man's battle, the perfected material embodiment in which to actualise her dreams of divine magnificence. Aswapati, therefore, asks Savitri to go out and find her mate:

Depart where love and destiny call your charm.
Venture through the deep world to find thy mate…
Hand in strong hand confront Heaven's question, life:
Challenge the ordeal of the immense disguise.
Ascend from Nature to divinity's heights;
Face the high gods, crowned with felicity,
Then meet a greater god, thy self beyond Time. (374-75)

This is the word that awakens her to the meaning and purpose of her life. She has strength enough in herself and is amply protected by Powers from behind to go alone on her search. Aswapati's words act as mantra and Savitri immediately realises her potential and her mission. The royal palace awakes next morning to find her gone on her search.

9.3.4 Canto Four: *The Quest*

Quest is not always a going after the Holy Grail. It is something woven in the essence of our existential matrix. Whatever be man's chosen field, it implies a choice of that which he deems his best or the one that brings him his highest fulfilment. If it be petty, the chicken can not be blamed for not soaring higher! But 'If all time is eternally present,'to quote Eliot, then all time, the whole of history, need be explored and tested before one can find the crux of one's Issue. Savitri's quest takes her through villages, cities, and monasteries nestling in the vast tracts of Nature: a more precise geography of the history of human endeavour is not possible.

But before setting out on life's quest, one needs to become familiar with one's travelling gear: the universality of self, the unbroken karmic chain, the guardian powers who are also the keepers of law and unerring accountants of karmas. Canto four brings a larger initiation to Savitri which leads to an all-inclusive and conscious search: "The world-ways opened before Savitri." The student must leave school and test his concept-learning in the concrete actualities of life. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. Savitri, like Buddha, must leave the sanctuary of her royal palace to "confrontHeaven's question, life".

The next morning as she sets out on her quest, "A deeper consciousness welled up in her…Till the whole destiny of mankind was hers". Thou art man, and for man thou seekest. The game runs through many lives, through whole human history. The little self does not matter, a personal salvation is not important. The first lesson that life teaches Savitri is that she is not here on earth for the first time. She has been here before, the whole wide world is a remembered scene:

> A citizen of many scenes and climes,
> Each soil and country it had made its home. (377)

The psychic being is individual as well as universal. Each birth is a continuation of a journey left incomplete. Though everything seems strange, nothing is alien. Much later in Book VII, when Savitri asks bewildered a host of gods and goddesses the way to her soul, pat comes the answer: "O Savitri, from thy hidden soul we come" (501). From the soul has this wide world emanated: the world of mind, no less the world of matter. It is thy own image thou watchest! She looks at faces and stars and sky and a memory of many past lives wells up in her:

> She seemed to her remembering witness soul
> To trace again a journey often made. (377)

Man does not walk alone on this earth. The universe is a single whole: the separation of the walls of body, or of nations and races, is neither valid nor tenable. One is the Real and Many his infinite faces; the division is false and unreal. Each man wears a different face of Man, and Man himself another face of God.

Man brings with him at his birth not only a load of accumulated karmas, a story-line woven through many forgotten selves, but also the guardian powers that guard and guide his growth. If "even in his casual steps they intervene", what is there for him to worry and be afraid of? There is nothing in life without a meaning and purpose, but all together merge into a many-toned symphony. Of course, this is no mere determinism:

> Upon her silent heights she was aware
> Of a calm Presence throned above her brows
> Who saw the goal and chose each fateful curve; (378)

The godhead sitting at the height of our being and calmly watching this varied phenomenon is our own true self in its purity and splendour. It is us and no other who intervenes and acts from behind and cancels or suffers the many turbid longings and pursuits of our phenomenal being trapped or wallowing in mire. Man is not his body alone, nor alone a phenomenal being. He is Spirit writing with life a creative history of great significance: "Nothing we think or do is void or vain".

Thus everything, our birth and purpose and destiny, is "prefigured" and part of "a foreseen design". Our various destinies are the variegated ways in which the Divine tests his issue with his shadow, Death. Savitri is the ultimate test He has put forward to confront fate and death, a determinism challenging another determinism. It sounds like a paradox, but paradox is sometime the only way a mystical verity can be told.

Savitri's quest takes her through the whole gamut of human existence. She passes through cities, the signposts of civilisation in full glory, and hamlets and villages, the crude early foundations of that great achievement. The coarse, half-evolved rustic nature

as well as the pompous vanity of urban life is summarily dismissed as being nowhere near an authentic living. Savitri moves on therefore to sojourn a greater length of time in the virgin silences of the primordial earth, the beautiful vast tracts of Nature throbbing with stirrings of bliss and light. The pattern of lines given to each – cities, 17; villages, 6; Nature, 168 – is in itself a commentary.

The royal palaces, symbolic of an urban way of life, are seen slumbering between banks of sleep where only dimly can creep in the psychic light. To see that light burning bright in her home of truth one must move away from "this thinking creature's burdenedhours" and his pompous insignificance to "free and griefless spaces… not yet perturbed by human joys and fears" where

> Afar from the brute noise of clamorous needs
> The quieted all-seeking mind could feel,
> At rest from its blind outwardness of will,
> The unwearied clasp of her mute patient love
> And know for a soul the mother of our forms. (p. 380)

Long back, in 1908-09, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

> Not in the petty circle of cities
> Cramped by your doors and your walls I dwell;
> Over me God is blue in the welkin,
> Against me the wind and the storm rebel. ("Invitation")

Once again he invites us to join him "in wind-stirred grass-lands" and "rough-browed hills" to meet the chariot of the golden bride. Here time stands still and one awakens into a realm of light, of silences behind life. Released from strife of division, mind falls quiet and feels a presence and power that nurses all life. In this immortal world of spirit which is at once a heaven somewhere on this earth, one can meet king-sages and seers, hermits and poets, their grave disciples and seekers, and also the king-children who are here to receive their god-like stamp and to mature as future leaders of humanity. This is the world where various arts of authentic living are mastered and taught: the art of loosening the knots of imprisoning mind, of communion with Eternity and oneness with Divine, of a life drenched in bliss and open to promptings of the Word:

> Carrying the splendour that has lit the suns,
> They sang Infinity's names and deathless powers
> In metres that reflect the moving worlds,
> Sight's sound-waves breaking from the soul's great deeps. (383)

The poem in treating at some length the highest planes reached by man in his mystical-aesthetic communion with Nature gives indeed a place of honour to these planes but finds them also too short of their desired goal. In this self-wrapt blissful eternity of Being, misperceived sometimes by the earthly nature as a land of Lotos-Eaters, the earth and the whole material universe appear as flutterings of an unnecessary bad dream in a tiny corner of eternal Vast.

Savitri explores the "meditation's seats" of forest-hermitage and partakes of the joy and bliss which the greatest of ascetics, seers and sages have been pouring on the toiling world. But she fails to meet her mate in these world-denying silences. Sri Aurobindo's is a vision of world-affirmation and Savitri is here to transform this world into the image of

its own inherent truth-light and not to shun and leave it unredeemed. Accordingly, her mate must be the one who is at once a king, a world-ruler and a seer of Truth, in short, a "communicant and prophet and lover and king". Savitri must leave behind both cities and ashrams, must go beyond the two negations: the materialist's denial and the refusal of the ascetic, go beyond all one-sided approaches to life and discover a greater and larger synthesis.

Both Aswapati and Savitri in their oneness with the anguish and aspiration of the earth seek something other than the all-blissful land of an eternal Vrindavan. Others, seeing a victorious predominance of Falsehood in the dynamics of earth-nature, prefer to throw the baby out with the bath water. Savitri refuses to concede victory to ignorance, falsehood and death. She is here to battle out earth's deliverance, not shun her. It is irrelevant to discuss whether Aswapati and Savitri are greater than those that came before them, but they certainly are different and new.

Savitri's quest demands a further search for a Truth not yet realised on this earth. She must leave this land of historical truth and venture into unknown fields. Passing through mountains, plains, deserts and rare human habitats Savitri travels on:

> Still unaccomplished was the fateful quest;
> Still she found not the one predestined face
> For which she sought amid the sons of men. (385)

The key to Savitri's quest will have to wait till her finding of Satyavan in the next Book.

Savitri, according to Professor Nadkarni, "was born out of Sri Aurobindo's concern for mankind and its future; it delineates the precise nature of the crisis mankind is facing and shows the way to resolve it". If *The Book of Birth and Quest* can rouse in us the certitude of our possibilities for such a birth and make us even dimly aware of the nature of quest ahead, our labour of reading this Book will stand amply rewarded. But a reading of text can never be a substitute for the text. At best, it can be a goading or a charmed invitation by the critic to lead his readers to the real thing. He is counting his catch and showing you his jewels. But you must not stop at these Units; go for the whole text, for the treasure itself, and find your own catch!

> All can be done if the god-touch is there. (3)

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Write a note on the significance of Flame.
2. In which sense is Spring the most important of seasons?
3. How do Savitri's followers respond to her influence?
4. What kind of place is Madra?
5. What is the message of the Voice to Aswapati?
6. What is the significance of the places visited by Savitri during her quest?

9.4 SUMMING UP

In this unit you have learned

- About the symbolic significance of birth and quest.
- About the significance of Savitri's incarnation
- To undertake a symbolic interpretation of the text.

9.5 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.1
2. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.1
3. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.2
4. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.2
5. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.3
6. Refer to the discussion given at 9.3.4

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9.8 TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the significance Savitri's birth and early education.
2. Discuss the events that lead to Savitri's quest.
3. Critically examine the nature of Savitri's quest.

UNIT 10 NISSIM EZEKIEL

"Philosophy", "Enterprise"

10.1. INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will read about Nissim Ezekiel, the Indian Jewish poet, playwright, editor and art-critic. He was a foundational figure in postcolonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian writing in English. Ezekiel was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his Poetry collection, "Latter-Day Psalms", by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.

10.2. OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- analyze Nissim Ezekiel as a poet
- explore the various themes of his poems
- establish Ezekiel's position in the canon of Indian English Writings.
- analyze and critically appreciate two of Ezekiel's well-known poems, namely "The Philosophy" and "Goodbye to Miss Pushpa T.S."

10.3. NISSIM EZEKIEL

Nissim Ezekiel is hailed as the father of Post-independence Indian-English verse. He is a trend setter, as he started the modern movement in Indian-English poetry. A horde of contemporary Indian-English poets follows the simple, conventional style of Ezekiel. Not only in style but also in selection of themes, one finds the influence of Ezekiel in a large number of contemporary Indian poets. A prolific dramatist, critic, broadcaster and social commentator, he was professor of English (American Literature) at Mumbai University during 1990s. Besides this, he was also an accomplished poet, playwright, editor, and art critic. During 1990s he was Secretary to Indian branch of the International writer's organization PEN.

10.3.1. ABiographical Account of Nissim Ezekiel

Ezekiel was born in December 1924 in Mumbai (Maharashtra). His father Moses Ezekiel was Professor of Botany at Wilson College, and his mother was the Principal of a school started by her. The Ezekiels belonged to Mumbai's Marathi-speaking Jewish community, known as the Bene Israel. They were the descendants of the oil-presser community who had sailed from Galilee around 150BC, and shipwrecked off the Indian subcontinent, settled and forgot Hebrew, yet maintain their Sabbath. He served as a volunteer at an American-Jewish charity in Bombay.

Ezekiel was raised in a secular milieu by his botany Professor father and Principal mother. When he was a schoolboy, his range of reading extended from T S Eliot, W B Yeats, Ezra Pound and Rainer Maria Rilke to the floridity of Indian English verse, and when he began his writing career in the late 1940s his adaptation of formal English was controversial, given its association with colonialism. He 'naturalized the language to the Indian situation, and breathed life into the Indian English poetic tradition.

In 1947, Ezekiel earned a BA in Literature from Wilson College, Mumbai University. In 1947-48, he taught English literature and published literary articles. After dabbling in

radical politics for a while, he sailed to England in November 1948. He studied philosophy at Birkbeck College, London. After three and a half years stay, Ezekiel worked his way home as a deck-scrubber aboard a ship carrying arms to Indochina.

In 1952 he married Daisy Jacob and in the same year, *Fortune Press* published his first collection of poetry,"The Bad Day". He joined *The Illustrated Weekly of India* as an assistant editor in 1953 and stayed there for two years. Soon after his return from London, he published his second book of verse "Ten Poems". For the next 10 years, he also worked as a broadcaster on Art and Literature for All India Radio.

After dabbling as an advertising copywriter and a manager of a picture firm company (1954-59), he co-founded the *Literary Monthly Imprint* in 1961. He became an art critic of the *Times of India* (1964-66) and edited *Poetry India*. From 1961 to 1972, he headed the English department in Mithibai College, Mumbai. He experimented with LSD while in America in 1967, ceasing the habit in 1972. A year later, he presented an art series for Mumbai television.

10.3.2. Literary Career

Ezekiel's first book, *The Bad Day* appeared in 1952. He published another volume of poems, *The Deadly Man* in 1960. After working as an advertising copywriter and general manager of picture frame company (1954-59), he co-founded the literary monthly *Jumpo* in 1961 and became an art critic of The *Names of India* in 1966-67. From 1961 to 1972, he was head of the English Department in Mithibai College, Bombay. *The Exact Nature*his fifth book of poetry was published in 1965. During this period he held short-term tenure as visiting professor at University of Leeds (1964) and University of Pondicherry (1967). In 1969, Writers Workshop, Kozhikode published his Drama plays. A year later, he presented an art series of ten programmes for Indian television. He translated Jawaharlal Nehru's poetry from Marathi, in collaboration with Vrinda Nabar, and co-edited a fiction and poetry anthology. His poem like "The Night of the Scorpion", "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher", "The Professor", "and Philosophy" feature regularly in the curricula of Indian and Columbian schools.

Some of Ezekiel's popular collections of poetry are as follows:

Time to Change (1952), *Sixty Poems* (1953), *The Discovery of India* (1956),*The Third* (1959), *The Unfinished Man* (1960), *The Exact Name* (1965), *Snakeskin and Other Poems*, translations of Marathi poet Indira Sant (1974),*Hymns in Darkness* (1976), *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) and *Collected Poems* (1989)

10.3.3. Nissim Ezekiel as a Poet

Nissim Ezekiel is called as the "Father of Modern Indian English Literature". He is called so because he was the first contemporary Indian poet to write in a style that was essentially modern as well as Indian at the same time. Nissim Ezekiel defined the role of poetry, the poet and the process of creation, which may start as the irritation of a grain of sand in the eye (*Drawing Room*) and may require the patience and industry of a "stubborn workman" who brings about the "miracle" of harvest form stone, of sense of dreams using words (*A Time to Change*), or it may be a sudden sharp moment of inspiration and clarity and clarity like a fire in the wind (*A Word for the Wind*).

He is seen as a doubter, interpreter, creator, silent thinker, communicator, innovator and messiah. Ezekiel's views on love, religion and poetry are connected with his ideas on the state of man, his striving to be "finished man" (*First Theme and Variations*). "What frightens me" is the self mask (self protective) and the truth behind the mask (the self naked). In *Penitence* he worries saying:

But I am still the sea
And hold within
The muffled tumult
Of a sin.

His poetry examines, observes and expresses the condition of mankind, taking it onto a universal plane.

Ezekiel's work is not isolated from world influences. Dr. Sanjit Mishra, who has studied the complete works of the poet, divides his poetic career chronologically into Romantic, Realist and Humanist phrase. It is a convenient division indicative of predominant moods and expressions but inevitably not watertight. We can find the influence of Eliot, Yeats, Pound and Larkin in the works of his poetry. We can also trace out the modernistic elements in his poetry. As mentioned earlier, he was the first to use modernity in Indian English poetry. Ezekiel himself indicates the influence of America and European "nothingness" in the abyss of living and of morality. Apart from more contemporary allusions, we can also trace out the echoes of Spenser's "Epithalamion" in the utter happiness of conjugal joys combining passions and quieter love, where the rose is not red but white in "Marriage Poem"; and of John Donne's relationship with God, Love and Poetry. Poems such as "The Worm", "After Rain", "Fisher Man", "Sparrows", "Lawn" and "In the Country Cottage" not only exhibit a naturalist's keen eye observation but also the Romantic's contemplation of nature with the fitness that eventually leads to a lesson for man- "the primeval root" (sparrows) of nesting and mating as the root of all the activity, the silent efficient energy of a lizard, how the fish comes to the fisherman-poet "at last" and show patient growth of the grass teaching the "gentle art of living things alone" ("Lawn") with a rather obvious parallel

a silence in depths
a stir of growth
an upward thrust a transformation-
botanic turmoil
in the heart of earth.
At last
A thin transparent green appears
and there you have the lawn.

Not only is Ezekiel inspited by Western poets like Eliot, Yeats, Pound and Larkin but he also values his Indian counterparts. In "Jamini Roy" and "For Satish Gujral" he appreciates their contributions while commenting on innocence of a people (the Santal tribal's) that can inspire and on the function of the imagination and love to hear what is unheard respectively. There is a poem on Paradise Flycatcher for ornithologist Zafar Futehally; while a cheerful, bent old odd jobs man Dhanya ("The Truth About Dhanya"), domestic help "Ganga" and the streetwalker- a medley of purple, orange, green and yellow covering up the actual darkness of her complexion and life of "On Bellasis Road"

are some of the characters you meet in Ezekiel's poems, apart from an array of women observed and remarked upon.

Ezekiel's poetry can best be sumed up as something that is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically is something you can grasp immediately. Nissim Ezekiel, from being an Indian born poet writing in English has achieved a stature by creating a body of thought and writing combining the universal, global and home ground with an élan that justifies his own stand that, "Poetry translated into English from the modern Indian language does not constitute English poetry written by Indians."

10.3.4.Major Themes of Ezekiel's Poems

Ezekiel's poetry describes love, loneliness, lust, creativity and political pomposity, human foibles and the 'kindred clamour' of urban dissonance. He echoed England's Post War Movement poets like Philip Larkin, DJ Enright and Ted Huges but with a distinct, ironic voice, moving from strict metre to free verse.

Ezekiel portrays the life of both extremes in the society. Negative features of the lower strata as well as the elitist world of five star hotels make content for his poems. "Night of the Scorpion" is the favorite poem of the Western readers as it reinforces one of their comforting myths about India.

10.3.5. Ezekiel's Style of Writing

As the poetic career of Ezekiel escalated, his attitude towards poetry also underwent a change. The young man who went about chasing dreams, changed into a mature one who incorporated themes from every day life in his poems. After 1965, he began to embrace India's English vernacular and teased its idiosyncrasies in the *PosterPoems* and in "The Professor".

It was Mahatma Gandhi who brought out simplicity and clarity into Indian English prose as against the complex, hard and elite language of Macaulay. Similarly, it is Ezekiel who made Indian-English poetry digestible for the common man. Ezekiel is averse to obscurity in modern poetry. He advocates simplicity of thought and language in poetry. His rhythmes were natural, flowing, direct, informal or conversational.

Let us now analyze two of Ezekiel's poems so you are able to appreciate and understand Ezekiel's poems better.

10.4. USE OF IRONY IN THE POEMS OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

Irony works with great force and acquires a new meaning in post-modern literature. Ironic mode adds to the dignity and magnitude of a writer or a poet's creative writing technique in handling with the social themes because it gives his experiences an utterly modern shape.

Ezekiel's poetry is ironical and reveals two kinds of irony: "one closely allied to satire where the post stands at a distance from the object looked, the other, closely allied to compassion, where the poet examines the experience as if from within." Ezekiel makes subtle use of irony and his insight into life finds its true expression through it. He develops irony and ironical contrasts frequently from the superstition and folk beliefs that exist in society and gives them an utterly modern shape.

As a story teller Ezekiel creates poems out of ordinary incidents, situation and events that one encounters in day to day life. He picks out a situation, analyses it, and describes it in such a way that it immediately assumes a kind of social significance because he views the ordinariness of most of the events with a sense of detachment. Ezekiel's sensibility was disarrayed by the lack of peace of mind in Bombay and this indeed prompted him to analyse the situation around him with a critical vision. Ezekiel is not only ironical while depicting his school-fellows belonging to the Christian, Muslim, and Hindu communities but even in depicting himself. He says that, at home, on Friday nights the prayers were said, and the family felt that his morals had been declining. He had asked himself if he could grow into a rabbi-saint, but the more he searched for an answer, the less he found. Here irony also continues when Ezekiel states that a friend had to pay the fare for his passage to England, and that Philosophy, Poverty and Poetry were the three companions who shared his basement room in London.

In "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." we find Ezekiel pocking fun at the way semi-educated Indians speak or write the English language. Through the device of irony Ezekiel emphasizes the mistakes made by semi-educated or ill-educated Indians in the course of their conversation through the medium of the English language. The poet ridicules the errors of grammar, syntax and idiom which many Indians commit while speaking the English language. The habit of the Indians to give extravagant praise at farewell parties to the departing person has also been ridiculed through the device of irony. Thus the poem is a wholly ironical and satirical. It is full of mockery without having any serious element.

As a poet, Ezekiel's sharp sense of awareness allows him to chronicle the situation around him with a professional approach. People in India never hesitate to put their professional approach even in most critical situation. They are always in wait for such situation in which they may explore themselves and get publicity.

Ezekiel heightens his reader's awareness of pain or joy through his deft use of irony which is the gate way to all suggestiveness in his poetry. His ironical words knife through the dark shades of life and reveal the truth under cover with sensitive and precision. They become meaningful observations on human conditions. So his irony appears direct and creative.

Verbal irony is frequently observed in Ezekiel's poems as halves using the traditional items with utmost modernity so he takes the help of this device. On the one hand he talks of Indianness and Indian concept. But on the other hand, he makes use of utmost sophisticated items of western civilization which insists on frankness, openness and a particular kind of candidness. He has great liking for using those words which are common in Indian English in order to echo in the sense of Indianness.

It is noteworthy that Nissim Ezekiel has written many poems ridiculing the absurdities and follies of the Indian people and his chief weapon of attack is irony. Undoubtedly

irony has become his most conspicuous quality. He does not attack the superstitions of the people directly but exposes the absurdity of superstitious beliefs by the use of irony. Almost every poem by Ezekiel is characterized by irony to a greater or lesser extent. He makes use of the weapon of irony in expressing ideas and depicting situations, characters and life and he uses this weapon in order to reform society. In other respects, Ezekiel shows originality even in the use of irony and in his mode of attack on the malpractices and the evils from which Indian society has been suffering for years and which are actually growing in magnitude instead of doing brought under control. Thus, Ezekiel is a great master of the weapon of irony and always attempts to use it as a device in his poems and creates truly great poetry. He uses the form of irony and gives a new meaning to his poetry. Commenting upon the use of irony by Ezekiel critic states, "The stand-point of Ezekiel is that of a highly educated, cultured and polished man not belonging to any extreme of society, and that such a stand-point is conducive to the development of his thought".

10.5. NISSIM EZEKEIL AS THE FATHER OF MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH

Nissim Ezekiel is known to be the father of Modern Indian English. His poetry is a blend of Indian sensibility and English diction. Ezekiel started a new era and trend in Indian English poetry. He is undoubtedly the father of modernity in Indian English poetry. There are many contemporary Indian English poets who followed the path trodden by Ezekiel. P. Lal and Dom Moraes have admitted the fact that Nissim Ezekiel was their poetic father. The other poets of the younger generation think that Ezekiel is perhaps the first Indian poet consistently to show Indian readers that craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter. What Thomas Hardy was to England in the early twentieth century, Ezekiel is to India in the post-Independence era. In fact he is a great spirit to Indian poets in English for several decades.

Ezekiel became the pioneer of "New Poetry". His poems reflect greater variety and depth than any other poet of the Post-independence period. In the words of Bruce King, "Of the group of poets—attempting to create a modern English poetry in India, Nissim Ezekiel soon emerged as the leader who advised others, set standards and created places of publication. Ezekiel brought a sense of discipline, self-criticism and mastery to Indian English poetry. He was the first Indian poet, to have such a professional attitude". Under the modernist influences he has portrayed a galaxy of themes such as urban-life, sexuality, alienation etc. "Among them 'alienation' and 'belongingness' are the most striking issues in the entire bulk of his poetry".

Ezekiel always felt a sense of belonging to India though he was an outsider by race. Even though he had to face bitter realities of alienation and discrimination from his own compatriots, India always was the motherland to which he was much attached. Even in his writings from London, India never seemed to him just a land of his ancestors as Naipaul always felt. Naipaul used India in his writings not to glorify her but to delineate her weaknesses, failings and thus portray her dark side. Though belonging to Jewish community, Ezekiel was primarily an Indian. Ezekiel satirized the evil practices, superstitions and ignorance of the Indian people in a humorous way just as Pope and Dryden did in their age, and as R. K. Narayan, did in his novels. In the words of

Ramakrishna: "Ezekiel's preoccupation has always been with the avoidance of both "the sophistication of the rootless" and "the parochialism of the native." Consequently, a writer like him is often more Indian than most others who are unduly ostentatious about their "Indianess." Ezekiel is of the opinion that a writer should be a man of convictions, upholding human values. He should be "a man speaking to men".

10.6. "PHILOSOPHY"

There is a place to which I often go,
Not by planning to, but by a flow
Away from all existence, to a cold
Lucidity, whose will is uncontrolled.
Here, the mills of God are never slow.

The landscape in its geological prime
Dissolves to show its quintessential slime.
A million stars are blotted out. I think
Of each historic passion as a blink
That happened to the sad eye of Time.

But residues of meaning still remain,
As darkest myths meander through the pain
Towards a final formula of light.
I, too, reject this clarity of sight.
What cannot be explained, do not explain.

The mundane language of the senses sings
Its own interpretations. Common things
Become, by virtue of their commonness,
An argument against their nakedness
That dies of cold to find the truth it brings.

10.6.1. Introduction

This poem was publishes in the collection *The Exact Name* in 1965. It is one of the complex poems of Ezekiel. It is a meditative poem, which states the superiority of poetry over philosophy. The poem consists four stanzas of five lines each. The poem displays a well-marked rhyme scheme i.e. 'a a b b a'. The language of the poem is simple and idiomatic. The complication of the poem does not lie in its diction but in the passion and complexity of its theme.

10.6.2. Summary and Critical Appreciation

When in London, Ezekiel was a student of philosophy. His love for the subject is evident from the way he calls it one of the three companions with poverty and poetry that shared his basement room. Ezekiel confided that whenever he read philosophy, it made him forgetall the realities of the world as it absorbedhim completely.

This poem is about a meditative state wherein the cosmos is seen with a special focus and the common things of daily life become an argument for "What cannot be explained, do not explain" because they argue against their own significance.

The poetic persona speaks of his transit once he has reached a transcendent state where his will "is uncontrolled." Here, he finds expanded thought is accessible whereas in a normal waking state, this is less so: "the mills of God are never slow."

In this transcendence, he sees the cosmos as a primordial goo that preceded the "million stars" of the physical cosmos: "Dissolves to show its quintessential slime." The speaker says that in this state he sees history as tears in the eye of Time, which puts historic events in a new perspective as insignificant and as tragic: "That happened to the sad eye of Time."

Yet, whispers of normal waking meaning still remain in this transcendent state. The myths of life make their way through the pain of life attempting to weave a final understanding through a light of revelation and meaning:

> As darkest myths meander through the pain
> Towards a final formula of light.

He says he rejects attempts at formulaic, revelatory explanations of life's pain, summarizing it as inexplicable:

> I, too, reject this clarity of sight.
> What cannot be explained, do not explain.

There is some ambiguity in the language of these two lines as he says "I, too, reject the English syntax.Which makes us question the obvious, who the other person is referred to in this line? When we recall that the poet spoke Marathi though he wrote poems in the Indian variety of English, we can justifiably mentally rearrange the syntax to be "I reject, too, this clarity." Now the syntax means he rejects the "clarity of sight" along with something else previously rejected. But what?Possibly, it is reality's realm of a "million stars" blotted out of view by the primordial "quintessential slime" or possibly the magnitude of "each historic passion" now reduced to the magnitude of a teardrop. The meaning of "I, too, reject" remains unclear.

The persona addresses why things that cannot be explained should not be explained by saying that human senses have varying understanding ("interpretation"): you feel differently from I, and I feel differently from you. He says that common things, because they are common and used everyday, become a justification for their substantial significance: they are not an abstraction, a nothing; they are something and therefore important. They themselves "become an argument" to prove their substance, "an argument against their nakedness," against their nothingness. Thus, the argument against things' nothingness/nakedness dies "of cold" while trying to find the truth it asserts: a false argument dies trying to prove itself.

In other words, the poetic speaker asserts that you can never prove that the substantial realm of material substance is true and, and by extension, that the spiritual realm of transcendence is not true.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. In which year was the poem “Philosophy" published for the first time?
2. What is the central idea of the poem “Philosopher”?
3. Shed light on the poetic career of Nissim Ezekiel.

10.7. “ENTERPRISE”

It started as a pilgrimage
Exalting minds and making all
The burdens light, The second stage
Explored but did not test the call.
The sun beat down to match our rage.
We stood it very well, I thought,
Observed and put down copious notes
On things the peasants sold and bought
The way of surpants and of goats.
Three cities where a sage had taught
But when the differences arose
On how to cross a desert patch,
We lost a friend whose stylish prose
Was quite the best of all our batch.
A shadow falls on us and grows.
Another phase was reached when we
Were twice attacked, and lost our way.
A section claimed its liberty
To leave the group. I tried to prey.
Our leader said he smelt the sea
We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope,
Ignoring what the thunder ment,
Deprived of common needs like soap.
Some were broken, some merely bent.
When, finally , we reached the place ,
We hardly know why we were there.
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is where we have to gather grace.

10.7.1. Summary and Analysis of the Poem

How many of you have read T.S Eliot’s “The Journey of the Magi?” While reading “Enterprise”, one may think of Eliot’s “The Journey of the Magi.” Though that poem is different in approach but it is also about a very cold and tiring journey by three wise men in search of spiritual pacification. Enterprise is one of those wonderful poems published in Ezekiel’s collection of poems named *The Unfinished Man*. It revolves around a

metaphorical journey of man on this earth followed by hardships and failures which man is subjected to by the very nature of the earthly life that he leads.

Stanza 1:

The poem, "Enterprise", begins with a group of people which includes the poet himself (as it is clear from the use of 'we' in the sixth line) journeys to a holy place. At that time, their minds were full of ideas to reach their destination. Therefore, they started their journey with a lot of vigour and excitement, sure enough that they can easily overcome all the difficulties that they face. Inconveniences seemed insignificant to them. However, our real strength emerges when we face a crisis, isn't it? Similarly, the travellers were full of enthusiasm and reached the second stage of their journey. During this second stage, they confronted the adverse natural difficulties, symbolizing the blazing Sun. But nothing could detain them from reaching their destination or take away their enthusiasm. Their passion to reach their destination was as hot as the blazing Sun above their heads. The heat of the sun is symbolic of Mother Nature being hostile towards human ambitions. The more the human beings aspire, the more the nature tries to put up a hindrance to beat them down.

Stanza 2:

The group of the travelers continues their journey, experiencing the difficulties put in their way. Carried away by the unrestrained excitement, the pilgrims kept a record of the events that they witnessed- goods being bought and sold by the peasants and the ways of serpents and goats. The travelers passed through three cities where a sage has taught. But they were unconcerned about what he taught or what his message was.

Stanza 3:

The third stanza talks about the differences that cropped up among the members which made a hole in their unity as they continued their journey. As they reached a desert, differences arose among on the question of how to cross the challenging landscape. One of the members, an excellent prose writer, left the enterprise. He was considered the most intelligent among the lot. Therefore, a shadow of discord fell onto their enterprise and continued to grow as one of the members parted from the group.

Stanza 4:

The poet describes the hindrances that follow the enterprise. In the next stage of their journey, the travelers are attacked twice and while saving themselves they lose their ways and forget the noble ambitions which had motivated them to come so far. The enterprise slowly breaks into two. Some of the members, claiming their freedom, quit the journey and went their own ways. The poet feels helpless and upset at the breaking of the enterprise, looking at the disorganized lot of pilgrims, the only thing he could do was to pray. And why do you think we pray? The answer is that the act of praying implies seeking the help of a divine personality when human efforts go in vain.

Stanza 5:

There is still an assurance from the leader of the group. He assures them that the sea or the destination was at hand. It seems that they members have lost their enthusiasm and hope as they see nothing noticeable as they move forward. The pilgrims have now turned into a crowd of aimless wanderers instead of being bounded by a well-focused goal like

before. They were not bothered about the roar of the thunder; some of them were too exhausted to stand erect.

Stanza 6:

The final stanza of Enterprise is a relief to the readers, as the poet tells us that they did reach their destination in total disorder- exhausted and frustrated- and without any sense of satisfaction. Instead of bringing a sense of fulfillment and achievement, the journey had only brought them frustration. They now started to doubt the importance of their journey; they began to find it futile and meaningless. They found nothing heroic in their achievements. They had a belief that their journey would be unparalleled and that its success would give them a place in history. So was it disillusionment? They later realized that such a journey was already undertaken by others before them and would be repeated in the near futile. This gave them a sense of disillusionment and they felt the journey was futile. In the end, they feel that staying back home would have been better than venturing out on such a dangerous journey with disastrous consequences.

There might be a question that may come to our minds. That was the journey really a fruitful one or was it as the members think, meaningless? What are your views?

For a better understanding of the poem, the critical appreciation is discussed below.

10.7.2. Critical Appreciation of the Poem:

Form and Structure:

The poem "Enterprise" is written in a conventional form. The poem consists of six stanzas, each having five lines. The pattern is iambic tetrameter, with rhyming scheme ababa that is the first line rhymes with the third and fifth, while the second rhymes with the fourth.

Use of Verbal Antithesis:

The poem has used verbal antithesis to achieve a balance. Antithesis is a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases, lines or stanzas. In this poem, verbal antithesis is not only found in the entire poem but in the same stanza and in the same lines. Some of the examples are listed below:

1. The initial activities of the pilgrims are juxtaposed with those in the final stage as the pilgrims turn into 'a straggling crowd of little hope.'
2. The 'exalted minds' of the pilgrims are turned into 'darkened faces.'
3. In the beginning the pilgrims found themselves as the 'burdens light' but at the end of the poem they are broken in spirit and bent down physically.

Symbolism:

"Enterprise" is a symbolic poem. Symbolism refers to the use of symbols to represent ideas or facts. The various symbols used in Enterprise are listed below:

Pilgrimage in the poem symbolizes life.

1. The 'crowd of pilgrims' symbolizes a group of men, who undertake to achieve common goal which begins with excitement and hope but ends with disillusionment and frustration.
2. The 'Sun' is the symbol of hostility of nature towards human aspirations and ambitions.
3. A 'desert patch' is symbolic of the challenges and hardships which the group faces or the differences that rise among them.
4. 'A shadow falls on us and grows' is symbolic of the differences in opinion that leads to a discord in the enterprise and consequently, a member leaves the group and the disharmony grows.
5. 'A straggling crowd of little hope' symbolizes a group of people who had a well focused goal and during the course of their journey loses their zeal and becomes a crowd of aimless and frustrated wanderers.
6. 'Thunder' is symbolic of man's inner voice.
7. 'Home' symbolizes remaining rooted to the soil or remaining true to oneself.

Allegory:

Allegory can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. The poem 'Enterprise' is allegorical in nature. The group of men all set for the journey, enthusiastic and full of vigour set out for the spiritual quest. They face hardships, difficulties yet they do not lose their aspirations. But during the second stage of their journey, disharmony and differences in opinions among the members arises and soon a conflict breaks out which results in disunity. The final stanza raises a question, 'Was the journey worth all the struggles?' The journey here is a metaphor of life. The poem is a stark depiction of the condition of men on this earth who are subjected to such failures, hardships and disillusionment during their course of journey of life.

Epigrams:

An epigram is a brief, sharp, witty and polished saying giving expression to a striking thought. It is used to convey the poet's message in the poem.

'Home is where we have to gather grace' is epigrammatic. Here, the poet wants to convey the message that in the journey of life, home is symbolic of one's inner self which must be accepted and faced and not shirked away. This is the only sane and balanced way of life that man should accept.

Self Assessment Questions II

1. Bring out the allegorical significance of the poem.
2. What are the things discussed in the second stanza of the poem?
3. How is the poem "Enterprise" similar to T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"?

10.8. SUMMING UP

In this unit you read about the life and writing style of Nissim Ezekiel, the Father of Modern Indian English Poetry.You saw how the poems of Ezekiel take the readers on a virtual tour of an Indian mind and gives us an insight of his thoughts, ideas, emotions. Furthermore, you explored the major themes and poetic devices used by Ezekielhis

poems. In this unit you also analysed two of Ezekiel's representative poems "Philosophy" and "Enterprise" in detail.

10.9. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to Section 10.6.1.
2. Refet to Section 10.6.2.
3. Refer to Sectio 10.3.2.

II

1. Refer to Section 10.7.2
2. Refer to Section 10.7.1.
3. Refer to Sections 10.7.1. and 10.7.2.

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10.11. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Critically examine the poems "Philosophy" in your own words.
2. What is the central idea of the poem "Enterprise"?
3. Discuss the use of irony in the poems of Nissim Ezekiel.
4. Why is Nissim Ezekiel known to be the Father of Modern English Poetry?

UNIT 11 KAMALA DAS

"The Freaks" "A Hot Noon at Malabar"

11.1. INTRODUCTION

Kamala das is one of the most notable poets and novelists of Indian literature.She wrote poems in two languages; English and Malyalam. Das has authored many autobiographical works and novels, several well received short stories and essays on a broad spectrum of subjects. Since the publication of her finest collection of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), Das has been considered as an important voice of generation, exemplified by the break from the past by writing in a distinctly Indian persona rather than adopting techniques of the English modernists. Das is noted for her confessional, fiery and autobiographical poetry, her open and honest treatment of female sexuality, free from any sense of guilt, infused her writing with power, but also marked her as an early life iconoclast.

11.2. OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit you will be able to:

- find out the Salient features of Kamala Das's poetry.
- explain briefly the merits of Kamala's poetry.
- find out the confessional notes in her poetry.
- the elements of Feminism in the poetry of Kamala Das.

11.3. KAMALA DAS

11.3.1. Kamala Das: Early Life

Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Madhavikutti (her pen name was Madhavikutti), was a major English Indian poet and at the same time a leading Malayalam author from Kerala, was born into an aristocratic Nair Hindu family in Malabar, Kerala, on March 31, 1934. Her pen name was Madhavi kutty. Her father V. M. Nair was a former managing editor of the widely-circulated Malayalam daily Matrabhumi, and her mother Nalapat Balamani Amma, was a renowned Malyali poetess. She started writing love poetry, at an early age through the influence of her maternal great-uncle, Narayana Menon, a prominent writer. Like her mother, Balamani Amma, Kamala Das also excelled in writing. Das was also affected by the poetry of sacred writings kept by the matriarchal community of Nairs. Das was Educated in Calcutta and Malabar, began writing at the age of six, her first poem published by P.E.N India at the age of fourteen.

She did not receive any university education because at the age of 15, in 1949 she got married to Madhava Das, an employee of the reserve bank of India, who encouraged her writing interests, and she started writing and publishing both in English and in Malayalam up and started appearing in cult anthologies along with the generation of Indian English poets. Although Kamala and Madhava were romantically incompatible (her autobiography "My story" 1976 describes her extra marital affairs and his homosexual liaison). Her carrier took them to Calcutta, New Delhi, and Bombay, and the poetry of Das is influenced by metropolitan life as well as by her emotional experience. . Calcutta in 1960s was a tumultuous time for the arts, and Kamala Das was one of the

many voices that came up and started appearing in cult anthologies along with a generation of Indian English poets.

11.3.2. Literary Career

As a writer Kamla Daswas noted for her many short stories as well as many poems that she wrote in Malayali as well as English. She once claimed that "poetry does not sell in this country [India]," but her forthright columns, which sounded off on everything from women's issues and childcare to politics, were popular.

Educated in Malabar, Das began to write poetry at the age of six (her poems were “about dolls who lost their heads and had to remain headless forever”) and her first poem published at the age of fourteen by P.E.N India. Her six volumes of poetry came out between 1965 and 1985, drawing upon religious and domestic imagery to explore a sense of identity, Das tells of her intensely personal experiences, including her growth into womanhood, her unsuccessful quest for love, in and outside of marriage, and her life in matriarchal rural South India. Since the publication of Das' first book of poetry, *Summer in Calcutta*, Das has been the controversial figure, known for her unusual imagery and candor. In poems such as “The dance of Eunuchs” and the “Freaks”, Das grows upon exotic to discuss her sexuality and her quest for fulfillment. In an “Introduction”, Das universalizes and makes public traditionally private experiences, suggesting that woman’s personal feelings of longing and loss are part of collective experience of womanhood. In the collection *Descendants* (1967), the poem “maggots” frames the pain of lost love with ancient Hindu myths, while the poem “The looking Glass” suggests that woman are untouchables of love, in that very things society labels dirty are the things the women are supposed to give. The poem implies that a restrained love seems to be no love at all; only a total immersion in love can do justice to this experience. In the *Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1975) poems such as “Substitute”, “Gino” and “Suicide” examine the failure of physical love to provide fulfillment, to allow from escape from self, or to exorcise the past, whereas poems such as “The Inheritance” address the integrity of the artistic self in the face of religious fanaticism. In “*This Savage Rite: The Love Poems of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy* (1979), Das invokes Krishna in her exploration of tensions between physical love and spiritual transcendence. *The Annamalai Poems* (1985), a series of short poems written after Das was defeated in 1984 Parliamentary elections, rework of classical Tamil interior poems that contrast grandeur and permanence of nature with the transience of human history. Poems, such as ‘Delhi 1984’ and ‘Smoke in Colombo, evokes the massacre of the Sikhs and the Civil war in Shree Lanka. Das is also an author of an autobiography, *My Story,* a novel, *The Alphabet of Lust* (1977), originally written in Malyalam (titled *Ente Katha*), and several volumes of short stories in English. Under the pen name of Madhavakutti Das published many books in Malyalam language. Although occasionally seen as an attention-grabber in her early years. She is now seen as one of the most formative influences on Indian English poetry. In 2009, The Times called her "the mother of modern English Indian poetry’’. She has also held positions as Vice chairperson in Akademi, editor of Poets Magazine and Poetry editor of the*Illustrated Weekly of India.*Kamla Das has been the receipients of various illustrious awards both nationally and internationally. Some of the coveted prizes that she has received include P.E.N. Phillippines Asian World Prize (1963), Kerela Sahitya Academy Award (Malyalam) (1969), Chiman Lal Award for Fearless Journalism (1971), ASAN World Prize (1985),

Sahitya Academy Award (English) (1985). Furthermore, she also received Honorary D.Lit. degree from the University of Calicut (2006) and was also nominated for Nobel Prize in Literature in (1984).

11.3.3. Themes of Kamla Das' Poems

Kamala Das mainly dealt with the sense of alienation, nostalgia for the past and unfulfilled love as the themes of her poems. She wrote on a diverse range of topics; she wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish. Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian poets were still governed by "19th-century diction, sentiments.

11.4. "FREAKS"

He talks, turning a sun-stained
Cheek to me, his mouth, a dark
Cavern, where stalactites of
Uneven teeth gleam, his right
Hand on my knee, while our minds
Are willed to race towards love;
But, they only wander, tripping
Idly over puddles of
Desire. .... .Can this man with
Nimble finger-tips unleash
Nothing more alive than the
Skin's lazy hungers? Who can
Help us who have lived so long
And have failed in love? The heart,
An empty cistern, waiting
Through long hours, fills itself
With coiling snakes of silence.....
I am a freak. It's only
To save my face, I flaunt, at
Times, a grand, flamboyant lust.

11.4.1. Introduction

This poem is a part of the first collection by Kamala Das *Summer In Calcutta*published in 1965. "Freak" is a person, animal, or plant that is abnormal or deformed and different from others. In this poem, the persona of the poetess, and her husband are termed as "Freaks" because they don't follow the rules and norms generally followed by ordinary people.While reading this poem, you will find the autobiographical note in this poem. In this poem Kamala Das has dealt with the feelings of a woman, who is not emotionally attached to her husband, but bound only in a relation called 'marriage'.

11.4.2. Summary of the Poem

This poem is about a couple. The poem begins showing the husband turning his face towards his beloved. The man is good looking, but the woman finds her lover repulsive. She describes that his cheek is sun-stained, and brown in colour, and his mouth appears like a sinister cave to her. His teeth are uneven and white that reminds her of the stalactites. The images in this poem presents that the relationship is forced one, which she has to tolerate, even though she does not want it.

She is submitting to the bond, as she is the wife so she must fulfill his husband's physical desires. Man lays his hands on the knees of the woman, they try to think of love, even though they have forced themselves to think of love. Her mind keeps wandering off love .They lack emotional bonding. They are like two people who are there to complete the dirty task they have undertaken.

Their entire focus is only on completing the task. The poetess has compared this dirty task to puddles of dirty water encountered on the road. The puddles are suggestive of the savage and the grime, and the symbolic of lust and desire. The woman is full of repulsion as the man's fingers move on her body, this can only ignite physical passion in her, and don't kindle any emotional response. It is the emotional desire that she craves.

She feels that their relationship is a hopeless and though they have lived together still they have not been able to love one another. She says that her hearts are like dry, empty cistern, which has no life giving water of love in them. They wait for the water of love to flow into their dry cistern hearts, but instead of water the cistern fills with the snakes of silence. The image of snakes conveys the horror and disgust, the woman is feeling at the act of sexual intercourse.

The woman considers herself to be Freak because she is not reacting as the other ordinary woman react. She thinks herself to be frigid, sterile and incapable of emotional love.

11.4.3. Critical Appreciation

This poem written by Kamala Das is a confessional one. Kamala Das was herself, not happy in her married life. She admits in her autobiography *My Story*that she was not emotionally attached to her husband. Kamala in this poem talks about a husband and his wife who are forced to be in love but not emotionally attached.

The poetess herself made it manifested that her poetry is a 'psychic striptease', an exploration of the characteristics of her own mind.' She says that her lyric is the result of her own self-exploration. Through the images of sterility and disgust in her poems, the poetess brings out the emotional dissatisfaction, and emptiness that she suffers in her matrimonial relationship. She brings forth the deep sense of misery that she feels at having to yield to her husband's physical demands; to submit herself to a man she finds disgusting and with whom she has no emotional affinity.

This poem describes the emotional, experiences that she has described in her autobiography *My Story*. Kamala Das obsession with the worn out aspects of human body as such, but she things of her diverse parts all imbued with the obliteration. These combined together comprise the male form that destroys the vital human decency.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. Give a critical summary of the poem "Freaks".
2. Why does Kamala Das refer to the husband and his wife in the poem"Freaks"?
3. What does the wife always seek for and what kind of love exists between the couple?

11.5. "A HOT NOON IN MALABAR"

This is a noon for beggars with whining
Voices, a noon for men who come from hills
with parrots in the cage and fortune cards,
all stained with time, for brown kurava girls
with old eyes, who read palms in light singsong
Voices, for bangle-sellers who spread
On the cool black floor those red and green and blue
Bangles , all covered with the dust of the roads,
For all of them , whose feet , devouring rough
Miles , grow cracks on the heels, so that when they
clambered up our porch, the noise was grating
Strange……. This is noon for strangers who part
The window-drapes and peer in, their hot eyes
Brimming with the sun, not seeing a thing in
Shadowy rooms and turn away and look
So yearningly at the brick-ledged well. This
Is a noon for strangers with mistrust in
Their eye, dark silent ones, their voices
Run wild, like jungle-voices. Yes this is
A noon for wild men, wild thoughts, wild love. To
Be here, far away, is torture. Wild feet
stirring up the dust, this is a hot noon, at my
home in Malabar, and I so far away.

11.5.1. Introduction

This poem is taken from the first collection of verse by Kamala Das *The Summer in Calcutta,* 1965. This poem deals with her yearning for her happy and love filled childhood and the family house in Malabar. As she herself says "From every city I have lived, I have remembered the noons in Malabar with an ache growing inside me, a homesickness." She craves for her past which is so dear to her and finds the present to be an "unbearable hot summer day".

11.5.2. Summary

At the time of summers, in her home, the poetess finds the external world to be discolored and filthy and finds solace and comfort in the past at her home town in Malabar. The summers she spends in city seems to her as if a torture, she describes a noon in the city; it is a noon where beggars ask for alms in their sing song voices,men

descend into the city from the mountains, parrots are seen peeping out from the cages, and a fortune-teller is beholden predicting fortune seeing cards. Then there are the 'Kunwara' girls, who tell the future of their clients, 'in melodious voices' while examining their palms. There are also the bangle sellers, who sell their nut colored bangles, covered with dust of the road. Their feet are cracked with the distance they have covered on foot. The speaker knew them all as young child, but now when they come to her porch, they seem like strangers and the sound they make, seem horrible and unpleasant to her.

The temperature of the summer noon distresses the poetess' soul. She feels that strangers from outside are peeping into the room through the window with their hot burning eyes and wish to seek shelter from the scorching sun. They first look into the room, and when they find no one there, they look towards the "brick ledge well" with yearning. They want to quench their thirst and escape for a while from the heat of the sun.

They are strange people, and have a kind of wild look in their eyes. They do not speak much but when they do, their voices are wild and hoarse. It is all the distress for her now, because these noons remind her of other long past noons, which were equally sultry. Everything seems dirty, filthy and alien to her, unlike the past when everything was pure and innocent to her.

The poetess' thoughts fluctuate between the present and the past times. She keeps comparing the two together. She tries to asses her unhappy present in the terms of her gay and happy past. It was hot then as it is now, then too, there were strangers, raising dust with their travel on feet, as they were now. Now she looks at them with doubt and suspicion, they seemed pure, innocent and familiar to her. She craves for her old family home; she feels that it is the greatest torment that she has undergone to be living in a new city, on that 'Hot Summer Noon'. She feels that the strangers with uncultivated feet would still be there in Malabar, but she will not be there anymore to watch them. The life may still be the same there, but for her all has changed.

She looks back at the family home in Malabar as the ideal place of protection, the refuge from her present sorrows and suffering. These images are nothing but a huddle of associations, which have deep emotional inferences. Phrases like 'jungle voices' create a combination of sense and sound, and produce powerful verbal drama, imparting a typical character of the poem.

11.5.3. Critical Appreciation

"A Hot Noon in Malabar" is an intensively emotional and personal poem. It is one of Kamla Das' typical works, which evokes the Malabar landscape and its lush greenery. The poem powerfully evokes a sense of belonging to Malabar of her childhood. In this poem she retraces her lost childhood in the tides of time but it still remains etched so deeply in her heart.

Recollecting the olden days, she remembers the totally unrestrained and unrestricted life that she had lead in Malabar. Kamala Das have chosen words carefully to recreate and pour out same feelings that had made those days memorable and extraordinary. The intimacy with which she portrays her feelings is prominent and very clear to visualize. It helps in creating a panorama of varied experience she had in her childhood. For Kamala, Malabar stands for the exotic people bringing along with them bundles of mystery that

arouse curiousness. Her verse brings forth all her yearnings that she was deprived off in life. As a matter of fact the speaker's agony is brought to the fore when she cries out aloud saying, "To be here far away is a torture".

The speaker wants to experience the vibrant colours of life and wants to be a part of it. She feels abandoned and craves to be accepted, to be a part of the world around her. She is disturbed as she feels that she has lost the happiness of her past life forever. She remembers the beautiful landscape of Kerala and it becomes even more profound when she associates it with "Wild Man, Wild Thoughts, Wild Love". She desires to lose herself in passionate love. Perhaps her childhood was devoid of unconditional love and she yearns for it from different sources. A bridled restrained love is no love for her. She wants to experience a more passionate love. Throughout the poem we see that there is a strong display ofemotions which is reinforced in each of her poems. The intensive feelings it captures reflects effectively in this poem. The choice of words and the imagery Ms. Das creates bring forth the Malabar landscapes right in front of eyes.

The poem presents before us nostalgia of the past that will never come again. The city life seems a torture to her soul, a cage in which she has been confined to and can never come out. This poem is also a confessional piece. She craves for her lovely past and contrasts her life in the city with her old family home. She describes the summer noon, in new city; beggars, fortune telling parrots, the Kunwara girls predicting future of the passer bys, bangle sellers selling bangles covered with dust. The speaker says that she has known them since her childhood but now as everything seems to have changed, they appear strangers to her.

The speaker is not happy with her present condition as she finds her old house at Malabar to be the real place of happiness. The people around seem to be strangers to her but she finds a yearning in the eyes of those people which is similar to her longings.Their voices, which were known to her earlier now seem to be 'Jungle Voices'. She shows her hatred for the noises they were making becauseit reminded her of her own sweet childhood.In a nutshell, this poem contains Das' unedited thoughts which are free flowing and shine in its own natural way.

Self Assessment Questions I I

1. Discuss the theme of the poem 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'.
2. Trace out the nostalgic elements in the poem.
3. Discuss the Confessional elements in the poem.

11.6.KAMALA DAS AS A POET

Kamala Das is beyond doubt the greatest woman poet in contemporary Indo-Anglian literature. As a Confessional Poet, she displays feminist ethos in her poems. . Shewrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish, largely for those readers whoresponded sympathetically to her guileless, guiltless frankness with regard to sexual matters. Miss Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for an independence of mind and body at a time when Indian women poets were still expected to write about teenage girlie fantasies of eternal, bloodless, unrequited love." While reviewers of Das' early poetry praised its fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality and intensely personal voice, they lamented that it lacked

attention to structure and craftsmanship. Scholars such as Devendra Kohli, Eunice de Souza, and Sunil Kumar find powerful feminist imagery in Das' poetry, focusing on critiques of marriage, motherhood, women's relationship to their bodies and control of their sexuality, and the roles, women are offered in traditional Indian society. Much criticism analyzes Das as a "confessional" poet, writing in the tradition to Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. Some scholars, such as Vimala Rao, Iqbar Kaur, and Vrinda Naur, find Das's poetry, autobiography and essays frustratingly inconsistent, self-indulgent, and equivocal, although they, too, praise her compelling images and original voice. They suggest that Das is both overexposed and overrated. Other scholars, such as P. P. Raveendran, connect the emphasis on the self in Das' work to larger historical and cultural contexts and complicated, shifting postcolonial identities.

In the poems of Kamala Das, we find a rare body and its feelings and she seems incapable of thinking of eternal life as a bodiless existence. Frustrated by love and loneliness, she longed for an eternal life with her body and soul after her life on the earth. She loved her body as much as she loved her soul. Since her bodily desires could not be satiated by her life here she wants to achieve it by a life after death. As "Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women–the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender". Its emphasis is on the ideology rather than on the literariness of the text. Feminism evolved as an opposition to patriarchy or the dominant sexist ideology.

Kamala Das tried her best to uplift the position of downtrodden women, thereby resisting the dominance of man. There is no doubt Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian poetry—a far cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das' is a fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive largely male-dominated world. Of course, the endless pain of such hurt, such disillusion, such cynicism, must sooner or later degenerate into a mannerism, but one hopes—and her exceptional talent offers the ground for such hopes—she will outgrow this obsession in due course and find her way to a season less tiring than summer and a world other than the 'unreal' city of dreadful ghosts.

11.7.ELEMENTS OF FEMINISM IN THE POETRY OF KAMALA DAS

The typical aspect of modern Feminist literature is the pervading sense of alienation and separation from the mainstream of history and civilization. This sense of isolation is not a product of feminist imagination but rather the result of a past, cultural and literary neglect of women and their activities. The women protagonists of the Feminist writers are the mouthpieces of the victimized womenfolk who are ruthlessly treated by male hegemony and prejudiced cultures.

Kamala Das has emerged as one of the most significant writers in Indo-Anglican literature in Post independent India. She is the proud receipient of awards such as the the PEN International Award for poetry and Kerala Sahitya Award for her literary contribution. She writes with understanding and has an insight of the different aspects of social life in India. She plays a very significant role in depicting feminist concerns in her poetry.In this context Sunanda P.Chavan comments:"Kamala Das embodies the most

significant stage of development of Indian Feminine poetic sensibility not yet reached by her contemporaries."

In a male dominated society, she has tried to emphasize her feminine identity and her personal identity. Her poetry is the poetry of revolt, and the revolt is the outcome e of all her dissatisfaction and psychological traumas. The major theme of most of the poetry of Kamala Das is quest for love and her failure to find fulfillment of love in life. A recurring theme in most of the poems of Kamala Das is quest for love and her failure to find fulfillment of love in life. Her poetry is an expression of feminine sensibility which she treats with frankness. Her poems are an articulation of love longings, frustrations and disillusionments.

Kamala Das' poetic sensibility can be revealed in most of her poems. Be it about her grandmother or her childhood experiences or her youth. In this context K.R. Srinivas Iyenger observes:

> Kamala Das is a new phenomenon in Indo- Anglican poetry, a far poetic cry indeed from Toru Dutt or even Sarojini Naidu. Kamala Das`s is fiercely feminine sensibility that dares without inhibitions to articulate the hurts it has received in an insensitive man-made world. While giving the impression of writing in hast, she reveals a mastery; of phrase and a control over rhythm –the words often pointed and envenomed too, and the rhythm so nervously, almost feverishly alive.

She is basically a poet who voices modern Indian woman's ambivalence, giving expression openly to women's issues more veheminantly than any other Indian Woman poet. She is not any woman or the manifestation of Woman. The motivating force of her notion is that love which is a frustrating experience. Kamla Das' radical feministic outlook is best depicted in her poem "Freaks". She depicts skillfully the disappointments, senselessness and the torments of a woman who longs for true love but it is denied to her by her husband who is insensible to her psychological desires. She revolts the cruelty of her companion and resists his male ego blatently. She refused to play the traditional role as a wife. Kamla Das' poems represent a rebellion against a male dominated social system and brings to the fore her feminine sensibility and in doing so she revolts against the system. She is proud of her femininity and does not fail to claim it. In this sense, she is a truly liberated woman anda true representative of a modern woman who identifies with her rights.

Scholars like Devendra Kohli, Eunice de Souza, and Sunil Kumar find powerful feminist imagery in Kamala Das's poetry. Das mainly deals with subjects like marriage, motherhood, womanhood, woman's relationship to their bodies and control of their sexuality, and the roles woman is offered in traditional Indian society. Das'uncanny honesty extends to exploration of womanhood and love. In her poem "An Introduction" from the summer in Calcutta, the narrator says, "I am every woman / Who seeks love."

In Das's eyes, womanhood involves certain collective experiences. Indian woman, however, do not discuss these experiences in deference to social mores. Das consistently refuses to accept their silence. Feelings of longings and loss are not confined to a private misery. They are invited into the public sphere and acknowledged. Das seems to insist they are normal and have been felt by women across times. In "Maggots" from the collection *Descendants*, Das corroborates just how old the sufferings of woman are. She

frames the pain of lost love with ancient Hindu myths. On the last night together Krishna asks Radha, 'If she is disturbed by his kisses?' and Radha replies, 'No not at all, but thought, what is / it to the corpse if the maggots nip?

Radha's pain is searing and her silence is given voice by Das. Furthermore, by making a powerful goddess a prey to such thoughts, it serves as a validation for ordinary woman to have similar feelings. The longing to lose one's self in passionate love is discussed in "The Looking Glass" from the collection*Descendants*. The narrator of the poem urges women to give their men "the musk of sweat between breast/the warm shock of menstrual blood…" and suggests that

these things should not be hidden from one's beloved. In the narrator's eyes, love should be defined by this type of 'unconditional honesty'. Das makes no attempt to hide the sensuality if human form; her works seem to celebrate its joyous potential while acknowledging its concurrent dangers. Das once said, "I always wanted love, and if you don't get it within your home you stray a little".

Some critics label Das as a feminist for her candor in dealing with woman's needs and desires, Das has never tried to identify herself with any particular version of "feminist activism". Das' views can be characterized as "a gut response" a reaction that like her poetry, is unfettered by others notion of right and wrong. Nonetheless, the poet Eunice de Souza claims that Das has "mapped out the terrain for post-colonial women in social and linguistic terms". Das has ventured into areas unclaimed by society and provided a point of reference for her colleagues. She has transcended the role of a poet and simply embraced the role of a very honest woman. She is unique in her treatment of sexual themes and her poetry consists, an emotional charm in it which attracts the readers towards it.

11.8.CONFESSIONAL NOTES IN KAMALA DAS'S POETRY

Confessional poetry designates a type of narrative and lyric verse, which deals with the facts and intimate mental and physical experiences of the poet's own life. Confessional poet reveals private or clinical matters about himself or herself, including sexual experiences, mental anguishand illness, experiments with drugs, and suicidal impulses. Kamala Das is also a confessional poetess as her poetry openly deals with private feelings, she introduces herself as:

I am Indian very brown, born in Malabar,
I speak three languages,
Write in two, Dream in one.

In her autobiography she frankly speaks about her many extra marital affairs and discusses her private feelings of love and lust. She also discusses hersexuality and other private matters frankly her poems. One can sense a spirit of rebellion in her poems. Her erotic poems express a deep rooted need to be loved which she desire to be fulfilled emotionally and sexually. In her poetry she confesses of being physical with her husband while not being satisfied emotionally or spiritually. Kamala Das's poetry in itself was a reflection of her life, the way she saw and experienced it. Her honesty in expressing things which the society considered taboo earned her a lot of criticism and appreciation

alike. She has labeled a 'Femme Fatal' who consistently delves into love, sex and loneliness. The narrator in "The Hot Noon In Malabar" says-

…I who have lost
My way and beg now at strangers door to
Receive love, at least in small change?

Kamala Das is said to be obsessed with writing autobiographical poems which are, according to Iyenger, "aggressively individualistic", William Walsh calls her poems "self centered". For a candid articulation of her sexuality and identity as a woman, has earned her the sobriquet of Kerala's "Queen of Erotica". William Walsh says "Her poetry is self centered and unabashedly sexual although the sexuality seems more fascinating to the poet because it is hers than because it is sexual".

11.9. SUMMING UP

In this unit you read about the life and poetry of Kamala Das. Kamla Das' poetry has been intimately connected to critical perception of her personality and politics. It has fierce originality, bold images, exploration of female sexuality, and intensely personal voice. You also traced the elements of Feminism in her poems. Furthermore, you analyzed two of Das' well-known poems, "Freaks" and "a Hot Noon in Malabar".

11.10. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to the Sections 11.3.
2. Refer to the Section 11.4.2 and 11.4.3.
3. Refer to the Sections 11.4.2 and 11.4.3.

II

1. Refer to the Sections 11.5.2 and 11.5.3.
2. Refer to the Section 11.5.2
3. Refer to the Sections 11.5.2 and 11.5.3.

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11.11. MODEL AND TERMINAL QUESTION

1. Draw a biographical sketch of Kamla Das in your own words.
2. Discuss Kamla Das as a Confessional poet
3. Discuss the contribution of Kamala Das as an Indian English poet.

UNIT 12 SOMDEVA

SELECTIONS FROM *KATHASARITSAGARA*

12.1. INTRODUCTION

India is a land of tales and Sanskrit is said to be the mother of many of the Indian languages. We observe a strong influence of this language on other Indian languages. The richest reservoir of short stories is found in Sanskrit literature around 11th century India. The *Kathasaritsagara*, or Ocean of the Streams of Story, is an exquisite eleventh-century Sanskrit text ascribed to Somdeva (Bhatt), a Kashmiri Brahmin. He must have composed this about 1070 AD. He is supposed to have composed it for Queen Suryamati (or Suryavati), the wife of a famous king of Kashmir, Anantadeva. He did it on the basis of some earlier works. The most significant of these is the Brahatkatha (the "Great Story") accredited to Gunadhya, who might be a mythological character. The *Kathasaritsagara* consists of 18 books of 124 chapters and approximately 22,000 śhlokas. It incorporates various other works such as an account of the Panchatantra and the Vetāla-panchaviṃśati orBaital Pachisi.*Kathasaritsagara* is one of the oldest fine collections of stories available in the world that have guided generations of story tellers in matters of theme and narration and it stands as an epitome of life and culture of its times.

12.2. OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to enable you to understand and develop your insights into the following aspects of *Kathasaritsagara*:

- To be aware about the myths and legends associated with *Kathasaritsagara*
- To know about Somdeva's times
- To present an analysis of the select tales from *Kathasaritsagara*
- To explain the salient features of Somdeva's works
- Legends about *Kathasaritsagara*
- To understand Somdeva's language and style
- To evaluate Somdeva's contribution and his relevance to the present times

12.3. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

According to Sir Richard Garnag Temple who wrote foreword to C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, The Ocean of Story, Somadeva, the author of the original book, was a Saiva Brahman of Kasmir. His real name was Somadeva being a mere suffix to the names of Brahmans, royalties and the like. His father's name was Ramadevabatta.

12.4.SOMDEVA'S TIMES

Some evidences state that Somdeva composed *Katasaritsagara*for Queen Suryamati (or Suryavati), wife of a famous king, Anantadeva of Kashmir around 1070 AD. This was a period of political turmoil and strife. There was no peace or stability. Sir Richard Garnag Temple remarks, " Somadeva was composing his distichs for the delectation of Suryavati, the Queen of King Ananta of Kasmir, at a time when the political situation was one of

discontent, intrigue, bloodshed and despair," (*The Ocean of Story* C. H. Tawney's Translation of *Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara)*

Anantdeva and his son Kalasa had been struggling for the throne. They had been fighting with each other and in one of the battles, Anantdeva was killed by his father probably in 1801, and his mother is supposed to have committed sati on the pyre of her husband.

The story of Kathasaritsagara begins with a mythological narrative of God Siva and his companion Parvati. Parvati asks Siva to narrate a story that she had never heard before.To amuse Parvati, Siva tells her stories of vidyadharas. As Siva narrates the stories of seven vidyadharas princes, they are overheard by one of his attendants who tells them to his wife. These stories are told again by the attendant's wife to Parvati who feels betrayed as she thinks that these tales are not new. The erring attendant, Malyavan, is cursed to be reborn on earth as Gunadhya, where he will remain until he has spread the tale that he overheard far and wide. This is how these stories are repeated on earth by Gunadhya who is actually a divine being.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. Comment briefly about the political atmosphere of Somdeva's times.
2. Discuss how does the story of *Kathasaritsagara* begin?

12.5. LEGENDS ABOUT *KATHASARITSAGARA*

Gunadhya appears on earth and writes the Brahatkatha ("Great or Long Story"), using *Paisacha* dialect. Gunadhya presents his great work before King Satavahana who finds it extremely unpleasant and crude. Sir Richard Garnag Temple writes in the foreword to *The Ocean of Story*, C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara,* " when he (king) heard that Paisacha language and saw that they had the appearance of Pisachas . . . said with a sneer: '… the Paisacha language is barbarous . . .Away with this Paisacha tale.' " .So Gunadhya burns the manuscripts of six of the seven tales. Hence, King Satavahana obtains only one book that contains the narratives of the adventures of the vidyadhara prince, Naravahanadatta, son of the legendary king Udayana. King Satavahana wants to preserve this rare book and adds the Kathapitha to it, which tells how Malyavan was cursed and compelled to spend his life on earth. So, the Kathapitha and the adventures of the vidyadhara prince, Naravahanadatta, together form the *Kathasaritsagara*. As Somdeva was from the Brahmin clan, the *Kathasaritsagara* is set in a Hindu context. Somdeva preferred to preserve his collection of stories in Sanskrit, as it has always been the language of the elite. We have the Vedas, Purans and great Epics in Sanskrit. F.W.Thomas suggests that Paisachi had many variations, the earliest of which were related to the better-known Prakrit Sauraseni. He holds that Paisachi was characterised mainly by peculiarities of pronunciation and that it was a dialect of travellers, traders and courtiers, people who came from different language regions and had, perforce, to communicate with each other. Thomas also thinks that since Gunadhya's text was in this relatively old and unpracticed dialect which was deemed vulgar, and since it did not contain stories of the gods or of human heroes, it was not preserved like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

It is assumed that *Brahatkatha* was written by a mythical figure Gunadhya and on the basis of this, Somdeva wrote *Kathasaritsagara*. *Brahatkathamanjari* was compiled by Ksemendra about thirty years before Somdeva's *Kathasaritsagara* came into existence. There was another Nepali text, Budhasvamin's*Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* that seemed to have been produced even earlier than Somdeva's and Ksemendra's works. Sir Richard G Temple remarks,

> Somdeva must have composed his verses about A.D. 1070, or about two hundred and fifty years after Vasugupta introduced into Kasmir the Saiva form of the Hindu religion peculiar to Kasmir, which was subsequently spread widely by his pupil Kallata Bhatta. Later on, but still one hundred years before Somadeva, it was further spread by Bhaskara, and then in Somadeva's own time made popular by Abhinava Gupta, the great Saiva writer, and his pupils Kshemaraja and Yogaraja. The last three, who must have been Somadeva's contemporaries, were much influenced by the philosophic teaching of another Soma Somananda, to give him his full name who with his pupil Utpalacharya created the Advaita (Monistic) Saiva Philosophy, known as the Trika, about two hundred years before Somadeva. Other important Kasmiri philosophic writers before Somadeva's date were Utpala Vaishnava and Rama-kantha.
>
> (*The Ocean of Story* C. H. Tawney's Translation of *Somadeva's Kathasaritsagara*)

Despite all the arguments, Somdeva's Kathasaritsagara is considered as the most popularly known version of the Brahatkatha.

Self Assessment Questions II

1. Discuss the legend how *Kathasaritsagara* came into being from Brahatkatha.
2. What shortcomings of Brahatkatha were improved upon by the writing of *Kathasaritsagara?*

12.6. FORM AND STRUCTURE OF *KATHASARITSAGAR*

The *Kathasaritsagara* tells the tales of 'kings and beggars', 'maidens and attendants', 'ardent lovers and liars', 'devils and saints', 'magic spells and natural charms ' etc. The stories are interesting, fascinating and their appeal is universal. The stories contain diverse characters and elements like natural world and mystical forces, witches and devils, animal kingdom and human existence, great emperors and common men, kings and heroes, Gods and Goddesses etc. Each story has some fantastic elements. Though the style and technique is not so simple, these stories do not follow very strict grammatical structures of a language. There are 'stories within stories' that makes the readers difficult to comprehend the situation. The readers often lose the track of the main story and their minds dwell somewhere else. But, there are instances which provide the readers an opportunity to look into the past events and comprehend the present and future as well. The story of Narvahanadatta, the prince of vidhyadharas, the sky dwellers with magical powers , contains the main narrative and is used as an outer frame to introduce the stories in the text. On close reading, one can decipher the kind of narrative techniques used in these stories. They have everything to attract the attention of both, children and

grownups. Such stories have been preserved for future generations. Arshia Sattar remarks about this stylistic feature in her book Somdeva: Tales from the *Kathasaritsagara*: " The *Kathasaritsagara* has a relatively simple framing structure compared to the complexity and sophistication of the framing devices used in the Indian Epics. There are several distinct and complete frames for the story of the adventures of Naravahanadatta which is itself a frame for the multiple stories within it. (XXXII)

In the very beginning of Kathasaritsagara, Somdeva himself gives a brief introduction of the structure and the content of his work:

> I am collecting the essence of Brahatkatha. It's first lambak (book) is Kathapitha. The second one is Kathamukha. The title of the third lambak is Lavanaka. The fourth lambak describes the birth of Nirvahanadatta. Then the name of fifth lambak is Chaturadarika. The sixth lambak is Madan-manchuka and the name of the seventh is Ratnaprabha. The name of the next lambak is Suryaprabha. The ninth lambak is Alankaravati. The tenth lambak is Shaktiyashasa, and eleventh is Vela lambak. The twelfth is Shashankvati and the thirteenth is Madiravati lambak. Then, the fourteenth is named Panch and the fifteenth is Mahabhishek lambak. Then the sixteenth is Suratmanjari lambak and the seventeenth is Padmavati lambak and the eighteenth is Vishamsheel lambak.

(Translated from Vasudevsharan Agarwal's Introduction to the Hindi Translation of *Kathasaritsagara*, Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna).

Self-Assessment Questions III

1. Write a brief essay on the form and structure of *Kathasaritsagara.*
2. Name the character whose story provides the frame for the multiple stories in *Kathasaritsagara.*

12.7. SELECTED STORIESFROM *KATHASARITSAGARA*

As you know, *Kathasaritsagara* is said to be ocean of stories, it is famous not only for its antiquity but also for its exquisite style of narration. It is very difficult to present all the stories for your critical reading. A taste of the text is being presented to you in the form of a few stories which have been translated into English; the purpose is to give an opportunity to you to critically appreciate the content and form of these stories.

Kathasaritsagara begins with the Kathapitha when Pushpadanta and Malyavan are cursed. Then there is a series of tales closely associated with each other. In fact the story telling is in the form of conversation generally between two characters. Each time when someone meets another, tells a story, often this story transcends to other births and one story hinges on the other, making a chain of numberless stories. The suspense of the readers / listeners is maintained through the labyrinth of happenings.

The first story is taken from the book titled "Kathapitha". The title of the story is 'The Wise Minister'.

12.7.1.The Wise Minster

"Long ago, King Adityavarma had a wise minister named Sivavarma. It came to pass that one of the queens became pregnant and the king asked the harem guards, 'Two years have passed since I entered the harem. Tell me, how can this queen be pregnant?' The guards insisted that no other man had entered the harem except for the minister Sivavarma who came and went without restriction. When the king heard that, he thought, 'This man is a traitor but if I kill him publicly, I will be criticized.' Adityavarma sent Sivavarma to Bhogavarma, the king of Samanta, the neighbouring state, on some pretext. He sent a messenger after him with a letter to Bhogavarma asking him to have Sivavarma killed. A week after the minister's departure, the pregnant queen was caught by guards while trying to escape with a man dressed as a woman. When this was reported to Adityavarma, he was filed with remorse. 'Why did I have a minister like Sivavarma killed without reason?' he wailed.

"In the meantime, Sivavarma reached the court of Bhogavarma and the messenger with the letter came soon after. As fate would have it, Bhogavarma told Sivavarma in secret about the order to kill him. That excellent minister said to the king, "You must put me to death otherwise I will kill myself." Bhogavarma was amazed and said, 'What is all this? I will curse you unless you explain it all to me!' and Sivavarma replied, 'The land in which I am killed will not receive rain for twelve years.' Bhogavarma began to worry. That wicked Adityavarma desired the ruin of my kingdom. He could have had this minister killed by secret assassins. We must not kill this minister and must also prevent him from killing himself.' Bhogavarma then appointed guards for Sivavarma and immediately sent him out of the country. Sivavarma returned home alive because of his cunning and his innocence was proved without any effort from him, for goodness is always rewarded.

(From Arshia Sattar's Somdeva Tales from the *Kathasaritsagara*, P 25)

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12.7.2. Kalingadatta has a Daughter

The next story is taken from the book titled "Madanamancuka". The title of the story is 'Kalingadatta Has a Daughter'. Kalingadatta had a wife named Taradatta. She was equal in birth to the monarch and because she was virtuous and sensible, she was a fitting ornament to the king, like language is to a poet who enjoys its many possibilities. She shone with virtue and auspiciousness and was to the king as moonlight is to the moon which contains the nectar of immortality. The king lived happily with his queen as Indra lives in heaven with Saci.

After a while, Taradatta grew heavy with her pregnancy. As the time for her delivery drew nearer, she appeared as pale as the eastern sky in which the new moon is about to rise. She soon gave birth to an incomparable daughter who was so lovely that she was the epitome of the Creator's ability to produce beauty. Even the lamps that affectionately blazed all night to protect the child from the evil eye were dimmed by her beauty. But the lamps faded as if in sorrow that the beautiful child was not a boy.When Kalingadatta saw his beautiful daughter, he was filled with disappointment. He understood that she was divine in some way, but he continued to despair for he had wanted a son. A son is joy incarnate while a daughter is nothing but grief. To distract himself, the king left the

palace and went into a temple that was filled with images of the many Buddhas. In a corner of the temple, he overheard a religious discourse being given by a mendicant who sat among a group of people.

The donation of wealth is the greatest ascetic practice in the world. Giving wealth is equal to giving life, because life depends on money. The Buddha was filled with compassion and he gave up his life for another as if it were a trivial straw. How much less is the value of wealth! It was through determined austerities that the Buddha gave up desire, acquired divine insight and attained the status of an Enlightened Being. A wise man should renounce selfish desires and do that which benefits others.

(From Arshia Sattar's Somdeva Tales from the *Kathasaritsagara*, P 69)

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12.7.3. The Seven Princesses

The next story is taken from the book titled " Madanamancuka". The title of the second story is 'The Seven Princesses'.

'Thus long ago, a certain king named Krta had seven beautiful daughters born one after another. While they were still very young, they grew disinterested in life and left their father's house and went to the cremation grounds. When they were asked why they had done that, they said to their retainers, "This world is meaningless .In it , the body, union with lovers and other joys are like a dream. The only thing that gives meaning to the world is working for the benefit of others. We have decided to use our bodies for the good of other beings and will fling our living bodies to those creatures that live on flesh. What use are these lovely bodies to us?

(From Arshia Sattar's Somdeva Tales from the *Kathasaritsagara*, P 70)

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12.7.4. The Three Suitors

The next story is taken from the book titled "Sasankavati". The title of the story is 'TheThree Suitors'.

'In Ujjayani there lived a virtuous Brahmin named Harisvami. He was the beloved minister of King Punyasena. Harisvami's wife was equal to him in birth and by her; he had a virtuous son named Devasvami. A daughter of matchless beauty, Somaprabha, rightly named, was also born to him. When the time came for Somaprabha to be married, she had grown proud of her beauty and sent a message to her father and brother through her mother. "If you value my life, you will give me away to a man who has courage or prescience or magic powers and to no one else." When Harisvami heard this he began to worry about finding her a husband who would fit into one of these categories. While he was immersed in worry, he was sent by King Punyasena as an emissary to the king of the Deccan to forge an alliance.

'When Harisvami had finished his work in the Deccan, he was approached by a Brahmin who had heard about his daughter's beauty and wanted to marry her. "My daughter will not marry a man who does not have courage or prescience or magic power. Tell me, sir, which one of these do you have?" The Brahmin replied "I have magic powers." "Show me!" said Harisvami. At once, the man created a chariot that could fly through the air. He

placed Harsvami in the magic chariot and took him around heaven and the three worlds in a moment and brought him back again, delighted, to the very place where he had been sent to do business. Harisvami promised his daughter to the man with the magic powers and fixed the wedding for seven days hence.

'But meanwhile in Ujjayini, another Brahmin had asked Somaprabha's brother, Devasvami, for her hand in marriage. Devasvami said that Somaprabha wanted a man with courage or prescience or magic powers as a husband and the man declared that he had great courage. He displayed his skills with missiles and combat weapons and Devasvami promised him his sister in marriage. With the advice of astrologers, he set the marriage date seven days hence. At the same time, Harisvami's wife was approached by a third Brahmin intent on marrying her daughter. "My daughter will only marry a man who has courage or prescience or magic powers," said the mother and the man told her that he was prescient. After she had questioned him about the past and the future, she promised her daughter to him on that same day, seven days hence.

'The next day, Harisvami came home and told his wife and son all that had happened and that he had fixed the date of his daughter's wedding. Both of them in turn told him what they had arranged and Harisvami grew agitated as three bridegrooms had been invited on the same day. On the appointed day, the three bridegrooms arrived at Harisvami's house. At that very moment, a strange thing happened. The bride, Somaprabha, disappeared and no one knew where she had gone. Harisvami was completely bewildered and asked the prescient man, "Tell me, where is my daughter now?" The man replied, "She has been abducted by the raksasa Dhumrasikha and he has taken her to his home in the forests of the Vindhyas." Harisvami was very frightened and cried, "This is terrible! How will we get her back? How will she be married?" The man with the magic powers said, "Have courage! I can take all of you to the place where this man says Somaprabha is." In a moment, he produced a magic chariot equipped with all kinds of weapons and when all the men had climbed into it, the chariot rose into the air. In a moment, they had reached the forests of the Vindhyas where the prescient man had told them the raksasa lived.

The raksasa was very angry when he saw the men in the chariot and he attacked the courageous man. A wondrous fight took place between the man and the *raksasa*, like the fight between Rama and Ravana who has also fought over a woman. In a moment, the courageous man had cut off the raksasa's head with his crescent arrow. Once the raksasa was dead, the men found Somaprabha in his house and they climbed into the chariot with her, when they returned to Harisvami's house, the marriage ceremony could not be completed even though the auspicious moment had arrived, because a huge dispute arose between the three bridegrooms. The prescient man said, "If I had not told you where the girl was, how would you have found her? She should be given to me!" The man with the magic powers said, "But I made the chariot that flies through the air. How could you have gone through the skies and returned in a moment like the gods? How could you have fought the raksasa who had his own chariot, without this chariot? Therefore, I deserve to marry this girl!" The courageous man said, "But I was the one who killed the raksasa in battle!" As they argued Harisvami remained silent and confused.

'King tell me, which one should she be given to? If you know the answer and don't tell me, your head will split!' said the vetala. The king broke his silence and replied, 'She should be given to the courageous man because he won her back by the strength of his arms. He killed the raksasa in battle at the risk of his life. The prescient man and the one

with magic powers only acted as instruments.' When the vetala heard Vikrama's answer, he left his shoulder and went as before, to his tree. King Vikrama went again to the Asoka tree to fetch the vetala. He placed him on his shoulder as before and began to walk in silence. As he walked along the path, the vetala said, 'King, you are wise and brave and I am fond of you.'

(From Arshia Sattar's Somdeva Tales from the *Kathasaritsagara*,P 214)

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12.7.5. The Story of King Simhabala and his Fickle Wife

Formerly there dwelt in the Deccan a king, of the name of Simhabala. And his wife, named Kalyanavati, the daughter of a prince of Malava, was dear to him above all the women of his harem. And the king ruled the realm with her as consort, but once on a time he was expelled from his kingdom by his powerful relations, who banded together against him. And then the king, accompanied by the queen, with his weapons and but few attendants, set out for the house of his father-in-law in Malava.

And as he was going along through a forest, which lay in his road, a lion charged him, and the hero easily cut it in two with a stroke of his sword. And when a wild elephant came at him trumpeting, he circled round it and cut off with his sword its trunk and feet, and stripped it of its jewel, and killed it. And alone he dispersed the hosts of bandits like lotuses, and trampled them, as the elephant, lord of the forest, tramples the beds of white water-lilies. Thus he accomplished the journey, and his wonderful courage was seen, and so he reached Malava, and then this sea of valour said to his wife: "You must not tell in your father's house this that happened to me on the journey, it will bring shame to you, my queen; for what is there laudable in courage displayed by a man of the military caste?" After he had given her this injunction, he entered his father-in-law's house with her, and when eagerly questioned by him, told his story. His father-in-law honoured him, and gave him elephants and horses, and then he returned to a very powerful king named Gajanika. But being intent on conquering his enemies, he left his wife Kalyanavati there in her father's house.

Some days after he had gone, his wife, while standing at the window, saw a certain man. The moment she saw him, he captivated her heart by his good looks; and being drawn on by love, she immediately thought: "I know no one is more handsome or more brave than my husband, but alas! my mind is attracted towards this man. So let what must be, be. I will have an interview with him."

So she determined in her own mind, and told her desire to a female attendant, who was her confidante. And she made her bring him at night, and introduce him into the women's apartments by the window, pulling him up with a rope. When the man was introduced, he had not courage to sit boldly on the sofa on which she was, but sat apart on a chair. The queen, when she saw that, was despondent, thinking he was a mean man, and at that very moment a snake, which was roaming about, came down from the roof. When the man saw the snake, he sprang up quickly in fear, and taking his bow, he killed the snake with an arrow. And when it fell dead, he threw it out of the window, and in his delight at having escaped that danger, the coward danced for joy. When Kalyanavati saw him dancing, she was cast down, and thought to herself over and over again: "Alas! Alas!

What have I to do with this mean-spirited coward?" And her friend, who was a discerning person, saw that she was disgusted, and so she went out, and quickly returned with assumed trepidation and said: "Queen, your father has come, so let this young man quickly return to his own house by the way by which he came." When she said this, he went out of the window by means of the rope, and being over-powered by fear, he fell, but, as luck would have it, he was not killed.

When he had gone, Kalyanavati said to her confidante: "My friend, you have acted rightly in turning out this low fellow. You penetrated my feelings, for my heart is vexed. My husband, after slaying tigers and lions, conceals it through modesty, and this cowardly man, after killing a snake, dances for joy. So why should I desert such a husband and fall in love with a common fellow? Curse on my unstable mind, or rather curse on women, who are like flies that leave camphor and haste to impurity!"

The queen spent the night in these self-reproaches, and afterwards remained waiting in her father's house for the return of her husband. In the meanwhile Simhabala, having been supplied with another army by King Gajanika, slew those five wicked relations. Then he recovered his kingdom, and at the same time brought back his wife from her father's house, and after loading his father-in-law with abundance of wealth, he ruled the earth for a long time without opposition.

(From: Somadeva Bhatta, *The Ocean of Story*. Vol. V. Translated by C. H. Tawney. Edited by N. M. Penzer. London: Privately printed, 1926, 23-25.)
(www.sdstate.edu/projectsouthasia/loader.cfm?csModule=security/).

12.8. HOW TO ANALYSE THE STORIES

Even a cursory reading of *Kathasaritsagara* gives you the impression that it is one of the finest collections of stories ever written in human history. It was a glorious moment in the history of Sanskrit literature when it came into being. It surprises us by its structure and style. Its supreme quality is the circumlocutory narration. The reader has to read slowly and keep abreast with the incidents happening in each story and not to allow his or her mind waver from the main narrative. The tale of Narvahanadatta, the prince of the Vidhyadharas comprises the main narrative and provides an organic structure to the whole. While there are stories which can be studied in isolation, their importance in the whole narrative is not to be overlooked and their contextual relevance has to be adjudged in keeping the story moving and sustaining the interest and curiosity of the audience/readers.

12.9. SUMMING UP

Undoubtedly, *Kathasaritsagara's* exquisiteness equals with any collection of stories ever done anywhere in anytime in the world. Written in Sanskrit,it is the fountainhead of all popular classic story collections in India, including Panchtantra and Hitopadesha. It is most remarkable in the sense, like the texts of the post modernism, it is open ended and offers no moral conclusions, no principles to be followed blindly. It is very much like a treatise that celebrates earthly life and passes on as most interesting and highly

engrossing book of fiction. Most of the writers of short fiction in India and abroad are indebted to its style of form and narration. It will never lose its popularity because of its timeless appeal to all the lovers of storytelling.

12.10. ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT-QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to the Section 12.4.
2. Refer to the Section 12.4.

II

1. Refer to the Section 12.5.
2. Refer to the Section 12.5.

III

Refer to the Section 12.6
Refer to the Section 12.6.

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12.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Somdeva's life and times.
2. Discuss the form and style of *Kathasaritsagara* on the basis of your readings.

UNIT 13 RAJA RAO *KANTHAPURA*-1

13.1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding Raja Rao is undoubtedly a complex experience. Rather than following a traditional pattern of linear structure and compact plot Kanthapura follows the oral tradition of Indian Sthalapurana. The story is narrated in flash back by Achakka, a wise woman of the village. Kanthapura, the name of the village is awakened by the call of freedom of Mahatma Gandhi.Moorthy, a young man is the protagonist.He spreads the message of Gandhi to the village folks. There are people who are loyal to the British while others vehemently oppose. The village is stratified on the caste lines .The concept of Freedom in the novel is not only political but social and economical. According to K R Srinivasa Iyengar the theme of Kanthapura may be summed up as 'Gandhi and our Village' but the style of narration makes the book more a Gandhi Purana than a piece of mere fiction. There are close religious parallels-the Red men or the british are 'Asuras' while the 'Satyagrahis' are 'Devas' and Gandhi is the invisible God while Moorthy is the visible 'avatar'.

13.2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are as follows:

- To acquaint the readers with a brief biography of Raja Rao
- To make the readers understand the Plot of Kanthapura
- To explain the narrative technique of Kanthapura to the readers
- To help the students become familiar with the setting of the novel

13.3. RAJA RAO: A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

Raja Rao was born on November 8, 1908 in Hassan, in the state of Mysore (now Karnataka) in South India, into a well-known Brahmin (Hoysala Karnataka) family. He was the eldest of nine siblings (two brothers and seven sisters). His native language was Kannada, but his post-graduate education was in France, and all his publications in book form have been in English. His father taught Kannada at Nizam College in what was then Hyderabad State. The death of his mother, when he was four, left a lasting impression on the novelist - the absence of a mother and orphanhood are recurring themes in his work. Another influence from early life was his grandfather, with whom he stayed in Hassan and Harihalli.

Rao was educated at Muslim schools, the Madarsa-e-Aliya in Hyderabad and the Aligarh Muslim University, where he became friends with Ahmed Ali. He began learning French at the University. After matriculation in 1927, Rao returned to Hyderabad and studied for his degree at Nizam's College. After graduating from the University of Madras, having majored in English and history, he won the Asiatic Scholarship of the Government of Hyderabad in 1929, for study abroad.

Rao moved to the University of Montpellier in France. He studied French language and literature, and later at the Sorbonne in Paris, he explored the Indian influence on Irish literature. He married Camille Mouly, who taught French at Montpellier, in 1931. The marriage lasted until 1939. Later he depicted the breakdown of their marriage in *The*

Serpent and the Rope. Rao published his first stories in French and English. During 1931-32 he contributed four articles written in Kannada for Jaya Karnataka, an influential journal.

Returning to India in 1939, he edited with Iqbal Singh, Changing India, an anthology of modern Indian thought from Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru. He participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In 1943-1944 he coedited with Ahmed Ali a journal from Bombay called *Tomorrow*. He was the prime mover in the formation of a cultural organization, Sri Vidya Samiti, devoted to reviving the values of ancient Indian civilization; this organization failed shortly after inception. In Bombay, he was also associated with Chetana, a cultural society for the propagation of Indian thought and values.

Rao's involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel *Kanthapura* (1938) was an account of the impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-violent resistance against the British. The story is seen from the perspective of a small Mysore village in South India. Rao borrows the style and structure from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic. Rao returned to the theme of Gandhism in the short story collection *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947). In 1998 he published Gandhi's biography *Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*. In 1988 he received the prestigious International Neustadt Prize for Literature. *The Serpent and the Rope* was written after a long silence during which Rao returned to India. The work dramatized the relationships between Indian and Western culture. The serpent in the title refers to illusion and the rope to reality.*Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) was a metaphysical comedy that answered philosophical questions posed in the earlier novels.

Later in life, Rao relocated to the United States and was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin from 1966 to 1983, when he retired as Emeritus Professor. Courses he taught included Marxism to Gandhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Indian philosophy: The Upanishads, Indian philosophy: The Metaphysical Basis of the Male and Female Principle. Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz, a friend of Rao's, published his only poem in the English language, "To Raja Rao", after a conversation with him.

In 1965, he married Katherine Jones, an American stage actress. They have one son, Christopher Rama. In 1986, after his divorce from Katherine, Rao married his third wife, Susan, whom he met when she was a student at the University of Texas in the 1970s.Rao died on July 8, 2006 at Austin, Texas, at the age of 97.

13.4. PLOT

Kanthapura is a novel in the Indian traditional way and it is not to be judged by western standards. The plot of the novel is made of a main plot and a sub-plot. The main plot deals with the impact of Gandhian movement on a remote south Indian village, Kanthapura. It is a village which is a microcosm of the macrocosm, for what happens in the remote village was happening all over India in those stirring decades.

The sub-plot deals with the happening on the Skeffington Coffee Estate in the neighborhood. It turns a light on the exploitation and brutality to which the Indians were subjected by the foreign rulers. The two plots are fused into a single whole. Both expose

the brutality of the Englishmen and the various ways in which they exploited the Indians. Later in the novel, the coolies of the coffee plantation join the Satyagrahis from Kanthapura in their Satyagraha outside the Toddy booth.

The plot has a beginning, middle and an end. It begins with an account of the small south Indian village, Kanthapura, its locale, its crops, its poverty and the ignorant and superstitious nature of the villagers. The village is small but it is divided into a number of quarters–the Brahmin quarter, the Potters quarters, the Sudra quarter and the Pariah quarter. The society is caste-ridden and has its own local legends. Kanchamma is the village goddess. The characters in the novel play significant roles in action of the novel. The petty rivalries and jealousies of the villagers are shown powerfully. There is development of action with the arrival of Moorthy from the city. The action is centered round Moorthy. The action develops through conflict.

The plot of the novel is without any twist or trick. It is grounded on a plain level. There is hardly any suspense in it. The things inside the plot happen no doubt with a design. The singleness of locale makes the task of the novelist easier. The unity of action is well linked. There is the rounded wholeness about it. It is one single mission that ignites the action and once generated it goes on unhampered. The Gandhian Movement is the spinal cord of the plot. The novel has the sketchy plot without any kind of frills. The hero once comes on the scene does not leave it till he is arrested by police. He has to be there. He must be there because of the limited scope of the novel. He causes action which catches others in its conflagration. The action depends on the nature of the programme.

The entire plot is vey simple. It has least complexity. It is by virtue of the characters and their individuality that the novel prospers. To be frank, there is hardly the plot of significance. Here are some dividing lines demarcating the incidents and things happen in the middle of the novel. The plot does not disconnect it only fixes the dividing poles in it. The plot is threadbare and thin. Plot loses its importance and what counts is the picture of roused national consciousness presented throught the struggle in the village.

13.5. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is a triumph of narrative art. It is perfectly suited to the ends the novelist wanted to achieve. He admits in the beginning in his preface that the telling has not been easy. This is so because he had to capture in English the tempo of Indian life. The narration of the novel is straightforward and chronological. There is no backward and forward movement as in a stream of consciousness novel.

The tale of the novel is not narrated by the novelist himself but by a persona called Achakka. Achakka is an old grandmother, most ancient of storytellers. She is involved personally in the events which form the substance of the novel. She narrated those years later for the benefit of a new comer. Thus the substance of the novel is made of the stream of her memories. She is a balanced woman who has a sound common sense, she has a gift of shrewd and intelligent observation. Her personality colours the whole non-co-operation movement, the brave resistance of the people and their consequent suffering. All is recollected and narrated by a naivete which is not the novelist's but the narrator's.

Making the old woman the narrator enables the novelist to mingle fact and myth in an effective manner. For the woman Jawaharlal is a Bharata to the Mahatma, the Mahatma who will slay Ravana so that Sita may be freed. For her Gandhi attains status of God and Moorphy is regarded as his avatar.

The second advantage derived by the choice of the narrator is that the language used by her which is of an elemental quality. Her reaction to things is direct and vivid. In the novel the constant shuttling back and forth in time is easily justified as an old woman's leisurely manner of story telling. The narrator provides a convenient point of view, though she is never sharply individualized. We know nothing about her beyond the fact that she is a widow and she has only son called Seenu. Seenu has given acres of wet land (twelve acres of wet land). This conveys the simplicity of the way of life where one's property is measured not in terms of money but in terms of cattle and land. She is just one of the many women of the village who responded the call of Mahatma. She has unflinching faith in Kanchamma, she has respect for Rangemma and she has unquestioned affection for Moorthy and trust in him.

Achakka is both the narrator and the commentator. Her manner of telling the tale is characteristically Indian. It is feminine. It has spontaneity, swiftness, raciness and native vigour. Her telling a story has a puranic dignity. It is historical. The narrative is hardly very straightforward. There are involutions and digressions. There are meaningfull backward glances. There are rheumatic chains of proper names there are hypnotic repetitions, and refrains. There are also sheer poetic iridescences. Description of Kanthapura, its people and life makes us feel it as a tour de force, Achakka narrates and comments–her comments are shrewd and balanced which serve to place both character and incident in a correct perspective. Her comments are a constant check on over-idealization. They import realism and authenticity to the narrative i.e."Rangemma did not understand all this, neither, to tell you the truth, did any of us".

The story is narrated simultaneously on two levels. It acquires a dramatic character. Narration and description go hand in hand with a chorus like evaluation of character and action. Achakka's evolutions are those of the novelist's himself. They increase the readers understanding of events and characters. They serve as a unifying force in the novel. The narration is dramatic. It varies according to the requirements of the action and situations. The language, the accent, the tone, the tempo constantly keeps changing. Achakka is garrulous as a grandmother usual is. Words flow out of her mouth in quick succession. The sense of the largeness of their numbers is conveyed though a multiplicity of images and epithets.

There is a mingling of fact and fancy and sheer poetry comes out of the narrator's lips in the following rhythmic account of the coming of Kartik, the month of the festival of lights. There is use of suspense in the narration, Moorthy is relapsed from jail and the villagers wait eagerly for his arrival. Their suspense and their anxiety are adequately conveyed through the use of a repetitive language replete with a sense of urgency.

The narrative art of the novelist is the novel's crowning charm specially Achakka's gossipy digressions and circumlocutions which make it very interesting. It is the epic of Indian Freedom Struggle.

13.6. SETTING OF THE NOVEL

The title of a novel should be apt and suggestive. Kanthapura is no exception to it. It is about a south Indian village named Kanthapura. Kanthapura is a village with all its living topography and the people are divided on the caste basis. The novel has a romantic setting with the classical ruggedness of the palaces surrounding it. It is a village in Mysore in the Province of Kera. It is situated in the valley of Himarathy. There is the cool Arabian, sea, up the malabar cost. It is the agrarian village. The forests about the place add to the romantic tone of the village-forest of teak and jack, of sandal and of sal. The passes and gorges are there. The romantic topography has the tragic centre in the peoples of various shades. The typical characters of the village express themselves on the scene. The streets in the village of the southern province have typical names based on the situation like the Main Street and on the vocation like the potter's lane. The river Himarathy is of significance in the sense that it has been invested with the sacred grandeur by the locals of the village.

The topography of the village has the notable establishment in the name of Skeffington Coffee Estate which runs around to any distance. It rises beyond the Bebbur Mound over the Bear's Hill. It is an accidental spot in the oriental setting of the novel. It is because of the presence of the European owner who is replaced by the lecherous nephew. The Estate swings round the Elephant Valley and rising to the Snow Mountains and the Beda Ghats. It follows on from the Balepur Tollgate Corner to the Kenchamma Hill, where it turns again and skirts Bhatta's Devil's fields and rises again and is lost amidst the jungle grown on the Horse head Hill. Roughly one may say that it is at least ten thousand acres wide.

After giving the topography the novelist comes to the village itself. It has a complex structure. It has four and twenty houses in the Brahmin quarter. It has a Pariah quarter, a Potters quarter, a weaver’s quarter and a Sudra quarter. Hence the outlook on life too has been divided into two based on the caste division. Men and women of the Brahmin quarter maltreat and look down upon the Sudras and the persons of the Pariah quarters. The Pariahs are not allowed to worship in the temple of the Brahmins.

The village and yokels of the village represent the mass mentality of the villagers eveywhere. Range Gowda, Lingayya, Chandrayya, Ramayya and others are symbolic and characters who are simple and who have raw emotions. They are illiterate and hard working.

The village Kanthapura is shown as a model village which represents rural India in the political forment. The social reforms occurs with are its pros and cons. The dynamism of Gandhi inculcates the spirit of righteous fight against the wrong. Their leader Moorthy is a sort of miniature Gandhi. He influences their aspirations for freedom of self and the country. Even he frees them from the bondage of Brahmanical tyranny. The element of social reform in the novel is strong and slow but steady.

Kanthapura is a model village which represents the social, domestic, agricultural and political attitudes. It is a socio-political and historical document during the Freedom Struggle of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, *Kanthapura*is not a novel dealing with the life and doings of Moorthy. It is a story of the masses of the village, of their suffering, of their exile, of their momentary defeat and the final victory. It ends with an account of their life

in Kashipura. It gives us a sense of abiding fulfillment which they attain. Hence if there is any hero in the novel, it is Kanthapura itself and its people.

13.7. SUMMARY

In this unit you read about the life of Raja Rao. You glimpsed his contribution as a freedom fighter and a novelist. Besides this Rao's first novel *Kanthapura,* a novel that deals with the Indian Independence Movementwas also examined. The plot, narrative techniques and setting of the novel were also discussed at length.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the plot of *Kanthapura.*
2. Write a note on Raja Rao's narrative technique as used in *Kanthapura*.
3. Discuss *Kanthapura* as a social novel.

13.8. REFERENCES

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13.9. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Draw a biographical sketch of Raja Rao in your own words.
2. Discuss the setting of the novel *Kanthapura.*

UNIT 14 RAJA RAO *KANTHAPURA*- II

14.1. INTRODUCTION

The myth of Gandhi is the predominant theme in *Kanthapura*.His embodiment is Moorthy who fights orthodoxy at the social level and the British at the political level.A special thing to note is that in *Kanthapura* woman is not a marginalised entity.When Moorthy is put in prison Ratna leads the people of the village against the British.And there are other female characters in the book who are individuals-Achakka and Rangamma.Religion in the form of 'Harikathas' is instrumental to spread the message of freedom and patriotism among the people of *Kanthapura.*

The numerous characters in the novel points out to a sense of community that unifies the plot and gives substance to the social and political conflicts in the story. The writer is not interested in individual fate but the destiny of the group. Rao's style is almost impressionistic with the focus more on the background masses and certain salient features in the foreground.Dialogue is kept to a minimum. The female narrator Achakka is the storyteller as well as an individual in her own right. Moorthy and Ratna are champions of change in the village. Moorthy influenced by the voice of Gandhi ignites the spark of socio-political and economic change in *Kanthapura*.She is supported by Ratna, an emancipated woman.

14.2. OBJECTIVES

Through a reading of this unit you will be able to:

- Appreciate the themes of the novel *Kanthapura*
- Understand and appreciate the characters of the novel

14.3. MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVEL

Kanthapura is Indian both in theme and treatment. To put it simply the novel is about Gandhi and our village. Kanthapura is a typical Indian village. The novelist describes it minutely with great realism. The village, its location, its crops, proverty, illiteracy and superstition are described superbly. The novelist highlights the Gandhian movement, the rivalries, jealousies among the villagers and the rigidities of the caste system. There is a realistic presentation of the villagers. Their names are descriptive in a typically rural way. They live in close contact with nature and are a part of it. They treat nature as a living being. The hills, rivers, fields and animals have their distinct existence and personality. They are enchanted by nature.

Indian sensibility is essentially religious. Politics is spiritualized. The Indian political leaders and social reformers have been great religious figures. Social and political ends are achieved through the guise of religion, for example Gandhi and his Non-Co-operation, and Non-Violent Movement. Kenchamma is a village goddess who is benign and bounteous. The outlook of the villagers is very religious. Gandhian faith is initiated into Moorthy. He becomes a dynamic force in the village. He becomes a Gandhiman slowly and steadily. He has mysterious power to move the villagers. The story of the novel blends with the religious, social and political issues. Moorthy is considered as the Small Mountain. It must be remembered that Big Mountain is Shiva, their protector. We

find the religious spirit and the Gandhian ideal merge together. The religious elements, social and political issues are becoming one entity. It is natural that prayers and national songs are sung side by side and to attain independence is the objective. Means like harikathas, bhajans, fasts, prayers and non-violent resistance are religious which are adopted by the villagers.

Women play a very important role in the Freedom Struggle. The novelist calls them 'Shakti'. Indian woman is coy, delicate and submissive. She is firm as a rock and great in suffering. Shakti rises in women. Each of them is enthused at the proper time. They propose for the titanic encounter. They are inspired by other's examples. In the end of the novels, Ratna takes over from Moorthy and leads the Satyagrahis. Shakti-worship is an essentially Indian theme which runs through the village. The powerful 'Shakti' rises in very woman at certain period and of points of life. Shakti's indomitable spirit is found in the women in their *satyagraha* against the British government. Through the women of the village different forms of Shakti are manifested. When police use sticks and boots, the women react strongly. Woman is the eternal devotee of Shiva. Jayaramachar retells epic stories and Ramakrishnayya reads passages from the scriptures. The most touching example of woman's edifying faith is the narrator's musing on the relics of Kanthapura. She dreams as the modern Ramayana ends happily where Rama (Gandhi) returns from his exile (visit to England) with Sita (India who had been abducted by Ravana (the British) as Gandhi returns to Ayodhya (Delhi). Bharata (Nehru) who reigns as regent welcomes Rama (Gandhi) and there are celestial flowers showered upon his aerial chariot.

The theme is Indian and the treatment of the theme is also typically Indian. The novelist adopts the method of narration which is typically Indian. The Indian grandmother is the most ancient and typical storyteller. Achakka is such a grandmother who is the narrator of the story of the novel. She is more articulate than her predecessors. Her garrulity is ear-splitting. Her style of narration is charming and superb. A person who is familiar with vernacular and habit of listening speech will be delighted with Achakka's narrative style and its wonderful gossips and digressions. It is an ancient way of narration which is a breathless story that illustrates the age old Indian tradition of story telling. Achakka uses long, meandering sentences. She uses blanks and digressions. The reader can almost hear Achakka talking. Episode follows episode. Each one is integral to the story. Sankar's, Rangamma's and Bhatta's detailed acounts are revealing and essential for the narrative. It is a long interminable tale whose essential Indianess is found in its long interminable sentences, long paragraphs and the absence of division into chapters.

Gandhi and our village is the major theme of the novel. The novelist presents the Gandhian Freedom Struggle in the village Kanthapura. The novel is a great rural novel, which depicts the impact of the Gandhian Freedom Struggle on the life of a remote and obscure Indian village. What happens in Kanthapura was happening all over India in many villages during 1919-1930. Gandhi transforms the entire nation in a single lifetime into an army of disciplined and non-violent freedom fighters. The political, the religious and the social strands are woven into the complex story inextricably. It is a story of regeneration of Kanthapura due to the Freedom Struggle. It is not merely a political novel but a novel which is concerned with socio-religious and economic transformation of the people at the time of Struggle for Political Freedom. Kanthapura is an obscure, out-dated and slumbering South Indian village which comes suddenly to life due to Gandhian

Movement in the twenties. The handling of theme gives us a picture of social conditions of the Indian villages.

No other book of this scope and size on this theme pictures so vividly, truthfully and touchingly as *Kanthapura* does. The story of the novel is of the resurgence of India under Gandhi's leadership. Gandhi influences the masses and everybody feels as if he/she is Gandhi who wants to free Indian from the clutches of the British rulers. It is Gandhi's greatness that he produces hundreds and thousands of little Gandhi throughout the country. Moorthy a young man becomes Gandhian and stirs the whole village, Kanthapura. He gives up his studies and a court arrest and desires to meet Gandhiji personally.

Moorthy organises the Gandhi work in the village. He forms the Congress committee in the village. He keeps the people constantly in touch with national events through newsapers and other publicity materials. He invites Harikatha man, mixes religion with politics. He equates Gandhi to Rama, Redman (British) to Ravan and calls Swaraj the three eyed. He preaches Swadeshi Movement, use of Khadi, spinning of Charkha and eradication of the untouchability in the village by mixing and dinning with the Pariahs. He goes form door to door and explains the economics of the charkha and Swadeshi. He inspires women to take to charakha spinning. He organises the women voluntary corps. He faces opposition courageously from ignorant and the conservative people. He highly charges the atmosphere and awakens the pepole from slavery, slumber and ignorance. The news of the Dandi March reaches the village Kanthapura, which creates enthusiasm among the villagers.

The novelist describes successfully the national upheaval under the impact of a single personality–Gandhi. There are ‘dharnas’, picketings and *satyagraha*. People including children and old men are injured and wounded in large numbers. Women like Ratna are beaten up and dishonoured but their spirit is not crushed. Shouts of 'Gandhi Ki Jai', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Inquilab Zindabad' resound in the air and boost the morale of the people. There is a mass arrest and people are sent to jail. When Moorthy is arrested, Ratna continues his work so the movement continues. There is the no tax campaign. People refuse to pay the revenue. Their lands are laid waste and they are forced to leave the village. The villagers of all castes and professions and the labourers of the Coffee Estate readily meet the onslaught of the police and government. Satyagrahis are maimed, broken and scattered. Some face trials and some leave their native place Kanthapura and settle down in another village like Kashipura. Rangemma, Ratna, Moorthy spend an allotted span in jail but the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the political truce relase the *satyagrahis*. Young men like Moorthy doubt the wisdom of truce and decide to follow Nehru.

The novel can be called a Gandhi-epic. It conveys Gandhi’s influence on the Indian masses. Gandhi's charismatic personality is felt even though Gandhi does not appear in the novel publically and privately. He remains in the background.

The novelist presents the Gandhian Movement impartially and objectively. There is no idealization, both the dark and bright sides of pictures are presented. The novel is a great work of art which presents the impact of the Gandhian movement on the masses of India realistically and artistically. It is a great classic of India's Freedom Struggle. It gives more essential truth about the Gandhian period than any official records or books of history. It

is a valuable social document which is interesting and significant. It is concerned with the total regeneration and resurgence of the Indian masses. It is not a mere political novel.

14.4. CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

Raja Rao creates living, concrete characters. The characterization in the novel has been done on the ordinary lines due to the theme which restricts its scope considerably. He tries to design his characters with liveliness. His characters lack the depth which is compensated by their outer warmth. They carry the vestiges of their environment and heredity. The characters in the novel are the sons of the soil and they have typical folk smell. Their personality is expressed through their typical conversation and limited aspirations. We only find their exterior. Their previous life is full of limited ideas, actions and reactions when the new ideas are introduced by the hero, Moorthy; he begins to transform them. They do not expand or develop. Their strange quirks of nature remain the same from the beginning to the end. The personality-making of the characters is just ordinary. It is of a single-dimension not multidimensional. In the novel we find mostly types and not the individuals of any kind. They lack the personality roots. The outer foliages are enough. The novel lacks the high voltage characters as their destiny is limited. They have nothing revealing, they are not portrayed with intensity. They don't vibrate. The novel has been designed primarily for action and not for the development of characters. The greater field in the novel gets occupied with action marching to its destined goal.

Among the characters of the novel there is no villain proper. Bhatta or Waterfall Venkatamma though they oppose the movement in the village and do not fall under the category of villain. The villain in them is in mild form and is almost negligible. They live and seldom act. The historic element misses in them. Through the passage of time they do not develop. There is hardly any magnetism in them. There is doubt that Moorthy has it but he has not actually magnetism. The simple characters move and live with the framework of their simple nature. Village simplicity prevents them from developing into the complex mould of life. There are types of characters. They are not individuals. Waterfall Venkamma, Range Gowda Swami etc. are all the types. Moorthy is also a type because he follows a typical pattern of a Gandhian. He is of a typical mould as a Gandhi. Bhatta is the typical usurer of the village is both a type and an individual. He is a type to the extent the village Mahajan-money lender. The characters in the novel are not elites or intellectuals. They are picked from the spare of life where there is no education, bhajans, and rituals are enough for them. There is no single academician among them. They are of the masses and driven by the propelling forces from without. Emotionalism is dominant motif in the novel. Moorthy emotionally appeals to the villagers only. That works with characters where emotions dominate. Emotion ignites the movement in the village. Its appeal is much more powerful than intellectualism.

The characters in action are badly dynamic. They remain stupidly static and they do not grow to a personality-size. They understand only the ritualistic value of religion. Diseases like malaria, small pox etc. are attributed to the displeasure of the divine deities. The sorrows of the people of the village are of the economic roots and not on account of their nature. They are poor. Waterfall Venkamma is jealous of Rangemma because of

economic reasons. The sorrows of Bhatta spring from the reason of the moral buffetings he gets from the villagers.

The grouping and regrouping of characters have been done nicely. The characters part for a while but soon get to reassembling as they do in life. Some characters appear after certain phases in the novel. Ratna is designed on the lines of as a heroine. She appears when we have exhausted at the beginning of the novel. She does not come off with the prominence which she must have on the canvas of the novel. The novel is a heroineless novel. The hero comes off with a sort of bang but the heroine does not. Ratna is a faded figure. She gets only some limited prominence and she appears artificial.

The novelist does not pay attention to the instincts of the characters, but only to the acquisitive instinct of Bhatta. The biological instincts of the characters are pushed to the hinterland. Thus the characters gain only outer appearance and not inner one. However, there is good social setting of the characters in the novel. The novel comes off on the scene as a socio-political novel. The social factor is just useful to the political movement. Thus the characters in the novel have more of social solidarity than anything else. On the whole the characters are drawn simply. The novelist is content with the outer wrapping of the characters. He has done a little personality probing. In handling of characters, there is ordinariness. Some of the characters like Bhatta, Range Gowda and Waterfall Venkamma gain strength because they have the inherent stuff of their own that helps them to gain prominence. The characters lack depth and are sketched and not portrayed. Kanthapura is just like a sketchbook whereas the novel The Serpent and the Rope has the portrait gallery. In Kanthapura the characters are mostly of the surface. They are the sons of the soil, the product of the illiterate society. The advantage of intellectualism is denied to them. However, the fold-colour in them comes off with a fineness. The fold-colour is thing that befits the individuals by the novelist. The soil of the place sticks to them. The crafty characters do not exist in the novel thus the novel is a story of the simple people set against the exploiting agencies, the self-increasing in power, rank, wealth and importance of humans.

Let us now analyze the characters of Moorthy and Ratna, the central characters of Raja Rao's *Kanthapura.*

14.4.1. Moorthy

Moorthy is the protagonist of the novel. He is called as the village Gandhi. He is an educated young man of Kanthapura who organises the work of the Congress in the village hence he becomes the central figure in the novel. The fact is that there is nothing heroic about him hence he cannot be called as the hero of the novel. He is an ordinary man having common human weaknesses. He is one of the thousands of young men who are inspired by Mahatma Gandhi who give up their studies for the national cause and invite the wrath of the government. He stands for the freedom fighters who fought for the motherland in order to liberate it under the leadership of Gandhiji.

He is considerate, respectful and affectionate person whom the people of Kanthapura love and like. He is called "Corner-house Moorthy and our Moorthy". He is treated as a noble cow, quiet, generous, deferent, Brahminic, a very prince. He is very honest like an elephant and he is called as a carbon copy of Mahatma Gandhi and the saint of the village. He is a 'small mountain', while Gandhi is the 'big mountain'. Through the novel we see him as inspiring love and respect, whowins the confidence of the villagers. He has

an immense impact of Gandhiji. Gandhi's personality has transformed him from a common village boy into a young man who has leadership qualities. He has self-sacrificial nature and he is devoted to the upliftment of the village. Of course, he never met Gandhi. He is in the college when he feels the full force of Gandhi and leaves the college for the cause of nation. He is one of the thousands of young men who give up their studies and court arrest. He has vision of Gandhi who addresses a public. He feels that he has met Gandhi and gets inspired by his charismatic personality.

The novelist has gifted him with a number of many good qualities of head and heart. He inspires the people. On his return from the city he at once organizes the Gandhi work in the village. The three strands of Gandhian freedom struggle - political, religious and social, are found in him. He works on these three levels. The most potent force in Kanthapura is religion so the action of Kanthapura begins with religion. There is tremendous religious activity before the introduction of Gandhi of Swaraj, starting from an invocation to the village goddess Kenchamma.To the end of the novel religion sustains the spirit of the novel Kanthapura. The action begins with the unearthing of a half sunken linga by Moorthy and its consecration. The villagers celebrate the occasion by organizing a feast. One thing leads to another. They observe Sankar Jayanti and Sankara Vijay.Everybody wish to offer a dinner. Jayaramachar, the Harikathaman is invited to the village. Harikathas are held every evening and serve as means for Gandhian propaganda. The Harikatha man is arrested and taken away and so the Gandhi movement comes to the village. He shows a rare devotion and insight for the village youth. He carries the message of Mahatma from door to door and explains the economy of the khadi and the importance of 'Charkha' to the ignorant and superstitious women of the village. He persuades them to take to spinning despite strong opposition from all quarters. He forms the Congress Committee in the village and gets elected unanimously as the president. Even Range Gowda, the Patel, the Tiger of the village is deferential to him, calls him 'learned master'. He has full confidence in him. He uses all his authority and prestige in Moorthy's favour. He permits him to have his way in everything. Moorthy enthuses women and organizes them. A women volunteer corps is formed and Ratna becomes the head of the organization of 'swayam sevikas'. Like Gandhiji, Moorthy too, undertakes a fast, organizes picketing and 'satyagrahas', courts arrests and is sent to jail. Throughout the novel he is shown as the ideal Gandhian.

Moorthy implements the programme of the eradication of untouchability. He goes in the pariah quarter from one village to another inspiring the women to take to spining in their time. The Swami excommunicates him for his mission still Moorthy persists in his mission. Being a human, he has weaknesses. Pariah business is too much ever for him. He hesitates and wears and thus shows that he is made of the same common clay. He is an ordinary man of flesh and blood who has human weaknesses. He is not a hero but an average young man who like thousands others in those days were enthused and inspired by Gandhiji who come out of their shells and contribute to the cause of the country.

14.4.2. Ratna

Ratna is the widowed daughter of Kamalamma, and sister of Rangemma. In appearance, she is deceptive because of her hair-style which is like a concubine. She,in fact, has been shown virtuous. She becomes a widow when she is hardly fifteen years of age. At a stage she has an emotional entanglement with Moorthy. She is attractive and charming. Moorthy pays attention to her. There is just a hint of a love-affair between them. However, their love and liking for each other has not been properly developed. Ratna is a young educated and progressive woman. Though she is a widow she does not dress and live in the conventional style of a widow. She wears bangles, coloured sarees and uses kumkum mark on her forehead and parts her hair. She is a rebel and defiant. She saw her husband only for a day and on this ground she does not consider herself actually married. Her case poses a social problem. She is the originator of a new idea which liberates the Hindu widows from the shackles of false social obligations. She is also bold and witty in conversation and can hold her own against heavy odds. She is much criticised for her unconventional ways but she pays no attention to such criticism. She chooses the path, treads it with confidence, firmness and determination.

She takes keen interest in the Gandhian movement. She is a source of inspiration and help to Moorthy. When Jayamachar, the *Harikatha* man is arrested, she conducts the *Harikathas.* After the death of Rangemma, she reads out the newspaper and other publicity material of the Congress for the benefit of the villagers. When Moorthy is arrested, she continues his work and serves as a leader. She imparts to the 'sevikas' the necessary training. She displays great courage and resourcefulness in the face of government repression and police action. As a consequence she is dishonored, beaten upon and sent to jail. But she suffers all patiently and unflinchingly. She comes out of the jail as a changed person. She becomes more humble and courteous to her elders and more matured and determined. When Gandhi goes to England for the Round table Conference, Ratna is disappointed. She goes over to Bombay. Her letters reveal her admiration for Nehru, "The equal distributionist".

She has the traits of leadership. She is noble, reasonably defiant, literate and forward looking and has a certain dignity. But as a work of art her portrait is weak. It is not drawn at length. She has not been drawn powerfully, not with a pervasive intensity. She has not been painted consummately by the novelist. She has been neglected for a long time in the novel and resumed only after an awkward interval. It would be difficult to call her a heroine. She is an occasional breeze character in the hot house atmosphere in the novel. Her personal character is pure. Though her character is thin, she catches our attention.

There are other characters in the novel as Patel Range Gowda, Bhatta, Narsamma, Rangamma, the Swami, the white owner of Skeffington Coffee Estate, advocate Sankar, Badekhan, Waterfall Venkamma and Sahab.

14.5. SUMMARY

In this unit you were given an account of the major themes discussed in the novel *Kanthapura.Kanthapura* is essentially an Indian novel where Kanthapura symbolizes any Indian village during the freedom movement. The novel can be seen as a blend of religious, social and political issues. Besides this, the novel can also be examined through

Feminist lens as well as the womenfolk are represented as manifestations of "Shakti" and "Shakti" culminates in the form of Ratna who epitomizes women's liberation and successfully leads the village womenfolk into the freedo movement.You were also given a character analysis of two of the central characters of the novel namely Moorthy and Ratna. Moorthy who is an ordinary boy from the village of *Kanthapura* is a devoted Gandhian who dedicates himself for the case of village upliftment. Ratna is the second protagonist of the novel. There is a hint in the novel that Moorthy and Ratna are I a relationship. Ratna is a headstrong woman and is shown as the manifestation of "Shakti".

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the major themes of the novel *Kanthapura*.
2. Write a note on Raja Rao's art of characterization.
3. Draw a charactersketch of Ratna .

14.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to the Section 14.3.
2. Refer to the Section 14.4
3. Refer to the Sections 14.4.2.

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14.8. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the importance of Moorthy in the novel Kanthapura.
2. Would you regard Raja Rao as a Feminist writer.Comment.

UNIT 15 KALIDAS *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*-I

15.1. INTRODUCTION

Block 5 deals with Indian Drama. Indian Drama has had a long tradition as its seeds can be found in the earliest-surviving fragments of Sanskrit drama from the 1st century CE. The wealth of archaeological evidence from earlier periods offers no indication of the existence of a tradition of theatre. The ancient Vedas (hymns from between 1500 to 1000 BCE that are among the earliest examples of literature in the world) contain no hint of it (although a small number are composed in a form of dialogue) and the rituals of the Vedic period do not appear to have developed into theatre. The *Mahābhāṣya* by Patañjali contains the earliest reference to what may have been the seeds of Sanskrit drama. This treatise on grammar from 140 BCE provides a feasible date for the beginnings of theatre in India.

The major source of evidence for Sanskrit theatre is *A Treatise on Theatre* (*Nātyaśāstra*), a compendium whose date of composition is uncertain (estimates range from 200 BCE to 200 CE) and whose authorship is attributed to Bharata Muni. The Treatise is the most complete work of dramaturgy in the ancient world. It addresses acting, dance, music, dramatic construction, architecture, costuming, make-up, props, the organisation of companies, the audience, competitions, and offers a mythological account of the origin of theatre. In doing so, it provides indications about the nature of actual theatrical practices. Sanskrit theatre was performed on sacred ground by priests who had been trained in the necessary skills (dance, music, and recitation) in a [hereditary process]. Its aim was both to educate and to entertain.

Under the patronage of royal courts, performers belonged to professional companies that were directed by a stage manager (*sutradhara*), who may also have acted. This task was thought of as being analogous to that of a puppeteer--the literal meaning of "*sutradhara*" is "holder of the strings or threads". The performers were trained rigorously in vocal and physical technique. There were no prohibitions against female performers; companies were all-male, all-female, and of mixed gender. Certain sentiments were considered inappropriate for men to enact, however, and were thought better suited to women. Some performers played character their own age, while others played those different from their own (whether younger or older). Of all the elements of theatre, the Treatise gives most attention to acting (*abhinaya*), which consists of two styles: realistic (*lokadharmi*) and conventional (*natyadharmi*), though the major focus is on the latter.

Its drama is regarded as the highest achievement of Sanskrit literature. It utilised stock characters, such as the hero (*nayaka*), heroine (*nayika*), or clown (*vidusaka*). Actors may have specialised in a particular type. Kālidāsa in the 1st century BCE, is arguably considered to be ancient India's greatest Sanskrit dramatist. Three famous romantic plays written by Kālidāsa are the *Mālavikāgnimitram* (Mālavikā and Agnimitra), *Vikramuurvashiiya* (Pertaining to Vikrama and Urvashi), and *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (The Recognition of Shakuntala). The last was inspired by a story in the Mahabharata and is the most famous. It was the first to be translated into English and German. *Śakuntalā* (in English translation) influenced Goethe's Faust (1808–1832).

(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/historyof theatre)

In the coming two units we will be discussing Kalidas and his opus *Abhijnanashakuntalam* at length.

15.2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present unit are to familiarize the students with the life and works of Kalidasa with reference to his poetic works like drama and poetry. The text aims at bringing out the dramatic beauty of the play and to discuss the poetic and theatrical device used for achieving *rasnispatti* among the audience and the readers. It is also aimed at that the classical framework within which the play was written and the spiritual aesthetics contained therein be brought down to the maturity level of M.A. students. It is also attempted that the global popularity of the play is also summarized for the proper understanding of the artistic elements of the play.

15.3. DATING KALIDAS AND HIS PLAYS

Kalidasa has assiduously removed all clues to his biographical details. In this he probably follows the tradition of Indian poets who just believe themselves to be the vehicles of the goddess Vak, which inspires the poets to write in the timeless frame. The identity of the individual in the cosmic design is insignificant. The Vedas were also written in this tradition and the writers kept themselves incognito as they believed themselves to be inspired by the Supreme. The Vak speaks through the poets and therefore the references to personal life of the poet are deliberately effaced. In the *manglacharan* of *Raghuvansh Mahakavyam*, Kalidasa calls himself a dwarf who tries to lap up the fruits from the tree of eternity. There is no possibility of knowing about the parentage, family, caste or community, district or region of Kalidasa. The only scope remains to date the time in history through which Kalidasa wrote. Another dim possibility is to find out the milieu in which Kalidasa lived, i.e., the mountains, the landscape, the rulers and the contemporary poets. In *Introduction to Complete Works of Kalidasa*, Chandra Rajan tries to locate the time of Kalidasa on the basis of the following facts:

1. Kalidasa is believed to be the court poet of Agnimitra Sunga who ruled as his father's deputy at Ujjaini, the alternative capital of the empire. Agnimitra Sunga is interpreted to be the protagonist of *Malvikagnimitram*. Sunga empire roughly ruled from 184 BCE to 78 BCE. In *Harshacharitam* by Baan Bhatta, there is a reference to a king called Sumitra who was killed with a scimitar by one Mitradeva while watching a drama. The same Sumitra finds place in Kalidas's Malvikagnimitram. On the basis of a text *Jyotirvidabharana*, an apocrypha of Kalidasa, there were eight ratna (jewels) in the court of Vikramaditya I: Dhanvantari, Ksapanaka, Amarsingh, Shankuka, Vetalbhatta, Kalidasa, Varahmihir, and Varuruchi.

2.Another evidence is quoted from the inscriptions of Bhita which were recovered in the year 1909-10 by one Marshall and the date of the inscriptions was fixed to be the 1 st century BCE. On the rock engravings was found an elaborate picture which is exactly similar to the scene of Dushyanta mounted on a horse in the hermitage of Kanva, being prevented from killing a fawn by a hermit. In front of him is standing a girl and in the background stands a cottage. The evidence is used to infer that Shakuntalm was written in the 1st century BCE.

3. Kalidasa wrote in the first century BCE. In the reign of the most celebrated king Vikramaditya who is an established hero of legends, anecdotes and folklores. The same

king is accredited for founding the Vikram Era in 57 BCE. The oral Indian tradition commemorates Kalidasa as the court poet of this King Vikramaditya.

4. One school of scholars places Kalidasa in the 4th CE European scholars like James Ferguson, Maxmuller, Macdonall etc support the view. On the basis of Kalidasa's *Kumar Sambhava* where Kumar is frequently called by the name of Skandha is used as an evidence to show that it hints towards the glory of Skandgupta , the Gupta ruler of the 4th and 5 th century. The school of scholars also cites the rock inscriptions of Mandsaur which were engraved in the 4th century, composed and consecrated by Vatsavatti (472 CE) who has copiously imitated the poetic style of Meghduta and Ritusamhara. Kalidasa is established to be the court poet of the Gupta king Chandragupta II who assumed the title of Vikramaditya .The period of Gupta dynasty is fixed to be 4th to 5th century.

5. There is a school of literary historians who fix Kalidasa in the 7th century CE, others place him in the 10th century.

However the majority of the scholars fix Kalidasa in the regime of Vikramaditya 1st who ruled Ujjain in the 1st century BCE.

15.3.1. Kalidas and Sanskrit Plays

Kalidasa is claimed to be belonging to different places by different Indians. The latest addition to the list is the Kaviltha village of Rudraprayag district in Kedarnath valley of Uttarakhand. Books and research papers have been written to prove that the poet was born in the Himalaya and further in Kaviltha a village very close to the temple of Kali who inspired the poet to write. Nothing is, however, certainly known about the birthplace of the poet, but he becomes the most passionate while describing Ujjaini which is located in Malava region of Madhya Pradesh and which was known in the ancient period as Avanti. The 30th *sloka* of *Meghdutam* says:

To Ujjayin glowing in splendor

Like a brilliant piece of Paradise (Meghdutam , 30)

The two short epics *Ṛtusaṃhāra* and *Meghadūtam* (Vol I) show that the poet was closely familiar with the landscape of Vindhya mountains. The rivers , meadows , forests, gardens and the river banks of the Malva and Ujjaini match the description in *Meghdutam* and *Rtusmharam*. Chandra Rajan writes: "Ujjaini's splendor and opulence are reflected in Kalidasa's writings. Its mansions and groves, its places and pleasure gardens, are described in vivid details in the two poems… already referred to"(p.14)

Rajan further explains that the description of palaces and gardens in the Alkapuri of *Meghdutam* and the details of Dushyanta's place in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* match with the historical description of ancient Ujjaini.

Kalidsa has written a large corpus of drama and poetry namely *Mālavikāgnimitram, Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Vikramōrvaśīyam, Raghuvaṃśa, Kumārasambhva, Ṛtusaṃhāra,* and *Meghadūtam*. The first three of them are plays and *Raghuvaṃśa* and *Kumārasambhva* are epics whereas *Ṛtusaṃhāra* and Meghadūtam are long lyrical poems known by the category of the genre of khandkavya or short epic.

Self-Assessment Questions:

1. Which is supposed the place of birth of Kalidasa?
2. To which age and ruler did Kalidasa belong to?
3. Name the eight poetic works by Kalidasa.

15.4. *ABHIJNANASHAKUNTALAM*

15.4.1. Title of the Play and its Popularity

The title of the play, *Abhijnanshakuntlam*, means a drama in which Shakuntala is recognized by a token. The title follows the logic of *Vikramōrvaśīyam* in which Urvashi is won by Vikrama, valour. The ring of recognition in the play functions as a central motif and the peripeteia and denouement in the play is brought about by the absence and presence of the ring. The motif of the ring was Kalidasa's own innovation upon the source narrative borrowed from the Mahabharata. The very name of the heroine Shakuntala has been derived from the situation of her birth. Shakunten lalitam, palitamiti Shakuntala, the one who was fed and nourished by the shakunta birds, should be named as Shakuntala. There is a debate over the name Shakuntalam or Shaakuntalam. The grammarians say that both the words are grammatically correct. Monier Wiliams' translation of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*(1855) is entitled as Shakuntala or the Lost Ring. George Forster's German translation was entitled as Shakuntala (1791), which was a translation of William Jones Shakuntala published in English(1789).Arthur W. Ryder translated the play with the title "Shakuntala and Other Works"(1914). Since then the play has been translated in almost every language of the world. In the next hundred years, there were at least 46 translations in twelve European languages.

The famous German poet Goethe made an outburst of awe and wonder on the beauty of the play in 1792. His comments were translated into German by E.B. Eastwick:

> Wouldst thou the young years blossom and the fruits of its decline,
> And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,
> Wouldst thou the earth, and heaven itself in one sole name combine?
> I name thee , O Shakuntala! And all at once is said.

15.4.2. The Narrative of Shakuntala and Dushyant in the Mahabharata

In a dialogue between Janmenjay and Vaishampayan Rishi, we find the history of the first man Bharata, the ancestor of Bhartvasis. The story is elaborated in THE Mahabharata thus:

Dushyanta, along with his entourage has been running from forest to forest for mrigaya, the hunting game which is so essential for the health of the kings and their subject. He ultimately lands into a forest which inhabits a beautiful and quiet hermitage inside it. Dushyanta calls aloud as to who is inside. To his call comes out a beautiful girl Shakuntala who tells Dushyanta that the head of the hermitage Kanva Rishi has gone to gather fruits and she is in charge of the Ashrama at the moment. She offers the king the hospitality of the hermitage. Impressed by the divine beauty of the girl, Dushyanta asks her parentage. The girl in reported speech reproduces what her foster father Kanva had once spoken to one of the hermits of the forest: "Disturbed by the ascetic heat of Vishwamitra, Indra sent on mission one of his courtiers Menka to disrupt the tapa of

Vishwamitra which would otherwise empower the rishi to the throne of heaven. Menka appeared in front of Vishwamitra, dancing and making erotic gestures. The rishi was distracted from his tapa and turned to Menka to make love. Out of the love was born a baby girl whom the mother deserted soon after the birth, as the prime concern of the nymph was to disturb the rishi. The baby was tended to by shakunta birds for some time. Once Kanva rishi happened to notice the baby being brought up and fed by the shakunta birds and brought the baby to his hermitage. The baby girl was given a name Shakuntala because she was brought up by shakunta birds."

Dushyanta proposes to her his love and offer of marriage. To which Shakuntala responds: "Promise first that my issues born of you will be the legal descendants of you and your empire and that I will be the first queen of your court. Only on these conditions will I marry you."

The king grants her request and both of them get married under the provisions of gandharva vivaah (love marriage). The king leaves the hermitage and goes back to Hastinapur with a promise to return but does not return for a long time. In the meanwhile Shakuntala gives birth to a child who grows so powerful that he starts intimidating even the lions and elephants living around the hermitage. He is therefore given the name "Sarvadaman".

Sometime later, Shakuntala along with her son is sent to Dushynta's court in Hastinapur. But out of the fear of other queens, Dushyanta refuses to recognize Shakuntala and accept her as his wife. Disappointed, Shakuntala returns but is intercepted on the way by Dushyanta to be accepted as wife and queen.

15.4.3. Changes made by Kalidasa

1. The first major change Kalidasa made in the story is the curse of Durvasa which reshuffles the major strains of the Mahabharata story. It first incapacitates Dushyanta to become an ideal grand hero of a classical play. In one stroke Dushyant is absolved of the sin of forgetting Shakuntala. Now in Kalidasa'a play Dushyanta's forgetfulness is just a result of the curse of Durvasa. The innovation webs into the play the story of the ring of recollection which at an unfortunate moment slips off the finger of Shakuntala and flows into a river. This event in the VIth act leads to another *prakari* (sub plot) in which the man selling the ring is arrested. The arrest leads to the unraveling of further mystery that the ring was recovered by the fisherman from the belly of a fish. This confirms Shakuntala's plea in the court that her ring had been lost into a brook.

2. The second change removes the encounter of Dushyanta and Shakuntala in the first meeting. The first man to meet Dushyanta is a hermit. Thus all the dialogues between Shakuntal and Dushyanta about the heirship of their issues are deleted.

3. In the play Kanva has gone to Shachi tirtha and not to gather fruits.

4. Kanva is informed of Shakuntala's wedding by the fire of yajna and not by Shakuntala herself.

5. The ring is given to Shakuntala as a token of love and also a passport into Dushyanta's kingdom.

6. Dushyanta is under the influence of the curse of Durvasa and thus thinks that Shakuntala is someone else's wife and not to be accepted.

7. As a result, the action of Act VI and VII organically issues forth. The revelation brought out by the ring gives birth to penance and repentance in the heart of the king. The intensity of his love for Shakuntala is also intensified in the Act VII. The events in Act VII are further invention of Kalidasa because the playwright seeks to forge the reunion of the lovers and accomplishment of the fourth purushartha, i.e., moksha in the play.

15.5. SUMMARY

In this unit you were given an introduction to the origin of Ancient Sanskrit Drama. Furthermore, you were also given an account of Kalidas and his contribution to Sanskrit Drama. In this unit we discussed Kalidas' opus *Abhijnanashakuntalam* at length. We saw how Kalidas borrows the Shakuntala Dushyant story from the Mahabharata, reshuffles the major strains to his interest, ain the form of *Abhijnanashakuntalam* with freshness of style.

15.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to our discussion at 15.1.1.
2. Refer to our discussion at 15.1.1.
3. Refer to our discussion at 15.1.2.

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(The translated extracts and critical concepts have been based on the material found in the following books)

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15.8. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Name five changes made by Kalidas while adopting the mythical Shakuntala-Dushyant story.
2. Write a note on the contribution made by Kalidas in the field of Sanskrit Drama.
3. Shed light on the title of the play *Abhijnanashakuntalam.*

UNIT 16 KALIDAS *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*-II

16.1. *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*: STORY OUTLINE

Abhijñānaśākuntalam enacts the mythical history of Bharata, the founder of Ancient Bharat nation. The story begins with the encounter of Dushyanta with Shakuntala, and the eventual love and marriage.

Shakuntala, who is born of the union of Viswamitra and Menaka, is living in the ashrama of Kanva, who adopted her when she was abandoned by her parents soon after her birth.

Dusyanta, the king of Hastinapur, is on a hunting-mission in the forest where he meets Shakuntala, and falls in love with her. After a brief tryst, they go for a gandharva marriage and soon after the king has to leave for Hastinapur.

Lost in the passion of love Shakuntala forgets to answer the call of hospitality to rishi Durvasa, who has come to visit Kanva's hermitage. The hotheaded Durvasa curses her that the person she was selflessly thinking of, and due to which Shakuntala forgot to attend on rishi Durvasa, will forget to recognize her. On the intercession of Priyamvada and Anusuya, two friends of Shakuntala, Durvasa attenuates his curse and puts up a rider, "but if Shakuntala produces an evidence of her love to Dushyanta, the later will recover his memory."

Kanva, who has been away from the hermitage throughout this episode, comes home and through his divine vision learns about the happenings. Sakuntala is then sent to Hastinapur and the two disciples, Sarnagarava and Saradhvat, along with the matron Gautami are sent as her escorts. On her way, while drinking water from a rivulet Sakuntala's finger-ring (souvenir given by Dusyanta) drops into the water. Obviously, the king forgets the event of marriage and refuses to recognize her as his wife. Disheartened Shakuntala takes shelter in the ashrama of rishi Marichi.

In the meantime, the ring which was swallowed by a fish is recovered by a fisherman, who in turn is arrested by police for carrying the Royal Insignia. The fisherman along with the ring is taken to the court of Dusyanta, who on seeing the ring recollects his memory of love and marriage with Shakuntala. He repents profoundly but Shakuntala is nowhere to be found.

Long after, while Dusyanta is on a mission to fight demons in Indra-lok(Kingdom of heaven) he meets a young boy called Sarvadaman who is playing with a lion's cub. Surprise leads to the discovery that Sharvadaman is Shakuntala's son and both the mother and son have been living in the hermitage of rishi Marichi. Three of them re-unite and live happily ever after.

16.2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEME OF *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*

Dushayanta enters the premises of the peaceful hermitage of Kanva Rishi in modest clothes. His right arm throbs, and he, knowing this to be a sign of good luck, wonders what benevolence of fate awaits him here. He hears some talking, and spots three girls watering the trees. Surprised at finding such beauty in a forest, he listens to them in hiding. He recognizes Shakuntala, and marvels at her beauty that even her coarse valkala garb cannot hide. A desire for her rises in his heart, and while having questions about her caste (he is a *kshatriya*, she may or may not be of the same caste), he eventually decides

to follow his heart, deeming it the only authority in case of a doubt. Grabbing an opportune moment, Dushyanta appears before Shakuntala and her friends. He behaves diffidently, and invites the three girls to sit and talk with him under a Saptaparna tree. He introduces himself in an ambivalent manner, and makes clever enquiries in order to find out more about Shakuntala. On learning that she is the daughter of Rishi Kanva, and that she is unmarried, Dushyanta is elated. The blessing of Vaikhanasa, that he will have a son as mighty as him, comes back to him, and relating it with the good omen of throbbing of his right arm, he decides to go further. He recognizes love for himself in Shakuntala's eyes. Shakuntala feigns anger to hide his desire for the King, but by now, intense attraction between them is quite apparent.

Dushyanta resists the desire to get closer and refrains from touching Shakuntala in the presence of her friends. But desire quickly takes over reason, and he, enamoured of her beauty, praises in detail her palms, her cheeks, her heaving bosom, the flowers she wears in her ear, and her flowing hair. He offers his ring as a symbol of his sincerity.

Priyamvada, Shakuntala's friend, sees Dushyanta's name engraved on the ring, and realizes who he is. On being confronted, Dushyanta tries to explain the ring away, but is caught by the clever Priyamvada. As the King confidently expresses his conviction that the feeling of love is mutual, shouts from his soldiers interrupt the meeting.

As Shakuntala starts towards the hermitage with her friends, she turns back under a false pretext to look at Dushyanta again, and silently conveys her feelings.

Vidhushaka opens the second act with a monologue, where he informs us of Dushyant's lovelorn state. The King thinks of Shakuntala all the time, he is unable to sleep, and even the thought of leaving the hermitage is unbearable for him. The sport of hunting does not excite him anymore. He thinks of Shakuntala day and night, and tells *Vidushaka* about her in a state of passion. He is beset by the complexity of his own feelings and constantly thinks of the time he met Shakuntala. His nobility and self-respect stops him from visiting Shakuntala in the hermitage without a reason. He is invited in by the sages, and sends Vidushaka and his army back to the capital.

In the third act, Dushyant is overcome by his desire to see Shakuntala, and goes to the bank of river Malini, in hope of seeing her there. He sees Shakuntala and her friends, but to confirm Shakuntala's feelings he hides and listens to them again. Shakuntala confesses to her friends that she has fallen deeply in love with Dushyanta. The friends praise her for choosing excellently and persuade her to write a love letter. Shakuntala reads the letter aloud, and Dushyanta listens to the affirmation with great joy. As she ends reading, Dushyanta comes out of hiding and presents himself to the ladies. The friends ask Dushyanta to accept Shakuntala's heart, and Dushyanta, acknowledging his own affection for Shakuntala, promises to pay utmost respect to this newfound love. The friends, satisfied with Dushyanta's assertion, leave the young lovers alone. Now that the mutual feeling of love has been affirmed, Dushyanta approaches Shakuntala. Shakuntala shies away from Dushyanta, and asks him to retain his good manners. Dushyanta suggests gandharva vivah, and the lovers have their moment of bliss, before getting interrupted by the arrival of Gautami. The two lovers, in confusion, part. Dushyant again hides himself in the bushes, while Shakuntala leaves the river bank.

Dushyanta and Shakuntala wed each other by the gandharva ceremony, and Dushyanta leaves for the capital, promising Shakuntala to send a guard to bring her to him later. He

asks her to count one alphabets everyday of his name engraved on the ring, at the end of which someone from Hastinapur would appear to escort her to the court. After his departure, Shakuntala sits in the hermitage alone, thinking of Dushyanta. So deeply occupied is she with his memories that she fails to extend a suitable welcome to Rishi Durvasa. Rishi Durvasa, angered by the insult, puts a curse on her- whoever she was thinking of in the moment she disrespected him, he shall forget her completely and would not remember even when reminded of her. Her friends hear the curse, and plead with Rishi Durvasa for forgiveness, and try to persuade Rishi Durvasa to take back the curse. As his spoken word cannot be taken back, Rishi Durvasa makes an amendment to the curse- Dushyant will recognize Shakuntala as soon as he is shown a token of recognition. The two friends keep the incident to themselves. Rishi Kanva returns to the hermitage, and upon hearing about Shakuntala's marriage to Dushyanta, praises her for her excellent choice. Meanwhile, Dushyanta forgets about his bride because of the curse. At the hermitage, Shakuntala begins to show signs of pregnancy, and as her husband has sent no one to bring her to the capital, Rishi Kanva decides to send her to her lawful husband's home himself. They prepare for her departure, and Shakuntala bids farewell to every creature living in and around the hermitage- the animal and even the creepers and trees- that she has grown so attached to. Kanva talks to her about the duties of a good wife and daughter-in-law, and bids farewell to her.

A group of ascetics escort Shakuntala to Dushyanta's palace in the capital, and ask to see the king. The King, respectful of the sages, allows them into his presence. Sarangava, the leader of the group, conveys Kanva Rishi's message to him, and asks him to welcome his bride into his household. Dushyanta has no recollection of his wedding with Shakuntala, and is surprised and offended at the suggestion. When all effort fails, Shakuntala tries to show him the ring he had given to her as a token of his affection. As per Durvasa's prediction, the curse would come to an end once Dushyant is shown a symbol of recognition. But as fate would have it, her ring is missing. As every attempt to bring back Dushyant's memory fails, Shakuntala leaves his court dejectedly. As she stands in despair outside his palace, a heavenly being comes down from the sky and carries her away. The King watches the event with all his courtiers, and though not able to place Shakuntala in her memories, he becomes vexed and anxious.

A fisherman finds the ring that Shakuntala had dropped in the stomach of a catch. Finding Dushyant's name engraved on the ring, the fisherman brings it to the Royal Court and produces it before the King. As soon as Dushyanta lays his eyes on the ring, the curse breaks and he immediately remembers Shakuntala and everything that passed between them in the forest. Overcome with grief over the loss of Shakuntala, Dushyanta helplessly ponders over the past. He is visited by Matali, charioteer of King of Gods Indra, who brings a request from his master to join him in fighting certain asura-s. Dushyanta accepts the invitation, and leaves in Indra's heavenly chariot to assist him in the war.

The King returns victorious, and is honoured in the highest manner by Indra. While returning to his kingdom by the aerial route, he stops at the Hemkuta Mountain with a desire to greet the sage Kashyapa. While waiting for Matali to inform the sage of his arrival, he spots a young boy playing with a lion's cub. As he recognizes the boy's strong resemblance to him, he develops a strange feeling of having his own son before his eyes. He overhears the boy's female attendants who speak about the boy's Puru lineage (the

family Dushyanta himself belongs to), and learns that his mother's name is Shakuntala. Dushyanta is now very certain that the boy is his own son, and recognizes Shakuntala as she enters the scene. Shakuntala sees the king too. As the two lovers seek and give explanations, Rishi Kashyap enters and clarifies that all the misfortune fell on the couple because of Rishi Durvasa's curse. He tells them that the curse made Dushyanta forget Shakuntala. Now that the curse has been lifted, Kashyapa blesses the couple, and sends them off to the capital, where they live happily ever after.

Self Assessment Questions I

1. What is the original source of the story of the play?
2. Who meets Dushyanta at the gate of the hermitage in Mahabharata story?
3. Which one major change was made by Kalidasa while adopting the mythical story in Abhijñānaśākuntalam?

16.3. CLASSICAL ELEMENTS IN PLOT CONSTRUCTION

The Sanskrit term for the plot is *Itivritta* (lit. thus it happened) which explains the body of the play and which is framed within five *avastha*-s (stages) and five *arthprakriti*-s (devices of giving interpretation to the plot). The point of action where the arthprakritis and the avastha-s join together are called *sandhi*-s. Thus the sandhi-s are also five in character and nature. The plot is of two kinds: adhikarika and prasangika. Adhikasrika plot is the one which is predominantly concerned with the hero and the prasangika plot is incidental in nature. The result which is achieved through the central efforts of the hero and coordinated struggle of the secondary characters is called adikarika plot. Other minor happenings in the plot which contribute to this main action and its result are called prasangika or subsidiary.

Five *avatha*-s(stages)of the plot: Bharatmuni's *Natyashatra* classifies them as

(a)*Prarambha* (beginning) (b) *Yatna* (effort) (c) *Pratyasa or Prapti Sambhava* (possibility of achievement) (d) *Niyatapti* (certainity of chievement) (e) *Phalprati*(achievement).

Five *Arthprakriti*-s: These are the external conditions for each avastha of the plot and are classified by Ntyashatra as *bija* (the seed) , *vindu* (the drop)(c) *pataka* (an incident), (d) *prakari* (an episode),(d) *karya* (the action).

Bija (seed), planted in a small measure, grows, expands and results in a fruit of the total action.

Vindu (drop) is the device which maintains the continuity of the play even when some links are missing in the action.

Pataka is a device which constructs line of the principle happening and which helps develop the central plot.

Prakari(episode) is a device which has no continuity of its own and which only contributes to the action of the central plot. It is a kind of subplot.

Karya (action) is the final action which leads to the achievement of the goal of the play.

Five *sandhi*-s: the joints in the construction of a play where the five *avastha*-s and the five arth prakriti-s meet in the respective order are called five sandhi-s. The sandhi-s are known as (a) *mukha* (opening) (b) *pratimukha* (progressing), (c) *garbha* (deeper growth), (d) *vimarsa* (pause) and (e) *nirvahana* conclusion. However, all the five *sandhi*-s are no found in all the ten category of the plays described as *dashrupka*-s by Dhanjaya. *Nataka* and *prakarana* alone web together these five *sandhi*-s. In rest of the genres of the plays the sandhi-s are less than five and in varying numbers.

(a)*Mukha*(opening): is the part of the play to which the seed(bija) the main source of various rasa and bhava-s is closely related. It is the meeting point of the avastha of arambh with the arthprakriti of bija.

(b)*Pratimukha*(progressing): In the part the perceptible or imperceptible opening of the yatna gets connected with the external condition vindu.

(c)*Garhbah*(deeper growth) is the part where the seed of the action begins to sprout. Here pratyasa and pataka combine together.

(d)*Vimarsa*(pause): At this point of the joint the action seems to have paused although it keeps developing imperceptibly. The niyatapti (certainty of achievement of action) and prakari(an episode of the sub plot) combine together

(e)*Nirvahana*(conclusion): At this joint the action which started from the seed and passed through various stages gives the final fruit. Here the avastha of phalagam combines with the arthprakriti of karya.

Self-Assessment Questions II

1. How many *avasthas* are found in a classical Sanskrit play?
2. How many *arthprakritis* are to be found in a play?
3. Name the major *sandhis* to be found in Abhijñānaśākuntalam.

16.4 . RASA NISHPATTI IN *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*

Rasa, (lit. sentiment of literature), according to *Natyashastra* is the cumulative result of *vibhava* (stimulous), *anubhava*(involuntary reaction)and *vybhichari bhava*(voluntary reaction). Just as when various condiments and sauces and herbs and other materials are mixed, a taste (different from the individual tastes of the components), so also along with different *bhava-s*(emotions) the *sthayi bhava*becomes a taste(rasa, flavor, feeling). In drama, sensitive spectators after enjoying the various emotions expressed by the actors through words, gestures and feelings feel pleasure. This final feeling by the spectators is explained as *rasa* of *natya*. However, the condition of *rasanubhuti,* relishing the pleasure of a play depends on the quality of the audience. It is only the connoisseur of literary tastes (samajik) who enjoys all the *rasa-s* (feelings) (Adya Rangacharya, p,54-55).

In a scene where the *srinagara rasa* takes place the *nayak* and *nayika*-s are the *alamban vibhava*; the garden, flowers and the Spring are the *uddipan vibhava*; the reflexes on the body and face of the lovers are the *anubhava*-s; and the occasional suspicion against each other or re-assurance of love from each other etc. are the *sanchari* bhava-s. There are further classifications of the each of the components.

Rasa-s are dependent upon *bhava*-s. *Rasa*-s and *bhava*-s bear the same mutual relationship as the condiments and herbs bear with the final taste of a food. Just as out of a seed grows a tree, out of a tree a flower, out of a flower a fruit, so as *rasa* is the seed of all *sthayi* bhava-s.

There are eight *rasa*-s and eight respective *sthayibhava*-s and symbolic colours:

	Rasa	**Sthayi bhava**	**Colours**
1.	Srinagara	Rati(erotic)	Dark blue
2.	Hasya	Hasya (Laughter).	White
3.	Raudra	Krodha(wrath)	Red
4.	Karuna	Karunaa or shok(Pathos)	Pigeon colour
5.	Vir	Utshah(courage)	Yellowish
6.	Adbhuta	Vishmaya(surprise)	Yellow
7.	Bibhatsa	Jugupsa(disgust)	Blue
8.	Bhayanaka	Bhaya(fear)	Dark

The dominant *rasa* (sentiment) in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is *shrinagara*(erotic). It is a story of love and separation and reunion of the two lovers, Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Both the stages of *shringara* rasa,i.e., *samyoga* and *viyoga* shringara have elaborately been treated in the play. Act II and III of the play are entirely devoted to *samyogasrinagara* where the love of the duo germinates, grows and leads to the final tryst and marriage. Here the beauty of Shakuntala is described in the best of the terms: Just two stanzas spoken by Dushyanta will bring out the feeling of shringara rasa:

> Though inlaid in duckweed the lotus grows
> A dusky spot rather enhances the moon' radiance
> This lissome girl is lovelier far dressed in bark!
> What indeed is not and adornment to entrancing forms(Act I,19)

A bumble bee hovers over Shakuntala's face and sends her into fright. The perturbed Shakunatala is described by Dushyanta:

> O, you honey foraging-thief! blessed are you
> Touching ever so often her tremulous darting eyes,
> Humming softly, hovering close to her ear
> As if eager to whisper a secret,
> Sneaking in to taste her ripe lower lip
> --the quintessence of love's delight—
> Even as she piteously flails her hand.
> Blessed indeed are you, while I wait
> Seeking to know the truth—undone (Act I, 23)

To Madhavya, the clown, Dushyanta describes the paragon of beauty that Shakuntala is

> Contemplating Brahma's imaging power ineffable
> And her loveliness exquisite,
> She flashes in my eye, a jewel among women
> Of another order of creation, extraordinary;
> It is as if the mighty Creator gathering

The rarest elements of beauty,
First drew the likeness of perfection,
Then quickened it with the breath of life. (Act II, 10)

Among many other expressions of love, Sakuntala's letter to Dushyanta written upon the exhortation of her friends is the best example of the *rati* that is overflowing in her heart:

I do not know your heart;
But my nights and days,
O, pitiless man
Are haunted by love
As every part of me
Yearns to be one with you. (Act III, 19).

To the letter, Dushyanta's response is:

Love burns you, true, my tender girl!
But me, He consumes utterly—relentless(Act II,20)

In the V and VI Acts the lovers get separated and the conditions of *Viyoga shringara*(estrangement) take place. The curse of Durvasa shown in the IV Act becomes operational in the two acts. There however remains a feeling of melancholy in Dushyanta's heart expressed in the following *sloka*:

When a being on seeing charming objects or on hearing agreeable sounds,
Becomes perturbed, although in enjoyment or happiness
Then, indeed, he mentally remembers, without being conscious (of the fact),

The associations of past lives remaining permanently impressed on the mind (Act V, 2)

Dushyanta refuses to recognize Shakuntala as his wife and denies ever having seen her earlier. The only insignia of ring which could have removed the curse of Durvasa has also been lost into a brook. Shakuntala, in the worst of her miseries is deserted both by the king and the two rishis Sharanrava and Shardhvata. Once again it is the celestial nymph Menaka who lifts her away to the hermitage of Marichi.

In the VI Act from the moment the ring of recognition is recovered from a fisherman, Dushyanta begins to suffer both from the guilt of negligence and pangs of separation. He is also shown suffering for loss of a ritual partner without which yajna-s cannot be performed and which leads to the eventual disturbance to the social well being of his state and the cosmic order. The gods who survive on the condiments offered through the yajna are reported to be hungry. The only solace he receives is from his clown friend Madhavya who both curses him for the misdoing and consoles with the hope of reunion. The reunion takes place in the VIIth Act. Here the reunion is not only multiplied manifold but also turns spiritual: It is a reunion with a wife who has matured through miseries and a son who will become the first ancestor of the great country Bharata. The emotion here turns from erotic to spiritual (*shaant rasa*).The very presence of Marichi Rishi evokes sentiments of shanta rasa. *The bharatvakya* (epilogue) here prays for the universal peace and wellbeing:

May the kings be committed to the wellbeing of the nature
May the knowledge of the learned enhance to highest level
May the blue necked Lord Shiva pardon my sins
May He free me from the cycle of birth and rebirth. (VII, 35)

Another dominant rasa is vatsalya which is the part of *sringaar rasa*. The rasa has been brought out in its best form in Act IV. The act depicts the separation of a daughter from the father, even though a foster father. It shows the pangs of separation from Shakuntala's childhood friends, Anusuya and Priyamvada. Shakuntala feels equally anguished on the separation from the plants and trees she has reared and the animals like a fawn she has brought up as her children since birth.

The four slokas(stanzas) spoken by Kanva are unanimously accepted to be best poetry of *vatsalya rasa*. In the first sloka Kanva says

That Shakuntala will go away today creates painful anxiety in heart
My throat feels choked and the tendency of tears blurs my vision
If this is the restlessness of mine who is used to living in forest
How much should the worldly parents suffer from fresh separation from their daughter!(IV, 6)

Then Kanva asks from the plants and trees of the hermitage to permit Shakuntala to leave for her in law's house:

Who would not drink water before offering the same to you
Although fond of ornaments, would never pluck flowers and buds from you
Who celebrated the first flowering in a tree
Such a Shakuntala goes to her husband's place, allow her to go

Kanva, the father, tells Sharangrava to carry this message to Shakuntala's husband:

Think of us the ascetics whose only wealth is abstinence of the high clan of yours
Think of the love you executed sans permission of Shakuntala's kins
With equanimity should you treat her among other queens
Rest is the matter of fortune, should not be spoken of by the kins(IV, 17)

To Shakuntala the Rishi's prescription is:

Serve yours elders and treat friendly all your co- queens
Be generous of gifts with your attendants, quite and composed during the good days
In condition of your husband's displeasure don't react in the same measure
This way do the girls achieve the position of a housewife, contrary they destroy the family.

In the end of the scene Kanva feels a satisfaction of having been relieved of the cares of a daughter which is the predicament of every Indian father even in the 21st century:

The daughter is the property of others. Today, having handed over to the owner

My heart is relaxed in a way when one hands over the costly item kept under one's charge.

There is little flicker of *vir rasa* in the Ist and the VII Acts. The hunting scene evokes the feeling of courage and zeal when the King is driving after a deer, there is a tinge of *vir rasa*. In the last act Shakuntal's son Sarvadaman plays with a cub of lion and evokes both *vir* and *adbhut rasas*

The third dominant rasa in the play is *hasya*(laughter) which is evoked when Dushyanta and his court clown Madhvya meet and discuss Shakuntala's beauty in the Act II or when Madhvya ridicules Dushyanta's folly of not accepting Shakuntala(Act VI). However the humour and its ethos does not click much with the modern audience as the cultural context of the time of the play is incomprehensible today. Rest of the *rasa*-s are absent in Shakuntalam.

Self-Assessment Questions III

1. Which is the exact European word for *rasanishpatti*?
2. What is the *sthayibhava* of vir rasa?
3. Whis is the predominant rasa in Avt IV of the play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam?*

16.5. CHARACTERIZATION

Edwin Gerow in his Introduction "Sanskrit Dramtic Theory and Kalidasa's Plays" to Barbara Stoler Miller's translation of *Abhjnanshakuntalam* says "that the characters in Sanskrit drama are not so much stylization of familiar individuals as they are personifications of role types embedded in Indian culture"(p, 45). He concludes that the drama in the Indian ethos is a celebration of hierarchy. And that in a well ordered universe the identities, that isd the character roles in a universe are not acquired but given. The nataka celebrates a reality of higher type, i.e., the ideal hierarchy that is dharma. Its characters are chosen from the matrix of myths and the characters are supposed to be "responsible for the other world, the everyday world outside the theatre" (p, 46). He cites an example of Dushyant and Shakuntala who in his view are the father and mother of the Indian nation. Bhavabhuti's Uttarramcharitam depicts Rama as the hero. Rama is courteous, kindly, generous, competent, gentle spoken, popular, pure, eloquent, well descended, stable, young, intelligent, energetic, having a fine memory, insightful, artistic, self respecting, courageous, consistent, vigorous, learned in the sciences, and observant of dharma. These are the traits of the nayaka, hero of the play. The hero is possessed of the action not to be possessed by the action. Whatever action confronts him in the play is suited to him and within his power and ken to be handled easily.

Among the subordinate characters, Gerrow believes, the chief is *vidushaka*, a privileged buffoon, but also the king's minister of amorous affairs (p. 49). He is a *brahmin* and a foil to the king's sentimentality. Like the buffoon of Malvikagnimitram Madhavya of Shakuntalam also brings together the hero and the heroine. He is a gourmet and self-indulgent. He is almost like a kin to the king and in Act II is sent back to Hastinapur to

participate in a propitiatory ritual to be held by the king's mother. The vidushaka is always a fallen Brahmin. Madhavya is even unable to read and write Sanskrit. He is given the role of a fallen *brahmin* who knows no asceticism, no diplomacy and no magical powers.

Sarangarava is another significant character in the play. He has the competence and capacity to challenge the authority of the king himself. He can call him false and hypocrite just in the court. He fails to control his emotions which as a stylized character of Sanskrit dramas he could have done.

16.5.1. Shakuntala

The parentage: The very descendance of Shakuntala from a divine royal ascetic Vishwamitra and a celestial nymph Menka decides the beauty and strength of her character. Born of a divine union, she inherits the heavenly beauty of her mother and father. If her irresistible charms fascinate Dushyanta's heart at the very first sight, that is a convincing reason for it. As a heroine of the play she is the perfect picture of womanhood. She is strong morally too. In spite of the curse of Durvasa and in spite of the king's refusal to accept her she maintains her cool. She only wails but does not curse her husband knowing full well that the latter is under the influence of the curse of Durvasa. She is flown away to Marichi's hermitage at Hemkut Mountain. Her innocence as a girl scintillates the audience with spiritual joy. She does not know the art of dressing, nor does she know the manners of response to the advances of love of Dushyanta. She just suffers from the fire of Kamdeva and only yearns to meet her lover. The idea of writing a letter is suggested to her by her mates Anusuya and Priyamvada. With the sufferings in the IVth, Vth and VIIth acts she achieves a spiritual calm and becomes the fittest agency to accomplish the final purushartha of Moksha.

She remains the centre of attraction in five out of Seven Acts. Her absence occurs only in Act II and VI. She is courted by Dushyanta in Act II and III. She is pictured in the Sylvan forest of Kanva's hermitage. Then in Act V, she goes to meet the king and her husband Dushyanta. She is out rightly rejected by the king as his wife and forced to weep outside the king's palace where she is noticed by her celestial mother Menaka and flown up to Marichi's hermitage on Hemkut mountain. Although she is absent in the aforecited two Acts, she alone remains the points of discussion all through the Acts. The maximum number of *sloka*-s on her beauty, gestures of love shown by her are found in Act II.

Fascination for Dushyanta: Brought up in hermitage among men and women leading ascetic lives, she too imbibes the spirit of that life (M.R. Kale, LXIX). She is not a girl; she is a youthful maiden between fifteen and eighteen with full-grown limbs. She is abyaaj manohar bapuh, a beauty without artificiality. The excuses she finds out to have a look at Dushyanta are not coquettish but natural .She remains unaware of the working of the passion of love till she sees the king On the first appearance of the passion she speaks to herself "Why on seeing this man I have been surrounded by feelings which are inimical to the ethos of a hermitage!" She keeps her feelings concealed even from her friends till ultimately she is over seized by the passion and she feels helpless. In the scene where she finally embraces Dushyanta she maintains the modesty of an Aryan female. She requests Dushyanta: "Paurava, protect my modesty. Although obsessed by love

passion, I do not forget who I am". This lively sense of female dignity and her respect for her elders heightens her dignity. Even after being discarded by her husband she does not lose her love and respect for him and thereafter lives a life of celibacy in the hermitage of Marichi.

Love for nature and its denizens: She holds passionate love for the trees, creepers, plants and animals of the penance grove in the Ashrama of Kanva. We are told in Act IV that Shakuntala has been rearing a fawn which she found wounded on the leg. When departing for her husbands home the same fawn tugs on to her clothes as if imploring not to go. Surprised, Shakuntala asks as to who is holding on to her clothes. Kanva answers:

> This fawn whom you reared with handful of wild rice,
> To whose mouth wounded with the sharp points of Kusa grass
> You applied the healing oil of Ingudi
> This foster son of yours stands in your way (Act IV, 14).

The mutual affection between the vegetative world and Shakuntala is to intimate that when the disciples of Kanva go ask for ornaments for Shakunatala who will adorn herself for visiting her husband's place, there is a rivalry among the trees and plants to gift her different adornments:

> By a certain tree was offered to her silk garments, white like the moon and suited to the auspicious occasion.
> By another was exuded the lac-dye for application to her feet
> Ornaments were presented by other trees through the sylvan deities
> With the hands revealed as far as the wrist, as if vying with each other by bursting forth of tender sprouts. (Act IV, 5)

Kanva also compares the growth of Shakuntala with a creeper which has embraced the branches of a mango tree. Thus Shakuntala has also won a suitable husband. The famous stanza in which Kanva seeks permission of trees and plants to allow Shakuntala to go to her husband's home is another view of her love for the trees. The rishi says that she would not drink water before watering the plants and trees, would not pluck flowers from the plants though fond of wearing them on her body. She would celebrate as festival the first flowering in a plant. When sending Madhvaya back to Hastinapur Dushyanta makes an apt comment about Shakuntala: "How can there be a love between me the girl brought up with the fawns?"

Innocence and experience: Shakuntala is destined to pass from innocence of Kanva's hermitage to the corruption of Hastinapur court, Although the transition and sufferings well explained through the curse of Durvasa, it still gives out a suggestion that the court is an experience, and a bitter experience for the innocent Shakuntala. Even before, her courtship with a man from the capital is a kind of encounter between the innocence and experience. Dushyanta's gift of as ring which is the royal insignia and also a passport the Hastinapur court gives a concealed hint that the courts sometime need a verification of identity which is never dreamt of in a Tapovana.

Shakuntala is rejected by the king as expected and is also abandoned by Sharangrava, Shardhvata and Gautami. She prays the Earth to gape and give her space to die. But suddenly her mother appears in a flash of light and lifts her up to the sky and then to Hemkuta, the hermitage of Marichi. There she matures as a mother and wife: fulfils her

duties of rearing Sarvadamana, never hopeful of the return of the father. But the destiny brings Dushyanta to the hermitage of Marichi where the discovery takes place.

She is described by Dushyanta as:

> "Ah, this is her ladyship Shakuntala
> Who wearing a pair of dusky garments
> With face emaciated by her observance of vows
> Having had her hair tied up once for all and of pure conduct
> Has been practicing one long vow of separation from me , extremely cruel(VII, 21).

Shakuntala pardons her husband with the philosophical conslolation:

> "Certainly an evil deed done by me in a past life obstructing the virtue was in those days about to bear its fruit, by which my lord, although compassionate (by nature) became hard hearted to me."(VII)

Thus Shakuntala's character can best be summarized with Goethe's remarks on the book *Shakuntalam* itself:

> Wouldst thou the young year's blossom and the fruits of its decline
> And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured feasted, fed?
> Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?
> I name thee, O Shakuntal, and all that once is said(Trans. E.B.Eastwick)

16.5.2. Dushyanta

He is the hero of the play and shorn of all the weaknesses of the Dushyanta of Mahabharat. He belongs to the category of dhiroddat hero. He possesses all the qualities of the hero of a classical drama: He is courteous, kindly, generous, competent, gentle spoken, popular, pure, eloquent, well descended, stable, young, intelligent, energetic, having a fine memory, insightful, artistic, self respecting, courageous, consistent, vigorous, learned in the sciences, and observant of dharma.

He appears young, between thirty and thirty five as is revealed by his craze for hunting. His love passion in the II, III and VI acts once again confirms his age as a young man who is capable of such passionate lovemaking. His first appearance makes an imposing impression upon Priyamvada. To her he appears to be a young man of wise form, wise gestures, youthful, handsome, majestic of sweet address.

Extreme nobility of mind: He belongs to a tradition in which polygamy for a king was sanctioned. He is youthful and in his favour stands the royal custom. Thus, his fascination for Shakuntala is not adulterous but a healthy sensation within a framework of a culture. He is neither a rigid monogamist nor a loose libertine. He is imbued with the high principles of moral conduct and never slips out any instinct of illicit or lewd passion. The moment he feels sensation of some good omen in his body, he investigates first whether the girl for which his heart throbs is a Brahmin or Ksatriya girl. Then he confirms that the girl is neither married nor betrothed. After confirming the parentage and marital status of the girl, he allows his heart to harbor the feeling of love. (1.25). He makes a sanctimonious love to Shakuntala by offering to her the contract of a form of marriage called Gandharva Vivaha.

Reverence for the sages: He shows great reverence for the sages of the ashrama and solicits for their comfort. He leaves behind his retinue and enters the ashrama alone. The ascetic devotion of the hermits naturally commands respect even from a king. On the call of a hermit he withdraws his arrow aimed at a stag, bows to the rishi-s and shows equal respect for the girls watering plants in the hermitage. He says to his attendant that one should enter the ashrama-s in a humble manner, lest ones behavior offends the inmates of the hermitage. He is equally respectful to women. Pressurized to accept Shakuntala as his wife in Act V, he reacts: "anirvarniyam parkalatra", one should not look at the face of other's spouses. No one even the emperor like Dushyanta can be moved by a celestial beauty like Shakuntala, given that the latter already has so many queens in his court. It is rather the outcome of the curse that the king altogether forgets his deed of marriage" katham pramattah prathamam kritaamiva"(like a drunken man forgets his previous acts).

Growth of the character: We find a gradual growth of the character of Dushyanta. In the first act he becomes curious to see the girl who has been given charge of the ashrama of Kanva. Entering into the ashrama he is awe struck by the sight of three beautiful girls. Romantic and nymphomaniac by nature, Dushyanta grows curious to know more about the girls. Hiding behind a tree he observes the girls and discovers that one of them is unimaginably beautiful. He overhears the dialogues of the girls and concludes that the beautiful girl is Shakuntala who is growing in her limbs bigger than the tree bark clothes she is wearing. In a lewd manner he leaps up in front of the girls to flail away the bumble bee which has been troubling Shakuntala's face. His curiosity is satisfied by Anusuya and Priyamvada who reveal the parentage of the girl. Dushyanta discloses his own identity and the seed of love also germinates in Shakuntala's heart. The king is so impatient for consummation in love that he does not wait for the return of rishi Kanva to seek permission of the latter. Exploiting the innocence and innate sensations of the girl he executes the ceremony of gandhava vivaha with the girl. All these acts and expression thereof reveal Dushyanta in a poor light. He is not a dignified character in the beginning. He appears to be an ordinary love lorn lad in the beginning. But in Act V he begins to accomplish seriousness and dignity when put into a critical moment of accepting a paragon of beauty as his wife whom he has married in the past. Owing to the curse he has forgotten the event and cannot accept a woman as his wife even if she is the paragon of beauty. It is against dharma.

Dushyanta comments about Shakuntala that she carries the inborn cleverness of females which is found even in a cuckoo bird which leaves its young ones in the charge of other birds. On hearing the comments, Sharangrava one of the disciples of Kanva remonstrates Dushyanta in the harshest terms. The king now becomes stern and refuses to accept any woman who is not his lawful wife.

In the following Act VI, on the discovery of the ring of recollection, the intensity of guilt felt by the king makes us realize the sublimity of the character. Dushyanta remembers the flash of the scene when Shakuntala was abandoned in the open court:

> Attempting to follow her relatives when discarded from here, stopped when her father's disciple, as venerable to her as her sire herself, loudly bade her stay , and again cast at my cruel self a glance, dim on account of the flow of tears . It is this that pains me, like a barb smeared with poison (Act VI, 9)

Kalidasa has presented a dramatic irony by creating the character of a nymph Sanumati who remains present invisible all through the remorse being experienced by Dushyanta. Thus, Dushyanta and the audience do not know what Sanumati knows. That Shakuntala has been lifted to Hemkut Mountain by Menaka and her celestial messenger Sanumati has come to know the condition of the King. Sanumati enjoys the pains and sufferings of the King and says that she will report the same to Shakuntala. Through her eyes we see that the King has painted a scene of love with Shakuntala and looking at it altogether confounds the picture with reality. He starts chasing the bee which is shown troubling Shakuntala in the picture. It is state of ecstasy and madness.

The remorseful Dushyanta has put a ban on the celebration of the Spring festival. He remains lost about the sweet tryst with Shakuntala which he discusses with his clown friend Madhavya. Looking at the picture of the meeting with Shakuntala, he remembers with pain the promise he had made to Shakuntala:

> "Count, one at a time (as)each day(passes on), the letters of my name on this ring. As you go to its end, my darling, the persons who will lead (you) to the entrance of my harem, will come for you" (Act VI, 12).

The painful repentance goes deeper realizing the difference between illusion and reality, Dushyanta says:

> Having first repudiated my beloved when she personally came to me, and (now), thinking highly of her drawn in this picture, I have, O friend, entertained a longing for mirage after having crossed, on my way, a stream having abundant water. (Act VII, 16)

Dushyanta, a King: He has the modesty and dignity of a king when is on the hunting game. Hunting is one of his passions. But the moment he enters the vicinity of the ashrama, he commands that the game be stopped and decides to enter the same in a humble demeanor. The first thing he asks the disciples of Kanva is whether the hermitage is facing any disturbance in its ritual performances.

His magnanimity reaches its highest point in the last scene of the play. Marichi asks him to ask a favour and the King answers that the only favour he needs is the wellbeing of the world and the states:

> May the king exert himself for the good of his subjects; may the utterance of those (poets) eminent for knowledge, be honoured; and may thy self-existent Shiva, with his energy diffused in all directions, cancel my cycle of rebirth. (Act VII, 35)

However, his real royal self is visible in Act VI where he dispenses with a case of inheritance, case of a merchant Dhanmitra. According to the existing laws the property of an issueless man after his death would go to the royal exchequer, Dushyanta provides for a new law. If the wife of the dead man is pregnant and if she gave birth to a male child the property would be inherited by the same. One of the Vaitalikas praises him as a king:

With the royal staff, you restrain those that follow the wrong path; you put down disputes and are competent to protect (your people). Wealth being plentiful, one may have, forsooth, a number of relations; but in you are consummated the duties of kinsmen of the subjects (Act V, 8). When the king is intimated of the visit of the rishi-s , along with

Shakuntala to the court, his first response is "Can it be that the penance(tapa) of the ascetics… has been interrupted by obstruction?"

He is the bravest of the braves as he is invited by Indra to fight against the demons, the race of Durjaya (descendants of Kalnemi) who have waged war on the kingdom of heaven. Dushyanta fights and defeats them. As a king he is accomplished in many fine arts. He can appreciate the music of Hanspadika. He exhibits deep knowledge of painting.

Dushyanta is the hero of mythical age and we should not err to apply the ethos of our accursed ironic age to his conduct. The hero and the heroine are the images of perfection which every human being wishes to be. The poetry and music put in mouth by Kalidasa make him the most attractive hero of Indian literature.

16.5.3. The *Vidushaka* (Clown): The vidushaka is universal in all Sanskrit plays. He hails from a Brahmin family but is usually a fallen Brahmin with no formal education and obsession for eating. The vidushaka is usually a friend of the hero to whom the hero confides about his love and the beloved. The vidushaka turns the inside out of every emotion. In Shakuntalam, he is more than a privileged jester. He comes handy to the king when he receives a summon from his mother for attending a ritual at home. He quickly decides that since Madhavya has been treated almost like a son by his mother, the former can attend the ritual, leaving him alone in the ashrama to continue his affair with Shakuntala. Natyashastra says:

A Jester should be dwarfish, possess big (protruding) teeth, hunch backed, bald headed and tawny eyed. He should entertain the audience by imitating people and their manner(ism)s. He should freely be mixing with women and be ready-witted. (XXXV, 76-83).

His language of conversation is prakrita and he produces humour through his wit and grotesque behavior.

The jester of *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is named as Madhavya and he appears in the company of the King in Act II, V, VI. He is an intimate friend of the King and almost like a son to the Queen mother. In the second act, we find him in a melancholy mood since he is tired of running from forest to forest following a king who is crazy for the game of hunting. Dushyant's encounter with Shakuntala is a kind of misfortune for him. But he does not complain to the king that he is apathetic to the whole business of love. He rather pretends to be suffering from body paralysis and is therefore in need of an urgent leave from the forest. When the King asks him for assistance in a matter, he is quick reply is "…in eating sweetmeat?" When the General of the King praises the benefits of hunting game the vidushaka warns him:

> "As for you, you will fall into the jaws of some old bear longing to have a man's nose while roving from forest to forest."(Act I)

He is a confidant in love to the King. The King confides in him:

King: Madhavya, you have not obtained the fruit of your eyes; for you have not seen the object most worthy to be seen.

Vidushaka: Why, Your honour is before me (Act II)

Vidushaka's wry comment on the love business of the King is loaded with meaning:

"Just as one palled with sweet dates has a desire for tamarind, so is this longing of yours, who are scorning the jewels of women in your harem".(Act II)

The King describes the beauty of Shakuntala in the highest form of poetry. To which the vidushaka creates an anti climax:

Then let Your Honour rescue her at once, that she might not fall the hands of some ascetic with his head greasy with the oil of Ingudi"(Act II).

While Madhavay is returning to the Queen mother Dushyanta, afraid of him letting loose the information of the love affair, convinces the former that all he said about Shakuntala was a matter of humour and should not be taken for reality.

Such is the contexting of the vidushaka in the play that he never finds a chance to see Shakuntala. In the II Act he is sent back to the court before getting such an opportunity. In the Vth Act , before the entry of Shakuntala he is sent on an errand to pacify Hanspadika who is reported sad for certain reason . In the VIth Act, Shakuntala is totally absent and even the King does not know where she might be. In the VI act the love lorn King says the Kamdeva has drawn his bow by putting in an arrow of mango flower buds. The Vidushaka repartees that he would beat Kamdeva with his staff. He makes irony of all sentimental outbursts made by the king and tries to console him on the separation.

The vidushaka is fond of eating tasty food. At the end of the VI Act the vidushaka is abducted by the magical act of Matali. The shudder and shock in the act is expressed by the vidushaka in terms of food and preying habits of animals like cats.

"Someone here is breaking me into three pieces like a sugarcane" or

"I have become hopeless of life, like a mouse pounce upon by a cat"

Kalidasa has used the character of the vidusaka as device to give expression to the feelings of love that Dushyanta is nourishing in his heart. As if the encounter between the two lovers is not a sufficient space to paint the entire picture of love, the exchange of dialogues between these two friends further explicates the intensity of love.

The same device has been used for Shakuntala. We come to know of the profundity and intensity of love that is breeding in Shakuntal's heart through the comments made by Anusuya and Priyamvada. They reflect in their light hearted digs at the behavior of Shakuntala the kind of love that is budding in the latter's heart. The centrality of the character of the Vidushaka can easily be guessed by looking at the structure of the plot Two Acts, II and VI are fully dependent on the character of vidushaka who has not only a subsidiary but organic function in the Acts. The action in the Acts moves further because of the character of the vidushaka. He also presents a foil to the sentimentality of the king by letting out his wise and witty comments.

16.5.4. Anusuya and Priyamvada: The two ascetic females are the friends of Shakuntala. They are young, charming and chaste. Like Shakuntala, they also have all the potentials to love or to understand worldly love. They bear a kind of sisterly affection for Shakuntala and have the foreknowledge that being a scion of a royal family , Shakuntala has to be mated with a royal youth, most probably a prince or a king. Therefore they coax her to call for help the king of Hastinapur to rescue her from the attack of a bumble bee. And when they suddenly see the king himself present in the Ashram they visualize the entire context of Shakuntala's future life. It is probably for this reason that the duo do not

object to the advances taking place between Shakuntala and the king. They seem rather assisting the affair and taking it as natural. Both the girls are reported to be beautiful by Dusdhyanta when he first glimpses the three. They have a kind of disinterested love for their friend and understand the difference in the course of life which they have and which Shakuntala will take in future. Priyamvada being the younger is more vivacious while Anusuya being the older is thoughtful and grave.

When Shakuntala is cursed by Durvasa, Anusuya and Priyanvada show their serious concern for their friend. They rush to Durvasha and explain the circumstances under which Shakuntala became negligent of her duties to the sage. They request Durvasha to grant pardon to their friend. Impressed by the innocence and concern of the two young girls, Durvasha modifies his curse and provides for an option which might protect Shakuntala from harm. The two girls remain present form beginning to the end in Act IV and become part of the idyllic ambiance of the play. They accompany Shakuntal to bid farewell for Hastinapur till a place where a water brook is flowing.

16.5.5. Kanva: He is also mentioned as Kashyapa in the play. He is the central character in Act IV. He is the foster father of Shakuntala. In the very Ist Act we are informed that concerned about the evil stars of Shakuntala, he has gone to Shachitirtha to pacify the evil effect. His concerns for his adopted daughter are expressed in the message he sends for King Dushyanta:

> Having well thought of us, rich in self restraint, and of your own exalted family, as also of that (so well known)flow of attachment (towards you)of this (daughter), springing up spontaneously and not through the exertions of relations, you should accept her with usual honour as one of your wives. Further than this depends upon destiny: it cannot, indeed be demanded by the wife's relatives. (ActIV, 17)

Though a hermit, he is deeply moved by the feeling of separation from his daughter. The kind of wisdom he preaches to Shakuntala for living in a husband's house is believed to be a sublime piece of poetry and wisdom:

> Serve your elders, and act the part of a loving friend towards your co-wives; though wronged, do not act in a refractory way towards your husband in a fit of anger; be extremely polite towards your dependants, and not elated with pride in prosperity. Thus do young ladies attain the dignity of a housewife; those of an opposite character are a curse to their family. (Act IV, 18).

His good wishes to the departing Shakuntala should be the highest kind of poetry in world literature. These lines far supersede the beauty of lines spoken by the fairies to the couple Ferdinand and Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

> May her path, charming at intervals with lakes(appearing) verdant with lotus creepers, and with the heat of the sun's rays mitigated by trees affording thick shade, have its dust soft with the mixture of (or have the soft dust of) the pollen of lotuses, be (pleasant) with a gentle favourable breeze , and blissful(Act IV, 11).

Self-Assessment Questions IV

1. Who is the male central character in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*?
2. Who is Priyamvada?
3. Who is Madhavaya and what is his role in the play?

16.6. THE NATURE AND STATE OF INNOCENCE IN *SHAKUNTALAM*

Kalidasa is a poet who cannot express himself outside nature. *Ritusamhara* is a decription of the six seasons of nature; *Meghdutam* puts its protagonist in the Himalaya. *Kumarsambhava* is again ambianced in the Himalaya and *Raghuvamsha Mahakavyam* moves through moving description of nature. Dilip, one of the Raghuvanshi kings, takes his cow through the slopes of the Himalaya for grazing. The overwhelming beauty of Kalidasa's nature poetry is divine in taste.

Abhijñānaśākuntalam can also not be conceived without nature. Except for the Vth Act, the setting of the play is in nature. The opening *Manglacharana* (auspicious words) prays to Lord Shiva to bless the audience with the help of the eight visible elements of nature:

> May Lord Shiva,endowed with the eight visible forms, protect you –(the eight forms, viz.) that which is the first creation of the creator (Water) that which conveys to the gods the oblation offered according to customary rites (Fire), that which is the sacrificer (Brahmin), those two that regulate time (Sun and Moon), that which has sound for its quality and which pervades the universe (Ether), that which they call the source of seeds (Earth), and that by which creatures possess breath (Air). (Act I, 1)

The play also ends with a reference to the nature. The bharatvakya (Epilogue), says:

> May the kings tend to the interests of prakriti (nature)
> May the knowledge of the learned increase (Act VII, 35)

The first act opens with the music and poetry being sung to the flight of a black spotted deer being chased by Dushyanta. The race of the chariot of Dushyanta against the undulating landscape is one of the rarest experiences for the audience and the reader. It is followed by the description of the ashrama of Kanva:

> Grains of wild rice lying under the trees fallen from the mouth of the hollows in the interior of which live parrots; in some places are oily stones indicated as being used in breaking the nuts of Ingudi tree; the deer having acquired confidence, bear the noise (of our approach) and do not vary their gait; and the passages to the reservoirs of water are marked with lines of water dripping from the fringe of bark garments.(Act I, 14)

The gentle smoke of the yajna fire is seen rising from different places on the ground, the spaces have been cleaned of the sharp blades of darbha grass, thick creepers for dense groves here and there and the ascetics and the deers are moving around unaware of each other's presence. A thickly interwoven creeper bower in the forest and outside the camp of Dushyanta is used as a backdrop for the performance of the first act. Standing at the cool bank of the Malinai river, Shakuntala, along with her friends is discovered against the breeze scented with the fragrance of flowers. It is in this backdrop, away from the

corruption and noise of the court of Hastinapur, that the king falls in love with Shakuntala. The divinely inherited Shakuntla, a royal king and an intoxicating natural background is used as a setting for love.

Nature is seen in its best form in Act IV. It is the living objects of nature like trees and plants which gift ornaments for Shakuntala. The meeting moment of Night and day impresses one of the disciples of the hermitage:

> On the one side the lord of the flora (the Moon) is going to the peak of the western (lit. setting) mountain, and on the other is the Sun having the golden light in the east as its precursor. By the simultaneous rising and setting of the two luminaries this world seems to be governed in its transition (Act IV, 2)

Even the social codes are decided by the natural phenomenon. Sharangrava reminds Kanva that:

> …the scriptures command that a beloved person should be followed as far as the margin of water (spring or brook). Here is the bank of lake; so you should give us your errand and return.(Act IV)

While being escorted by her father, Shakuntala overhears the cry of a chakravaak bird that has momentarily been stranded from her mate. The reference is obvious to suggest that the plight of the bird is similar to that of Shakuntala.

Nature is present even in the V Act where with the tree bark clothes, Shrangrava and Sharadhvata along with Gautami are present. Even the attire of Shakuntala is still from the sylvan forestn backgroung. In the VI Act also the king and Madhava are sitting in the bower of Madhavi creeper. In the VII Act Dushyannta flies through the gust of clouds and alights at Mount Hemkuta. In the hermitage of Marichi we find the divine trees like Mandara, Kalpvriksha, and Ashoka. The lakes there are described to be full of golden lotuses.

Shakuntala is herself the daughter of nature. She doesnot drink water before offering the same to the trees and plants. The first flowering in the trees and plants is an occasion of festivity for her. Although fond of decorating herself, ne never plucks flowers and buds from the plants. A wounded fawn was found by her in the forest which she brought to the hermitage and treated to health. She reared the fawn with handful of wild rice and applied different kinds of oils to its bruise. The same deer when grown young plucks on her clothes when she is leaving for Hastinapur. The mango tree and the creeper climbing around it grow parallel to Shakuntala and Kanva compares the two situations alike. The creeper has now received the support of the mango tree and Shakuntala ha met her husband, the chief anchor of a woman's life. While departing, she embraces the Vanjotsana creeper and requests her friends to tender to the creeper in her absence.

The nature responds to her love. The foliage of Keshara trees invites her to rest; the fawn doesnot let her go. The trees and plants of the forest offer her rich gifts. So sad are the elements of nature at her departure that the deers have freezed while eating half the stalks of grass, peacocks have stopped dancing, and trees shed tears in the form of yellowish leaves. One of the deers named Dirghapaga drinks water only from Shakuntala's hands. The bond of love between Shakuntala and the nature is so profound that Kanva in a loud voice asks for the permission of natural phenomena to let Shakuntala go. Nature in Shakuntalam is an inseparable identity from the human beings. Anusuya, Priyamvada,

Sharanrava, Gautamai, Sharadhvata, kanva—all the charcters are nature themselves. They are the beings of an age in which the hiatus between the two had not yet ruptured.

Self-Assessment Questions V

1. In which Act do we find a description of day and night meeting together?
2. Who stops dancing owing to pain caused by separation from Shakuntala?
3. What is Kanva's parting wish to Shakuntala?

16.7. FOUR *PURUSHAARTHA*-S IN *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM*

That here exists a concept of four *purushartha*-s in *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* is suggested by a sloka in Act IV where Kanva answers to the question of Shakuntala about her next visit to the *ashrama:*

> After having long been the co-wife of the Earth bounded by the Four Oceans, and having settled (in marriage and kingdom) your son from Dushyanta that will no opposing warrior(to challenge him), you will again set foot in this tranquil hermitage, accompanied by your husband who will have transferred the burden of family to his son (Act IV,20)

The stanza suggests that you will accomplish *dharma, kama* and *artha* during your tenure as a queen by living through the *grihastha* and *vanprashthaashrama*-s and then return to the hermitage in the *sanyasa ashrama.*

In the ancient Indian way of living the goal of life was to accomplish four *purushartha*-s or accomplishments. These were *dharma, artha, kama*, and *moksha*. *Dharma* is the routine rituals of life which help one lead to final attainment of the blissful seat variously described as Garden of Eden, *jannat* and *moksha* by several religious sects. *Dharma* means to live pious life within the framework of normative behavior: to have patience, to be ready for pardon, to restrain, to be non violent, to be truthful, to control desires, to be wise, to attain knowledge, to have no anger. *Dharma* has to be combined with *artha* and *kama*. Collection of wealth without dharma is immoral and indulgence in *kama* not sanctioned by *dharma* is also immoral. Only that kind of *artha* and *kama* which permitted by *dharma* leads to the attainment of *moksha.*

In the play we find that all the characters follow their *dharma.* The *dharma* of a King is to feed, control and protect its subject. Dushyanta does that. He protects not only his own subjects but even the kingdom of Indra. He remains worried about uninterrupted tapa of the sages of the hermitage. He embraces Shakuntala not before going into a religious sacrament of marriage with her. Marriage is also an act of *dharma.* Absence of the institution of marriage will create anarchy in the human society. Marriage empowers us to participate in yajna ritual. Yajna gives birth to clouds, Clouds give us rains and the food is possible only when we have rains. The food of the gods is the sacrifices offered in the yajna. Thus the dharma controls the entire course of life. Dushyanta, Shakuntala, and the ascetics all the characters follow their respective *dharma.*

Kama is love, fascination for music and arts and for all things beautiful. Dushyanta the king and the young man ought to have the strain of *kama* in him. As a king, he already loves so many religiously wedded queens. Still a young man in his thirties, he is permitted by his social codes to have another marriage and for that to fall in love with the

best representative of women. He falls in love with Shakuntala. Shakuntala, although in a restrained manner, also becomes victim of the passion of *kama*. *Kama* is a passion created within us for the continuity of the posterities. Therefore Kamadeva is one of the prominent deities of the Indian pantheon. The hero and the heroine realize their instinct of *kama* successfully and give birth to a noble son who becomes the founder of the Indian nation Bharata. A son is also need for the post life rituals of the ancestors. Therefore the *kama* suffused with the streak of dharma leads to the state of moksha.

Artha is taken for granted in the play. Dushyanta is a king and has been maintaining the economical wellbeing of the empire and of himself through the tradition of royalty. It is just hinted at in the play the he has been taking care of the affairs of the empire. By maintaining the resources for the stomachs of his people and for the performance of the *yajna*-s, Dushyanta has been supporting the cause of Dharma also.

Moksha in the play is accomplished by the reunion of the lovers and by procreation of a capable son. The ascetics of the two hermitages are the keepers of the tradition of *moksha*. But for Dushyanta and Shakuntala, the purushartha of moksha is attained only when they are reunited and then blessed by sage Marichi.

Self-Assessment Questions VI

1. Which of the four *purusharthas* is attained in the second act of the play?
2. Which single *sloka* states about the four *Purusharthas* in the play?

16.8. *ABHIJÑĀNAŚĀKUNTALAM* THROUGH THE MULTIMEDIA

The play has been adapted for purpose of painting, sculpture, music, theatre, and films down the ages. Painters of all the ages have tried to draw the impressive scenes of the play. The latest among them is Raja Ravi Verma who has painted may famous scenes from the IVth Act of Shakuntalam.

Shakuntala in Theatre: Kuddiyattam, the oldest surviving form of theatre in Kerala, has been performing the play till date in the styles combining together the idiom of Kathakali, Kaliaripattu and Theyyam. However, legendary Kutiyattam artist and Natyashastra scholar Nātyāchārya Vidūshakaratnam Guru Mani Madhavacharya choreographed a Kuddiyattam production of The Recognition of Sakuntala. (Wikipaedia) A production directed by Tarek Iskander was mounted for a run at London's Union Theatre in January and February 2009. The play is also appearing on a Toronto stage for the first time as part of the Harbourfront World Stage program. An adaptation by the Magis Theatre Company [5] featuring the music of Indian-American composer Rudresh Mahanthappa had its premiere at La MaMa in New York February 11–28, 2010.

In our times, several Indian theatre directors like B.V. Karanth, Ratan Thiyam, Prasanna, K.N.Pannikar and others have directed Shakuntalam in their respective languages and respective idioms. National School of Drama's annual Bharat Rang Mahotsav 2014 showcased K.N.Pannikar's Hindi production 'Chhaya Shakuntalam'. The National Sanskrit Academy Delhi has also been promoting directors to produce Sanskrit versions of the play. Sanskrit Akademi of Uttarakhand Government has also produced the Sanskrit version of the play in the year 2014.

16.9. GLOSSARY

Purvaranga*:* The preliminaries like benedictory words, entry of chorus and Sutradhar and Nati, technically known as Nandi, Pratyahara and Avtarana etc., are known as Purvarnga of a play.

Naandi: Benedictory prayer for a deity in the opening is known as Nandi.

Sutradhara: The Director and multiple role player in a play.

Nati*:* Sutradhara's female co-artist

Vishkambhak*:* That part of the plot which is suggested off stage in the beginning of the play, a term parallel to Prelude.

Praveshak**:** The action taking place off stage, and located between two acts

Vidusha*k:* Clown, jester

Kanchuki(Masculine gender): Advisor and attendant of a lord

Rasanishpatti*:* Enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure*, catharsis*

16.10. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

I

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.1.
2. Refer to our discussion at 16.2.
3. Refer to our discussion at 16.2.

II

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.3.
2. Refer to our discussion at 16.3.
3. Refer to our discussion at 16.3.

III

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.4.
2. Refet to our discussion at 16.4.
3. Refer to our discussion at 16.4.

IV

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.5.
2. Refer to our discussion at 16.5.
3. Refer to our discussion at 16.5.

V

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.6.
2. Refer to our discussion at 16.6.
3. Refer to our discussion at 16.6.

VI

1. Refer to our discussion at 16.7.
2. Refer to our discussion at 16.7.

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16.12. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Write an essay on the use of myth of Shakunatala and Kalidasa's treatment of it.

2. What is the ring motif in Shakuntalam? How does it serve the purpose of plot and theme of the play?

3. Draw character sketch of any one of the following:

a) Shakuntala
b) Dushyanta
c) Vidushaka
d) Anusuya and Priyamvada
e) Kanva

4. Write an essay on the treatment of nature in Shakuntalam.

5. Do you think Kalidasa has followed the Sanskrit classical rules of plot construction in Shakuntalam?

6. Explain with exhaustive comments the four great slokas of Act IV.

7. Describe Kalidasa as a poet.

UNIT 17 VIJAY TENDULKAR

GHASHIRAM KOTWAL-I

17.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous two units you read *Abhijnanashakuntalam,* a touching love tale of Shakuntala and Dushyant written by Kalidas, the renowned Sanskrit playwright. In this unit as well as the next one, we will be taking up a well known Marathi play, *Ghashiram Kotwal,* written by the much acclaimed Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar. In this unit we will focus on Vijay Tendulkar as a dramatist so that we are able to understand and appreciate the play *Ghashiram Kotwal* in a better way.

17.2. OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- List the qualities of Vijay tendulkar as a dramatist
- Evaluate Tendulkar's contribution toModern Marathi Theatre
- Discuss the major themes of Tendulkar's plays

17.3. AN INTRODUCTION TO VIJAY TENDULKAR

Vijay Tendulkar (6 January 1928–19 May 2008) is a playwright, scriptwriter for films and television, an essayist, political journalist, and a social commentator. His most recognized plays are *Gidhāde*, *The Vultures* (1961), *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe, 'Silence! The Court is On'* (1967), *Ghāshirām Kotwāl* (1972), and *Sakhārām Binder* (1972). Many of Tendulkar's plays have drawn their theme and plot from the real events of life which the playwright might have seen personally. Most of his characters in the plays live at the subhuman level of existence. To the category belong the protagonists of *Sakharam Binder, Giddhade* and *Kanyadaan,* who depict such subhuman existence.

Tendulkar remained not only a towering theatre personality but also a serious social thinker writing features, attending seminars, and participating in the contemporary social movements. He also worked as a Professor guiding students in U.S. in the art of script writing. His plays have originally been written in Marathi and have thereafter been translated into Hindi, English and many other Indian languages. His success as a playwright can be guessed from the number of productions of his plays like *Ghashiram Kotwal, Sakharam Binder* and *Shanta, Court Chalu Ahe.* These plays have seen more than one thousand shows all over the world.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born on 6 January 1928 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra in the family of a small time clerk and owner of a publication house. The environment in the family was predominantly literary and the child was so much influenced by his surroundings that he wrote his first story when he was eight. In the company of his father and brothers, he would go to watch English plays. His dramatic genius began to surface at the age of eleven when he directed a play for his childhood chums.

In1942, at the age of 14, he abandoned his studies and joined the Indian Freedom Movement, risking alienation from his family and friends. He kept writing during this phase, but for his own satisfaction, and publishing these early works was far from his mind.

Tendulkar's literary career took off with a job of writing for newspapers. His two plays *Āmchyāvar Kon Prem Karnār (Who will Love us?)*, and Gruhastha *(The Householder)* were written in the early 20s. But the plays were not mature enough to receive due recognition and disheartened him to a large extent.

Breaking the silence in 1956, his play *Shrimant* fetched him success and popularity. *Shrimant* brought forth a shocking theme for the hardliners in the society. One of the women in the play conceives a child before any formal marriage and decides to keep it while her father, in order to save his social status, tries to buy a husband for his tainted daughter.

Tendulkar's struggle for survival forced him to live in hutments (chawls) of Mumbai where he had the first hand experience of living in subhuman conditions, and the consequences such existence brought upon the human nature. He brought in themes stamped with authenticity to the Marathi theatre of his times. Tendulkar's writings radically transformed the motifs, myths and themes of the Marathi theatre of 1950s and the 60s, Theatre groups like Rangayan and others consisting of the famous actors like Shriram Lagoo, Mohan Agashe, and Sulabha Deshpande not only imparted authenticity and power to Tendulkar's characters but also set in motion a new movement in the modern experimental theatre.

Tendulkar won Maharashtra State government awards in 1956, 1969 and 1972; and Mahārāshtra Gaurav Puraskār in 1999. He was given the Sangeet Nātak Akademi Award in 1970, and was awarded the Sangeet Nātak Akademi Fellowship ("Ratna Sadasya"), their highest honour, in 1998. In 1984, the Government of India conferred upon him Padma Bhushan award for his literary accomplishments. [29]

Tendulkar died in Pune on 19 May 2008 struggling against a disease called myasthenia gravis.

In a writing career that spans well over 5 decades, Tendulkar has written 27 full-length plays and 25 one-act plays.

17.4. VIJAY TENDULKAR'S PLAYS

Tendulkar's *Gidhāde (The Vultures*) written in 1961 and produced in 1970 introduces a morally collapsed family structure which leads to the inevitable situation of violence. The violence manifests in domestic, sexual, communal, and political forms. Tendulkar's play *Shāntatā! Court Chālu Aahe ("Silence! The Court Is in Session")* (1956) was based on a short story *Die Panne ("Traps")* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. First staged in 1967, the play proved out to be one of the bests of Tendulkar, so much so that Satyadev Dubey adapted it for a movie in 1971, the screenplay for which was written by Tendulkar himself.

Sakhārām Binder

In his 1972 play, *Sakhārām Binder (Sakhārām, the Binder*), brings out a shocking theme of a man Sakharam who forces live-in-relationship on hapless women, on the condition that he would provide them maintenance and a roof to live under. Sakharam lives as a social beast who considers himself privileged as a male to exploit and torture the females. He is not governed by social morality or ethics and is thus free to use women for his own

pleasure and convenience. He regularly gives "shelter" to abandoned women and uses them for his sheer sexual gratification. He is profusely abusive in his language to women. Each woman is told that she is free to leave whenever she likes. He will even give her a sari, 50 rupees and a ticket to wherever she wants to go. It is suggested in the play that he uses and then abandons (sometimes murders) these women. Sakharam binder and his women live through the miseries of subhuman existence.

In 2004, Tendulkar wrote a single-act play, *His Fifth Woman* — his first play in the English language — as a sequel to his earlier exploration of the plight of women in *Sakhārām Binder*.

Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe (Silence! The Court Is in Session)

Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe (Silence! The Court Is in Session) was written in 1963 and was first performed in 1968, under the direction of Arvind Deshpande, with Sulbha Deshpande in the lead role.

The action of the play takes place within a group of teachers who are planning to stage a play in a village. One of the members of the cast does not turn up. A local theatre artist is asked to replace him. A rehearsal is fixed and a mock trial is staged to make him understand the court procedure. A mock charge of infanticide is leveled against Miss Benare, one of the members of the cast. Then the pretend-play suddenly turns into an accusatory game. Gradually it emerges from the witness that Miss Benare has actually killed an out-of-wedlock child by Prof. Damle, the missing member of the cast.

The play was based on a short story *Die Panne ("Traps")* by Friedrich Dürrenmatt. First staged in 1967, the play proved out to be one of the bests of Tendulkar, so much so that Satyadev Dubey adapted it for a movie in 1971, the screenplay for which was written by Tendulkar himself.

Kanyadan

Kanyadan deals with the socio cultural tensions generated by casteism in India. Jyoti, a soft spoken and well-bred Brahmin girl decides to marry Arun Athavale, young Dalit poet. Her brother and mother warn her against the consequences of such a mismatch. In the enterprise she is supported by her father Mr. Nath who is a renowned social worker. For Nath, this marriage is the realization of his ideals. But soon after the marriage, Arun becomes vindictive against his wife. The repression he and his caste have suffered at the hands of the upper caste work him up and he decides to punish his wife for the entire Brahmin race. He beats her even during pregnancy and hurls the worst kind of abuses on her. Exhausted, Jyoti decides to leave her husband but her father tries to save the marriage because it covers his hollow idealism. In the end Jyoti also decides to return to the path of idealism which she has created for herself.

Gidhāde (The Vultures)

Papa Pitale and his brother Sakharam establish a construction company named “The Hari Sakharam Company”, which prospers due to their hard work. Papa deceitfully grabs all the power of the company leaving his brother Sakharam penniless. Papa’s sons Ramakant and Umakant, who have already received their shares of the father’s wealth, assault him and drive him out. They then quarrel among themselves for the money they received from their father. Their sister Manik, who secretly collaborated in their plan against Papa,

has illicit relations with her paramour, the Raja of Hondur who impregnates her. Ramakant and Umakant now plot to blackmail the Raja to extract money from him. But the Raja succumbs to a heart- attack. Now, both of them kill Manik in the womb and kill her unborn baby. Ramakant's wife Rama, who has been childless for a long time, gets pregnant with Rajaninath's child, who is the illegitimate son of Papa Pitale.

Now Manik, having lost her child, unleashes her fury on Rama, and aborts her child. The whole family is stuck in this horrifying reality that offers them no deliverance, while Rajaninath, knowing that there is no escape for these tortured souls, still prays for mercy.

17.4.1. Tendulkar's plays in Theatre

Theatre artists and theatre performers turn out to be the best scriptwriters of the plays and films. They unconsciously and consciously imbibe the techniques of script writing. They know the arrangement of the scene and sequence of the scene which would best convey the meaning and bind the audience into empathy or Brechtian intellectual empathy. An actor turned script writer knows how long a dialogue can sustain the interest of the audience and at which point the audience may get distracted by along dialogue. An actor scriptwriter also knows how to design scenes and find out devices to shift one set to another if the set has to be placed on the stage during the fade out. In several scenes in *Ghashiraam Kotwal*, Tendulkar has used dance and song to present a scene which are only mimes and contain no dialogues. Such a scriptwriter also knows the points of action which can be illuminated with the help of music and song and those which do not need any vocal or instrumental music. One reason for stage success of Tendulkar's plays was probably his thorough experience in acting and other department like, light, music, set and property, of theatre.

Tendulkar's plays came to the stage soon after being written or published. Most of plays went first to the stage and then to the press. And most of the plays triggered controversy once the audience saw them on the stage with full interpretation achieved through mime, dialogues, music, dance, costume and sets. The ones to generate worst controversy were *Sakharam Binder, Giddhare* and *Ghasiram Kotwal*. For *Sakharam Binder* the producers had to fight a long legal battle in the court, because the lascivious and abusive character like Sakharam was too offensive to the sensibilities of the lower middle class and aristocratic audience of Puna. Not only the language but the types of fallen characters created in the plays came as a cultural shock to the people. The primordial instincts which Tendulkar's characters carried in themselves were something the audience had never confronted before. Sitting in the theatre they felt that they themselves were being unstrapped of their clothes of modesty.

In the following lines let us discuss the stage techniques used in presentation of the four representative plays—*Giddhare, Sakharam Binder, Shantat! Court Chalu Ahe* and *Ghasiram Kotwal.*

Scenography: Scenography or scenic design is the first requirement for a play in the modern proscenium theatre. It creates the backdrop or background against which the action of the play takes place. For example., the action of the play *Shantata !Court Chalu Ahe* is shown in a room with one door opening in the background and the court room created in the same room on an elevated platform which otherwise is used as a lobby of

the kitchen. A dock for presenting the witnesses and the respondent and the plaintiff is also erected. On the downside there are tables and chairs. Some character use the edge of the raised platform for sitting comfortably and listening to the arguments of the lawyers.

The same kind of set with chairs and tables and bedroom is used in the play Giddhare. In *Sakharam Binder* the set changes: There are bound and unbound books scattered around, shabby curtains used to compartmentalize the room. The backdrop is formed by a musty wall which may contain a small window. As a whole the room has to be made as stuffy. But *Ghashiram Kotwal* uses almost no scenic design. To entrance gates on the two flanks of the stage are erected to mark the entry or exit of actors. In a scene where Nana encounters Lalita Gauri for the first time during the ritual of Ganapati worship, a frame to fit into the actor Ganesh is brought and fixed upon the spacious ramp close to the cyclorama. The same ramp is used by the choric characters to stand and function as a swaying and waiving curtain.

Costume: The most elaborate costume is worn by the Gulab Bai, the danseuse and courtesan, and, Nana the Chancellor of the Peshwas. In the Second Act, Ghasiram also wears an elaborate royal dress. The choric characters wear just the short cloaks, turbans and white trousers. To act as Shinde Sardars or as the policemen they only change their headgear. Rests of the roles are manipulated by wearing or removing the turbans.

In *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, the characters wear day-to-day life costumes: Saris, shirts etc. Only the actor in the role of a judge wears a black coat. The same kind of routine dress is worn in Giddhare and Sakharam Binder.

Music, song and dance: It is interesting to see that Tendulkar has used dance and song only in *Ghashiram Kotwal.* The play opens with the song and dance for Shri Ganrai and the same kind of song continues in the background to present an irony to the motive of the Brahmins who are going to Bavankhani to enjoy the dance and song of the courtesans, particularly, Gulabibai. The song then glides over to another song which says: Bavankhani mei Mathura Utari/Ram Shiva Hari, Radhekrishna Hari (The brothel has an incantation of Mathura /Remember Ram, Krishan and Hari). The music and song all through the play clashes with the action taking place. The best example is the seventh marriage of Nana with a twelve year old girl. To mark the occasion the chorus sings: "Banni chali Saasre" (The bride goes to her in laws house). The tenor of the song in fact suggests a joyful moment. But here it is rather the pathetic plight of a girl which is heightened by the irony of the context of the song. Rest of the play does not use much music. Music is used only to show transition between the fade- outs and fade-ins.

Tendulakr's plays have been directed by renowned directors like Jabbar Patel, Ram Gopal Bajaja (*Ghashiram Kotwal*), Shriram Lagoo, Maria Mileaf and B.M. Shah (*Giddhare*), and Arvind Deshpande (*Shantata ! Court Chalu Ahe*).

17.4.2. Themes of Tendulkar's Plays

Feminism and Sexuality: Sexuality is suggested to be a primordial drive in all human beings. But in the process of fulfillment of this wild, animal instinct it is the woman who happens to fall at the receiving end. She becomes object of exploitation in the male dominated society which has invented long ago a discourse which takes it for granted that women have to be dominated, forced to do the sexual act even against their wish. In

Ghashiram Kotwal we have such female characters: Gulabi Bai, Lalita Gauri and the Brahmani who is dug out of her house in the midnight. The more pitiable character in the play is a bride who at the age of 16 becomes the seventh wife of Nana. The age old discourse has created the ritual songs like "Banni chali saasre" to glorify any wedding, even the one executed at the age of twelve. It is not only the case of Pune or Maharashtra, the author seems to be suggesting that such lores have been composed over past thousands of years to justify the inhuman treatment to the woman's race. In the play *Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe*, Leela Benare is sexually abused by her own maternal uncle in the childhood and then by a Professor who she wants to love as a mature woman. Tendulkar gives a dhvani, a suggestion of exploitative social system against women by taking the situation for granted, thereby creating meaning through irony.

Jyoti of *Kanyadan* suffers serious pains at the hand of her Dalit husband Arun Athavale who she marries out of her commitments to social idealism. The point of suffering and torture which are lotted to an Indian woman is underlined by Jyoti's decision not to desert her husband and continue to follow the path of idealism chosen by herself. The end suggests the same kind of irony which surfaces at the end of Premchand's "Sava Ser Genhun". The Sahukar grabs the son of the dead man to work in the former's fields so that the father may not rot in hell.

Sakharam Binder presents the extreme plight of the women who have been cast off by their husbands and whom fate throws into the ghetto of *Sakharam Binder*. They are to veil their faces in front of a stranger, not to talk to an outsider and satisfy the lust of Sakharam with whom they are to live as wives. Throughout the play we hear the shrieks of the hapless women who live in Sakharam's house turn by turn. The irony heightens when Laxmi, goaded by jealousy for Champa, hatches a conspiracy to remove the latter. In the sequence of quarrel and coercion on Champa, she dies. Here is a case of an exploited woman against another exploited woman.

Similar theme of molestation occurs in the play Giddhare where Manik, the sister of Ramakant and Umakant is impregnated by one Raja. When Raja dies of heart attack, the brothers terminate Manik's pregnancy by kicking on her womb. Thus the inherent sexuality in human beings, particularly in women serves the purpose of the malignant fate or the machine which feeds male chauvinism.

Cruelty and Violence: Another dominant theme is the genetic cruelty which a man inflicts on another man. The two instincts are at its height in *Ghashiram Kotwal.* There are two levels of cruelty, the concealed and the expressed. Nana nourishes the first kind of cruelty like a Machiavellian while Ghashiram nurtures the second kind of violence. The disgusting scene of cruelty is seen in the episode of *Agni Parikscha* (Trial by Fire) of a Brahmin and then in the scene where 44 brahmins coming from the South are thrust into a small coterie where half of them die of suffocation. Kicking a woman on the womb in *Giddhare* or beating Jyoti in Kanyadaan are other pictures of cruelty and violence.

Political and Social High Handedness: Nana while bestowing the Kotwali of Puna on Ghashiram soliloquizes that he would play a double-edged game with Ghasiram. All the sins which Nana wants to commit will be planted on the back of Ghasiram who happens to be an outsider in Puna. When 22 Brahmins die of suffocation, Nana quickly signs the death warrant of Ghasiram. We are just informed about the burial of Lalita Gauri, daughter of Ghashiram, in the garden. She is used by Nana and then murdered.

Caste discrimination and adverse and reverse human suffering: Tendulkar has presented a strange human predicament of suffering in Kanyadan which is a result of not a natural phenomenon but of an artificially created social phenomenon. Jyoti, driven by the idealism of her father, falls in love with a Dalit boy Arun Athavale and marries him. Thus, she becomes victim of a modern social idealism. The boy himself suffers from a stigma of caste discrimination which he and his forefathers have been suffering for thousands of years. The repressed psyche of Arun responds in an equally disgusting sense of revenge. Since the community of Jyoti had been humiliating the Dalits for centuries, Arun unconsciously behaves in a vindictive way against his wife who inherits the history of the upper caste. Now it is a process of reverse suffering.

Greed and Conflict: Giddhare deals with the theme of greed and the internecine conflict which follows from lust for grabbing the wealth. Papa Pitale and his younger brother Sakharam start a venture which is later on high jacked by the two sons of Papa Pitale Umakant and Ramakant. Their sister Manik who conceives from her paramour the Raja of Hondur is brutally tortured by the brothers and almost killed while terminating her pregnancy by kicking on her stomach. The title of the play seems to be more than justified by the vulture like characters and deeds of the dramatis personae.

There are many other themes in the plays of Tendulkar. There are games of power as in *Ghashiram Kotwal*, flaws in legal system, philosophy of truth, social inequality, fight for resources, political corruption, rotten social mores etc.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Give a biographical account of Vijay Tendulkar in your own words.
2. Discuss briefly any two of Tendulkar's plays.
3. Write a note on Vijay Tendulkar's plays in theatre.

17.5. SUMMARY

After going through this unit we have learned:

- About the life and dramatic accomplishments of Vijay Tendulkar
- His place in Marathi Theatre
- Major themes of Vijay tendulkar's plays

17.6. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Refer to our discussion at 17.3.
2. Refer to our discussion at 17.4.
3. Refer to our discussion at 17.4.1.

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17.8. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Vijay Tendulkar as a dramatist.
2. Write a note on the theme of greed and conflict in Tendulkar's plays.
3. Discuss Vijay Tendulkar's plays in detail.

UNIT 18 VIJAY TENDULKAR
GHASHIRAM KOTWAL-II

18.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are to introduce the students to the beauty and layers of meaning in the play. The analysis has been arranged in a way that the student understands the cardinal text written in Marathi and its versions available in Hindi and English languages. The discussion is centered on the significance of the play as a document of socio - cultural and socio - historical criticism and more as a beautiful piece of theatre conceived by the author himself and first produced and directed for theatre by Zabbar Patel. The subsequent productions all over the world have more or less followed the structure of the first production.

18.2. *GHASHIRAM KOTWAL*: AN INTRODUCTION

It is a playscript originally written in Marathi and subsequently translated into many languages of the world. The present study uses for its analysis the English translation rendered by Jayant Karve and Elleanor Zelliot. But the core focus of analysis is its performance text available in video format both in Hindi and Marathi. The writer of the text has personally seen two performances at Kamani auditorium, Delhi and M.N.Ghosh Auditorium, Dehradun of *Ghashiram Kotwal* by the Repertory Company of the National School of Drama. The readers of the play are advised to see the performance either in the video format or on the stage itself. The meaning and nuances of the play emerge in the performance. The written text reveals just half the shades of the play. A major part of the play is mimed parallel to the song and dance of the chorus and therefore the bare reading of the written text may totally miss the action which is mimed by the actors. It will not be an overstatement to say that the play without the performance would not have received the worldwide recognition. The students are advised to understand the performance text.

18.3. ABOUT THE TEXT

Ghashiram Kotwal was first written in Marathi in 1972 and published by Nishat Books in 1973. Its English translation was rendered by Jayant Karve and Eeanor Zelliot in the year 1984. It was then translated into Hindi by Vasantdev in 2007. The play has been translated in more than a dozen languages of India. It was presented on 16 December 1972 at Bharat Natya Mandir, Pune.

After nineteen performances of the play by the Progressive Dramatic Association of Pune, it was suddenly banned by the president of the Association. The resentment against the play came not only from the Brahmins of Maharashtra but also from the President of the Dramatic Association itself. The play was branded as anti-Brahman. The play, it was, alleged, had put to ridicule the Brahmins of Pune and their cult hero Nana Phadnavis, who was not so as per the oral and written history. There was a fear of revolt among the audience. As a result, most of the actors resigned from the Association and formed a new performance group called Theatre Academy (27th March 1973). The production was revived in 1974 and since then, the Academy has presented the play in France, Germany, U.K. Netherlands, and Italy. Jabbar Patel's production of the play for Progressive Drama Association in Pune is considered a classic in Modern Indian Theatre.

The play owes its popularity less for its thematic and literary contents and more for its theatrical experiment which has immortalized the play for use of folk and traditional mediums which sits so perfectly well with the modern theatrical structure of the play. Produced by People's progressive Theatre, Pune and directed by Zabbar Patel, the play has ever been a success in all its vernacular, Hindi and English versions. The kind of theatrical experiment Tendulkar has suggested in his script was executed by Zabbar Patel and subsequently by hundreds of theatre directors all over the country and even beyond its borders. The shifting and waiving human curtain which shows its presence in all the scenes and constituents of which also act as dramatic personae is the highest achievements of Tendulkar and his directors. The style has universally been used by many directors of regional theatre because it is the best idiom to hybridize the Indian and the Western theatre. The style of the songs has been carefully selected so as to make the play authentic and aesthetic both. In the very opening of the play the impressive chorus of the players resounds in the auditorium and apart from making the interesting revelations about the historical and mythical ambiance of the play also builds instant empathy with the audience. The same kind of theatrical experiment was made in Kannad theatre a decade before by Girish Karnad while staging his own play Hayvadana.

Film Adaptation

In 1976, the play was adapted into a Marathi Film of the same name. Vijay Tendulkar wrote the screenplay of the film, while Om Puri, Prakash Belawadi and Mohan Agase played the main roles. The film was directed by K.Hariharan and Mani Kaul, with the cooperation of 16 graduates from FTII.

18.4. THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF *GHASIRAM KOTWAL*

Genesis of the Play: In an interview to Gowri Ramnarayana entitled as "More uestions than answers" (2000, p.114) Tendulkar said:

> The inspiration for the play was a topical situation. I was working for Loksatta when the first major riots were launched in Bombay by the ShivSena. Bal Thackeray seemed an ordinary man, not at all the sort of person who would indulge in dare-devilry. The middle class boys who followed him were not demons. In that particular situation they acquired power, abused it and spread terror. I sensed that terror in my newspaper office. We were not free to write anything about Shiv Sena. If the title "Senapati" was not prefixed to Thakeray's name in a report, a morcha would be taken out with burning and looting.

Actually, the Shiv Sena was deliberately fuelled by the ruling elite to establish a force against the masses…. You can see the similarity between the Ghasiram incident and this event to which we were all witnesses.

Tendulkar used Ghashiram incident as a political satire on a politico-historical situation in which existed at the time of Nana Phadnavis (1741–1800). It is just an essence of the history to convey the thought that men in power give rise to ideologies to serve their purposes, and later destroy them when they become useless.

Maya Pandit in her article "Deliberate Dismantling of an Icon" (2000, p.16-23)) says that Ghashiram was "an official of Nana Phadnavis , the Peshwa's deputy in Pune , during 1768—1800". Tendulkar has put less focus on Ghashiram and more on Nana Phadanvis who was a Brahmin ruler enjoying "political power and cultural hegemony" . The Peshwa rule ended with the entry of the British. The Brahmins, already smarting from the pain of Colonial rule, felt further humiliated by the negative image presented in the play.

Maya Pandit explains in detail the history of the shadow battle between the dethroned Brahmins and the Britishers. The Britishers deliberately raised a propaganda against all Indian rulers painting them as "weak, immoral, degenerate and and incapable of just government". At the same time they projected themselves as "benign, restraining, guiding, and in other words, as saviours." This image about themselves was gradually accepted by the Brahmins of Puna which finds its expression in Maroba Kanhoba's book Ghashiram Kotwal (1863) from which Tendulkar derived his plot and characters. The image of Brahmins was further downgraded by Mahatma Phule in his book Brahmanache Kasab by saying, 'They bathe, put chandan mark on their forehead, with a cap on their head. And they seat a whore on their lap"(Maya, p., 18). Ramchandra Narayana Lal, a minor writer in the nineteenth century, wrote that Ghasiram Kotwal would procure women for Nana's lustful ventures.

This negative publishing of the Brahmins was encountered by cultural revivalism by the high caste Brahmins like Lokmanya Tilak who sought the revival of the image of Indian rulers in general and Brahmin image in particular, through cultural and literary movements. A beginning of Shivaji Utsava, and Ganapati Uutsava was one such endeavour. Hundred years after Nana's death Nana Phadnavis Utsava was also started. Novelists, essayists, and poets began to glorify Nana in their writings: "Historians like Vasudevshastri Khare wrote treatises …like Nanacha Adhikaryoga and Nana Phadnvisanche Charita" to refute charges against the person of Nana. Y.N. Deodhar another historian compared Nana to Machiavelli for holding together the Maratha potentates, and with Gladstone and Bismark for his "ministerial timber" (Maya, p.21).

The historical facts spoke otherwise: Nana had nine wives and two mistresses, as confessed in his own autobiography. His eighth wife was only fourteen when she died one day after his death. His last wife Jiubai had not even attained puberty at the time of his death.

18.5. SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Ghāshirām Kotwāl was written in 1972, and is one of the longest running plays in the history of Indian Theatre. The play is introduced by a swaying human curtain of Pune Brahmins who convey the lawless and corrupt state of their city. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is the story of a Brahmin from Kannauj, who comes to Pune during the 18th century reign of Peshwa. Nana Fadnavis, the chief of Pune visits a Lavani dancer, and while dancing with her accidentally pulls a leg muscle. Ghashiram offers Nana Fadnavis his back to rest his injured foot on, and receives a necklace from him as a gift. The necklace, though, is taken away by the Brahmins of Puna, who denigrate Ghashiram in public. Ghashiram swears revenge on the Brahmins of Pune, and uses his beautiful daughter to catch the roving eye of Nana Fadnavis. Lustful Nana asks him to let him have the girl, and Ghasiram asks to be made Kotwal (Police chief) of the city in return. After becoming Kotwal, Ghashiram unleashes his revenge on the Brahmins of Pune. Ghashiram's

daughter gets pregnant and dies during childbirth. Nana orders her buried without Ghashiram's knowledge. Ghashiram's tyranny goes out of hand, and when a group of people thrust in a small jailroom dies of suffocation, People of Pune plead to Peshwa to intervene. Peshwa summons Nana, and in his true chameleon-like fashion, Nana orders the merciless public execution of Ghasiram, the root of all-evil. Hence, Ghashiram, an embodiment of crude revenge is eliminated, and Pune is reinstated to how it was before. No changes occur in the political scenario, yet a false sense of justice prevails among the people of Pune, and Nana only strengthens his reputation.

18.6. DESIGN IN THE TEXT

Details of Structure: Shymala Vanarase has drawn a perfect design of the text of Ghasiram Kotwal which appears to be the best design never to be substituted by any other discourse. In the following pages Shyamala Vanarase's design has been summarized. (Ghasiram Kotwal: Design in the Text, 2000, pp.,37-70)

Act I :Rise of Ghashiram Kotwal

There are three main segments:

- The facade and the inner rot of the 'Punekar' society.
- Ghashiram in the center for sexual pastimes, the Bavannakhani.
- Ghashiram's efforts are crowned with the order of 'Kotwali'.

There are three sub-sections of each of the segments.

1.1. a. Invocation

Ganesh and the group of performers – Bamanharis
Ganesh, Saraswati and the group
Ganesh, Saraswati, Laxmi and the group

b. The facade of Punekar Society.

The Pundits from different disciplines
The knights from the south
The settlers in the North – All declare themselves as 'Punekar'

c. A View from Within

Narrator – Bhatji interaction: Reveals the Clandestine Act.
Narrator – Bamanoji Interaction: Reveals the Arrogance.
Narrator – Knights Interaction: Reveals Unabashed Indulgence.

1.2.a. The Night is Young: Ghashiram as Gulabi's servant

The Lonely Wife
Brahmins in Bavannakhani
The Lonely Wife Finds Company

b. Ghasiram meets Nana

Nana arrives in Bavannakhani
Nana notices Ghashiram - gives him 'bakshish'

Nana leaves, the night of indulgence continues

c. Ghashiram bitten by the Punekar System

Gulabi claims the necklace given by Nana with the muscle power of her musclemen.
Ghashiram arrested under suspicion for theft, goes to the custody and ordered out of the region.
Ghashiram declares revenge.

1.3. a. Ghashiram finds opportunity: Nana notices and wants Ghasiram's beautiful daughter Gauri

b. Ghashiram uses his daughter: Gauri yields
Ghashiram blind with revenge
People gossip about the affair

c. Ghashiram uses the gossip: Demands Kotwali

Gets the order
receives the insignia of Kotwali

Act II: The Fall of Ghashiram Kotwal

There are three segments and three subsections in each of the segments.

- Ghashiram rules coercively
- Ghashiram's weak-point attacked
- Ghashiram falls – thrown to the furious mob

2.1. a. Common people harassed

The rule by permits
Suspicion for foul play – on the street
Suspicion for foul play inside the house

b. Coercive enforcement, unmindful authorities

Nana's indulgence continues with Gulabi and Gauri
Further tightening of rules
Failure in catching the eye of the authorities

c. Cruel Punishment for the Innocent

Suspected theft
Ordeal by fire to prove innocence
The curse of the innocent

2.2. a. Nana's Seventh Marriage

Ghashiram thinks of Gauri's marriage
The news about Nana's marriage cannot remain a secret
The marriage preparations, rituals and celebration

b. Ghashiram searches for Gauri

Ghashiram goes to Nana's residence
Ghashiram goes to the cremation ground

Nana checkmates Ghashiram
Ghashiram attacks
Ghashiram put down by Philosophy and Authority
Gauri's body thrown into the river

2.3. a. Ghashiram becomes a tyrant

b. Nana's careless indulgences continues
c. The case of Telangi Brahmins
The Brahmins take fruit by mistake; they are arrested put into a very small custody where they die.

Brahmins of Pune complain, Nana uses delay tactic, angry Brahmins at Nana's gate, Brahmins get the order to kill Ghashiram.

Brahmins catch him, dishonour him and maul and kill him, Nana declares a celebration.

1.1. a. As per the Hindu rituals, Lord Ganesha is invoked for the success of any ritual, performance or celebration. Also, the Peshwas of Pune worshiped Lord Ganesha as their main deity. Hence the play opens with an invocation of Lord Ganesha. In the invocation goddess Saraswati and goddess Laxmi bow down and pay their respects to Lord Ganesha who dances as Saraswati plays her musical instruments. The actors pray for the successful performance of the play. They refer to themselves as Bamanharis of Pune and after the invocation they become 'Punekars'. "The Peshwa power leading to prosperity and pursuit of knowledge is implied. The ascendance of Brahmins has a reference to their supremacy in the fields of learning. The rise of Maratha power and the expansion of their rule with the Brahmin initiative form a base for the invocation" (46-47)

1.1. b. The introduction is rather brief. The narrator inquires about each one's line of specialization. The main focus is on the "prestige of the names and the specialities"(47).We get a variety of specializations- Vedanta, Medicine, Astrology, Logic, Linguistics which are all misused eventually. Shyamala Vanararse points out,

> Vedanta is used by Nana to cover up Gauri's death and offer condolences to Ghashiram.Medicine comes in handy as the unwed mother is subjected to abortion and death, it fails to save her. Logic is perverted in the argument, the astrologer is busy finding the auspicious time for the undesirable marriage of a young teenager with old Nana, and language seems to function as a tool of covering the truth rather than articulating it. (47)

In this introduction all the knights (both from north and south) are introduced as a group who declare themselves as 'Punekars' in unison. By such an arrangement of subordinating the individual characters to the whole group in the introduction the power of the 'Punekars' becomes well emphasised.

1.1.c.In this section the Punekar society is presented with its "facade of strength and power" (51) where the power is being grossly misused.The society is in a state of decay, it is a cauldron of poison simmering with self-glorification, repressed and perverse carnal desires, hypocrisy, and ruthlessness. The interactions in this section reveal the real picture of the society and the system running it. In the interaction between the narrator and Bhatji we get a glimpse of the hollowness of the code of conduct and the ritual

performances that are expected of this Bhatji (a Brahmin). Bhatji tries to evade all the questions by talking about going to the cremation ground and trying to stealthily find a way to the Bhavannakhani, the place for erotic pleasures. "The rigidity of the frame of norms with respect to sexual conduct, austerity of the lifestyle and a confused understanding of the philosophy give rise to this decay, leaving the facade intact, but, at the same time, hollow within."(48)

The next interaction is between the narrator and a Brahmin referred to as Bamnoji who gives the impression of a priviledged caste that is happily basking in the power of the Peshwas. Bamnoji talks of irrational beliefs which are devoid of any moral or scientific significance. Here we come across the rigidity of the Punekar's political stance that prevented the Punekars from embracing the new ideas of the British.

The narrator initiates the third interaction with the knights heading for the Bavannakhani who try to evade him but do not succeed. According to Shyamala Vanararse,

> The dialogue is structured like a famous joke in which a string of bad habits is revealed by a tactless answer. The content again refers to 'Kirtan', which will be part of an elaborate scene in which Nana would eye the young Lalita Gauri. The story referred to, is the famous story of Vishwamitra-Menaka.The turning away from penance to sexual indulgence is later seen on a large scale. Vishwamitra denied the fatherhood of the child. Here, there is a further downfall. The child will not be allowed to take birth at all. (50)

1.2. a. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is not a historical play in the traditional sense of the word.

> There is a space left open for the actors and the actresses to fill with the happening. Such spaces occur in the script at significant junctures...The scene is just a display of collective indulgence of the erotic kind.... the lonely wife comes in along with the narration and completes the picture of individual and group degradation. (52)

The structure of his section is different from the earlier sections which did not specify the locations of the events and were rather vague. Another interesting thing in this section is the use of the expression 'Rama Shiva Govinda'. This is an everyday phrase of Marathi used by the listener or the speaker to refer to some instance of habitual bad behaviour (in this case habitual visits of the Brahmins to Bavannakhani).

1.2.b. In this section the "major factors in the social dynamics are laid out, their logical outcomes will be seen later"(53). The section has very less dialogues and yet it is rich in picture as the song, dance and action give it a certain appeal and succinctness. Here we get acquainted with Nana Phadnavi's in the scene where he injures his ankle, notices and rewards Ghashiram's help when Ghashiram tries to impress him by offering his back as a footrest for Nana's sprained ankle. The short exchange of dialogues between the two indicates Nana's capacity to read people and win them to his side. In this scene the transition from night to dawn is done by the actors where "the duplex of the Home and the Bavannakhani is maintained in the transition" (52) Ghashiram is daydreams about the rosy future pinning his hopes on his first encounter with Nana. Nana's favour to Ghashiram ignites Gulabi's jealousy.

1.2.c.This section portrays how the coercive-authoritarian cultural framework takes the obedience of the obliged for granted; how Ghashiram an outsider obliged to Gulabi is

beaten up and robbed of his reward from Nana due to jealousy. Here we also come across the "new social presence of the 'white' sahib" (53) who is the target of many Brahmins who are trying to win his favour to grind their own axe of becoming guides to the 'Ramana'. Ghashiram gets arrested here for theft and fraud. This section shows the arrogance and tyranny of the police. Here we come across the clash between "individual aspiration and desire to make grade against the criminal relationship of the police and the thieves" (54). The location is significant as it is here where the innocent Ghasiram interacts with the narrator. The dialogue "serves to give a past and a present to Ghashiram. His concern for his reputation, for his family, and a self-righteous indignation over receiving the treatment he did, he is full of contemporary references" (54). The most dramatic part is when Ghashiram is sentenced to an exile (the point where he is thrown into the auditorium) and he vows fiercely to take his revenge on the Punekar society. Here is a tendency to turn a deaf ear to one's conscience and shirk off responsibility for moral degradation and put the blame on others.

1.3. a. The entire section deals with the how Ghashiram comes back to Pune and sets out to fulfill his revenge. In the first segment, Nana's attraction towards Lalita Gauri is depicted with the "most elaborate stage directions telling the actors to create this event at the time of a 'kirtan' during Ganesh festival. The attraction is to be depicted by the complex 'turning of an 'abhang'-a devotional song into an erotic 'lavani' song. Here, much of the effects are due to the use of the theatrical directions and techniques as they seem to over shadow the importance of literary means. Also, "the use of folk style allows the language used by Nana in the interaction to be openly sexual and directly making a request for getting the woman he wants" (55).

Lalita Gauri attracts Nana's attention and Nana tries to seduce her but Gauri maintains her dignity as a chaste maiden. In the exchange of dialogues between the two, Nana tries to misguide Gauri and defend his amorousness by deliberately misrepresenting the symbols of Hindu mythology. Nana pleads with Ghashiram to get his daughter. Ghasiram receives a diamond ring and stoops to the lowest level by becoming a pimp for his own daughter. This is followed by the 'Ganpati Visarjan'.

1.3. b. In this section Nana is not only established as a Casanova but is portrayed as an alert and shrewd politician whereas Ghashiram is seen pushing the dust of his guilt under the carpet of revenge and ambition by relentlessly pursuing his personal vendetta at the cost of his daughter. Lalita Gauri gives in to Nana's evil intentions and the group approves. The stage directions are elaborate and the chorus acts as the gossip mongering 'society' which recites a Sanskrit saying with slight modification to press the point : Those who are bitten by passion, know no fear, no age (where 'age' has replaced 'shame'). Also towards the end of the gossip, "the collective recitation is similarly twisted. 'Pundaleek varada hari vitthal' is sung by replacing 'Hari' by 'Gauri' " (56)

1.3.c. The first act ends with the appointment of Ghashiram as the Kotwal accompanied by a lot of 'pomp and show'. Nana, the clever politician that he is takes advantage of Ghashiram and he also makes the most out of the divided house of the Pune Brahmins. He appoints Ghashiram as the Kotwal thus ensuring a convenient arrangement as Ghashiram would cover up for Nana's promiscuous reign and at the same time book the errant ones.

In all, the first act is marked by moods of sexuality and violence where the initial mood of erotic indulgence and carnal pleasures gradually mingles into cruelty and violence. We come across two very strong characters- Nana and Ghashiram; with strengths put to negative use and glaring moral and spiritual flaws. Some scholars feel that the text offers tremendous theatrical possibilities. Shyamala Vanararse has observed that,

The rising line of violence now creates an expectation of the second act in terms of the life of the main characters and what happens to the life of the group. The group has acted to prevent certain acts, has supported collective pleasure-seeking against the norm, has participated in the moral downfall and has spread gossip. The entertainment values of folk – forms used in the play lend special flavour to the text (57)

Act II

The Second Act depicts the nemesis of Ghashiram. "His fall takes the path of control – coercion – violence in the ascending order" (57). In this section we get the description of the woes of the people under Ghashiram's rule and are introduced to the long list of offences that are punishable. The irony here is that the list is inclusive of all the means that he had used to get himself the power that he was executing now. He introduces the concept of 'permits' for various activities including visits to Bavannakhani, much to the hatred of the Punekars. However no such rules apply to Nana and his amorous activities. In this segment the entertainment comes from the idiotic ruling of Ghashiram whose sense of retaliation has worsened and who is full of vengeance. "Everybody is a criminal and offender and the burden of proof lies with the innocent. This perverse logic continues."(58). The instances of Ghashiram objecting to the woman going in labour at odd hour and shaking a couple out of the bed on the suspicion of not being married are hilarious and pathetic at the same time.

In section 2.1.b.Nana's indulgence with Gulabi, Lalita and his other wives continues as Ghashiram continues to shield Nana's sinful indulgences which were banned or licensed for the other pleasure seeking Punekars. Thus Ghashiram's appointment served as Nana's convenience. In fulfillment of his vow of wrath, Ghashiram enforces strict laws during the festival thus agitating the crowd who file a complaint against him. The complaint is conveniently overlooked by Nana who sends it back to the Kotwal.

In the next section, (2.1.c.), an innocent Brahmin is caught in Ramana on mere suspicion of theft. He is subjected to ordeal by fire. The ritual is quite elaborate and Ghashiram is shown to enjoy the gory details. The man curses Ghashiram for his cruelty after the man's arms are cut and he is exiled. "The entertainment elements become instruments of horror and sarcasm" (59)

The next segment has"an elaborate scene of marriage ritual (to be created by the actors) as the Barud song goes on"(60). The Act portrays the defeat of Ghashiram at the emotional level when he is shaken up by the news of Nana's seventh marriage and the parallel discovery of his daughter's death at the mid-wife's house. Ghashiram blames Nana for Lalita's death but Nana very coldly makes him aware of his lower status and reminds him of the embarrassment the news of the death of an un-wed mother would bring to the father of the girl. The body of Lalita is picked up from the pit and is thrown into the river at Nana's orders. At this point Ghashiram finds himself completely frustrated and becomes more ruthless with people. The pathos content in this scene is

high as a young girl dies and her life's worth has been reduced by Nana's perverseness and the girl's father's reckless decision to that of a mere object of male desire.

Section 2.3 opens with the chorus describing the reign of terror that Ghashiram starts, as Ghashiram becomes more cruel and vindictive after Lalita's death. In the meanwhile Nana gives a brief appearance chasing a dancer only to indicate that his indulgence continues. Ghashiram's doom starts when the Telangana Brahmins (twenty two) die in the custody while being held captive for the theft of fruits from the orchard. The authorities higher than Nana are invoked but Nana delays the proceedings to infuriate the mob further and then he orders Kotwal's execution when he feels the mob is boiling with enough anger to unleash mayhem on Ghashiram. The mob catches Ghashiram unawares and doesn't give him a chance to save himself. Ghashiram also declares himself guilty of his daughter's death and finds the punishment as just. The angry mob dishonours, tortures and kills Ghashiram. After the murder of Ghashiram at the hands of the angry Punekars Nana joins the group and declares three days of special merrymaking to celebrate the occasion.

The play comes to an end with a song and a performance by the Bamanharis in the praise of Lord Ganesha.

18.7. PERFORMATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Performative structure of the play has been made up of the idioms of several Marathi folk plays. The chief among these idioms are *Khela*, the *Dashavatar*, the *Tamasha*, the *Gondhal*, the *Bharud*, and *Waghya –Murli*.(Samik Bandyopadhyaya, 'Introduction" to the English text, 1986, p., 4-5). Bandyopadhyaya cites a note of Theatre Academy:

The basic structure of the play is a human wall, which is basically a singing and dancing chorus, personally commenting on the episodic developments. But it also breaks into smaller tableaux, grouping and regrouping endlessly. The human wall ceases to exist when its back is turned to the audience. The Sutradhar or narrator interposes in the proceedings to keep the audience abreast of things, the actors switching parts with perfect timing. A touch of opera with verse, music and prose fusing into one another in a strange, compelling alchemy. The ballet, blending with the traditional folk dances, sets the mood and tempo of the decadent and bawdy era (Bandyopadhyaya, p.5.)

One more interesting feature of the performance structure which the aforesaid writer misses is the mimetic form of the play. The play is predominantly mimetic with very little amount of dialogues in it. Even where the dialogues are spoken, these are choric. Use of Lavani singing imparts the depth of irony evoked by the situation.

The chorus in the play has to perform in a group and also as actors. They act as the wall or the cyclorama of the stage; they act as Brahmins, soldiers, attendants, priests and everything. They also act as trees and stones in the garden. When Nana is chasing Lalita Gauri, they act as inanimate objects in the house and garden of Nana. The beauty of the performance lies in the perfect music sung with intonations, rising and falling by the chorus and by the timing with which the artists in the chorus switch their roles. Another beauty of the performance is the use of minimum property and sets.

Ghasiram Kotwal should not be read as a written text but as a performance text.

18.8. POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

Ghasiram Kotwal, in essence, is a timeless tale that has been fit into a random time frame by Vijay Tendulkar. When the play was banned by the Progressive Dramatic Association in the early 70s due to its controversial portrayal of Nana Phadnavis, a heroic figure among the Brahmin society in Maharashtra, Tendulkar voiced his reason to use that particular period in history:

"…Broadly speaking, I had in mind the emergence, the growth and the inevitable end of Ghashiram; also those who create, and help Ghashirams to grow; and the irony of stoning to death a person pretending that it is the end of Ghashirams. The rest just happened at a subconscious level. The decadence of power (the Brahmins, incidentally, during the period which I had to depict) also was incidental, though not accidental." (Saxena, p.27)

Ghashiram, a Brahmin comes to Pune in search of livelihood, and has to take the lowliest of jobs to feed himself. Being of a higher caste, working under a prostitute like Gulabibai is humiliating enough for him. When the soldiers of Nana snatch his prize necklace away, beat him and denigrate his existence as a Brahmin, he is understandably enraged, and vows revenge. How he exacts revenge is a classic study in political drama. Ghashiram, trampled on by the powerful, uses his own power as a father and the guardian to use his daughter as an object of barter, and buys a position of power with this exchange. From victim to the oppressor of his daughter to the oppressor of the people of Puna, Ghashiram follows the same pattern that power allows its holder. Revenge drives him, and we see that both sides are ugly in this game of political one-upmanship. Power corrupts, and as Ghashiram guards Nana's lustful needs, he guards his monopoly over the law and order situation in Pune. When Ghashiram falls out of favor with Nana, he loses his protector and meets his downfall. While the tyrannical Ghashiram dies, the shrewd, calculative Nana only gains from this situation.

According to Vibha Saxena (2002), oppression of weak, gender and caste otherisation is the main concern of postcolonial writers. In this play, mistreatment on basis of caste is evident when Ghashiram is denied a Brahmin identity having come from a different place. Women are treated as commodities and meet with the worst kind of fate in this decadent society where male dominance prevails. Gulabibai, Lalita Gauri and Nana's many wives represent this oppression. As the Kannauji Brahmin rises to power, he metes out the same treatment to Brahmins of Puna as was given him, and takes upon himself the purging of the immorality that has seeped into their community. Punishments like agnipariksha are doled out in the name of moral rectitude. And when Ghashiram is punished by the mob at last, Nana uses the anger to his advantage, gives a grand speech about the abolishment of evil, and declares a three-day feast to celebrate the death of Ghashiram Kotwal. He thus survives the debacle cleanly, coming out stronger. Thus, the recurring motifs that put kirtans in the middle of brothels and the satirical praises that the opening singers sing of Puna bring out the playwright's intention in bold.

18.9. CHARACTERIZATION

Tendulkar has used historical characters like Nana Phadnavis and Ghashiram Kotwal. Though Nana's character is taken from history, Tendulkar does not claim that his play should be treated as a historical play. The play is about power politics and Ghashiram is creation of Nana. Nana uses him as a pawn and throws him away when his purpose is served. Nana is symbol of a political figure that use the mad people like Ghashiram to play with. In the edition of 2005, Tendulkar has written an epilogue to Ghashiram Kotwal in which he has exposed the birth story of Ghashiram. He has stated that even after twenty-two years of his publication of the Ghashiram Kotwal, he met the character Ghashiram in a local train. Ghashiram cannot die. As long as Nanas are there Ghashirams will be there. Tendulkar has used just two female characters in the play, one is Gulabi and the other is Lalita Gauri. But both these women are molested by Nana. They become the prey to the lust of Nana. The art of characterization of Tendulkar is quite different from that of other contemporary writers. Ghashiram Savaldas and Nana Phadnavis are the historical characters but Tendulkar has presented them to tackle the contemporary issues. The characters of Ghashiram and Nana are symbolic. One is demon and the other is creator of demon. History repeats. Though in the play Ghashiram is killed at the end, Ghashirams are still alive in the society and even the creators of Ghashirams, Nanas are there in the society.

Tendulkar wants to criticize the tendency and behaviour and not the human being. Tendulkar's plays expose vices of the society such as hyppocricy, vulgarity, barbarism, corruption, narrow mindedness etc. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is based on power, sex and violence and the play explores the depths of human mind. In the portrayal of society, Tendulkar's plays mark a definite departure from the previous Marathi theatre. He presents the characters and their lives as those are. Life is projected with all its ugliness and crudity. He was interested in showing disharmony rather than harmony in the relationship between man and society. The characters in his plays are the victims of hostile situations or harsh circumstances. The characters are either aggressive or tender hearted, and they are victimized by chance (fate) or circumstances. These characters have to follow the law of life. The playwright's as well as readers' and audience's sympathy goes with the victim. In her preface Shailaja Wadikar writes, "In the treatment of his theme and delineation of characters, Tendulkar is out rightly humanitarian, but for that, one has to read his plays between the lines." (Wadikar P.XII)

Psychologically speaking heredity and environment play a major part in shaping the behavior of characters. The hostile circumstances in life leave some of them aggressive and violent. But the condition of many is helpless and pitiable. Most of them are animals disguised in human forms. And Kumar Ketkar uses the term, 'Tendulkar's Human Zoo'. The function of Tendulkar's plays is neither to just entertain not to just reveal ironies and contradictions but to help man to know himself in relation to his environment. Tendulkar aims at bringing to light some of most complex and vital issues of our existence inner and outer. Tendulkar is treated as an Avant-

Garde playwright for he deliberately undertakes in Ezra Pound's phrase to make it new. He had shocked the conventional sensibility and by revolting against the accepted norms and values, he shocked the traditional readers and introduced the neglected and forbidden subject matter. He did not sugar coat the realities but put the things as those are.

18.9.1. Ghashiram: He is the central character in the play. He functions both as a victim and a victimizer. He is ambitious, revengeful and sometimes inhuman. But his strategy to

rule is toppled down by Nana and in the end of the play Ghasiram is lynched to death on the command from Nana.

Ghasi Ram, usually addressed as Ghasya by Nana is a Brahmin of Kannauj come to seek his fortune in Puna as Puna happens to be a kingdom of Brahmins who assemble there to try and enjoy their fortune. Living along with his family in Puna, Ghasiram finds a job in Bawankhani as a pimp of a dancer's cabin and also plays iktara to the songs and dances of the courtesan, Gaulabibai. Once when Nana visits the dancer, his foot receives a sprain and Ghasiram rushes to massage the foot. Pleased by the serviceability of Ghasiram, Nana gives him a gift of a precious garland. But Gulabibai snatches away the garland and also gets him thrashed by her goons. Ghasiram once again receives a thrashing when in a queue for food and dakshina, he is accused of stealing. He decides to seek revenge on the Brahmins of Puna. He uses his young daughter to lure Nana into his trap. Ghasiram succeeds and offers to send his daughter to Nana's lustful residence on the condition that Nana appoints the former as the Kotwal of the city of Puna. The crafty Nana agrees but also plans the end of Ghasiram. He gives him a long leash to indulge in unjust acts so that the Punekars to whom Gahsiram is an alien would rise in revolt against the latter. It so happens and Ghasiram is sentenced to death on the demand of the Brahmins of Pune.

Ghasiram is a craft less character like the modern day sharp shooters of the gangs of the underworld. Hurt by the humiliation of the Brahmins of Pune he vows to turn the city of Puna into a city of swine succeeds. But he is unaware of the conspiracy and diplomatic plans of Nana. He continues to commit atrocities and brutalities on the poor people of the city in order to stop all kinds of sinful practices but fails to understand that all the immorality is being promoted by Nana himself. He is so unwise that he pushes his own daughter into the unholy profession, an object of carnal desires for Nana. The girl is pathetically murdered when she is no more useful. The event breaks Ghasiram and in desperation he thrusts the Southern Brahmins into a cell where half of them are found dead.

Ghasiram is cruel by temperament and immoral by nature. Or he has no leisure to be moral in the situation he has been put in. His accusation of a Brahmin of the theft and then the eventual Agnipariksha through which a burning metal ball is put in the hands of the accused and then his hands are amputated electrify the audience with horror. His recky through the city of Puna at midnight and then dragging out a man and woman who are in fact husband and wife on the charges of lechery are examples of worst kind of cruelty. In his madness for revenge he even forgets the basic norms of humanity and stifles the Brahmins by putting them in a small cell. The devilish methods he uses for arresting the citizens and the alibis he seeks to confirm the charges are the part of his nature which disqualify him for any kind of sympathy.

Ghasiram is both a victim and a victimizer. He is the victim of the circumstances which have brought him to Puna to try his career there. But he is rather beaten and humiliated at every stage of his stay which forces him to adopt monstrous ways of acquiring power. He assumes the role of a victimizer now .As a Kotwal he begins to intimidate and torture people most of whom are innocent. He acts just a tool in the hands of Nana who wants a surrogate sinner for all the evil deeds he has done himself. Then at the opportune moment Nana commands the murder of Ghasiram at the hands of common people.

18.9.2 Nana: Nana has been described as the Machiavelli of Puna. He uses the tactics of deputation to mask his strategy of exercising power to hide from victims the real face of power. Like the paraphernalia of modern Indian bureaucracy he uses Ghasiram as a cover to deflect resistance to hide himself from the charge of abuse of power. Like a perfect politician he knows when to submit to Ghasiram and when to neglect him. He silently disposes of Lalita Gauri and throws her body into a river. At the end of the play he calmly and quietly signs the death verdict on Ghasiram and resumes his adventures of lust to the tune of the song "Bavankhani mein Mathuraavatari".

Nana operates his power game not only through policing or edicts but also through the network of social rituals and institutions. He has a full support to Bavankhani, a redlight area where the citizens of Puna remain lost and do not feel resentment against the centre of poswer. He has his mediators who act on his behalf. He promotes rituals like Ganpati Puja, Holi etc. He also organizes feasts and festivals where the poor are given alms. He is a despot who has ruthlessly and without a scruple been ruling the roost. As already discussed when his desires not fulfilled even by seven wives, he hires women of pleasure like Gulabibai and Lalita Gauri. He is lustful, festive and mirthful but equally cruel. For him religion is just a façade. When Lalita Gauri resists his embraces in front of the idol of Ganesha, Nana says, {Look at the feet of Ganesha, these are just made up of clay". Nana is what he is described in history. Through his character Tendulkar only wants to assert that Nanas and Ghasirams are there in every age and every country.

18.9.3. The Brahmins of Puna: The Brahmins of Puna are a decadent society. They are busy in merry making under the garb of religiosity. One of the Brahmins in the opening scene answers to the narrator that he is going to the temple to hear the bhajana. When enquired further, he admits that he would listen to and enjoy a lavani daance which of course is not held in a temple but only in a red light area. When the Brahmins are busy in Bavankhani, their wives are entertaining Sindhe knights in their respective houses at night. They make a queue for alms in the houses of the lords, they flock together at Puna to get pittance from the rulers. In total the play presents the Brahmins of Puna as chanting "Ram Shiva Hari, Mukund Murli" but at their heart they are lost in the lustful desires for women. Their best representative, Nana Phadnvis is entertaining dozens of women at a time.

18.10. GLOSSARY

Ganapati: Lord Ganesha, God of learning and wisdom.

Bavannakhani: Place of entertainment where nautch girls resided

Kirtan: A form of religious entertainment where stories from epics are sung. Usually performed in temples or village squares.

Lavni: Forms of folk songs that became popular during the rise of Peshwas.

Bamanhari: The Brahmins of Puna, also known as Punekars

Banni chali sasre: The daughter is leaving for her Husband's house

Kanyadan: the giving away of one's daughter. A ritual in the Hindu wedding.

Self Assessment Questions

1. Discuss the historical and political background of Ghashiram Kotwal.
2. Write a note on the Post Colonial perspectives of the play.
3. Discuss the characters of Ghashiram Kotwal and Nana.

18.11. SUMMARY

In this unit you were given an introduction to Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal.* You were also given the historical and political background of the play. Furthermore, this unit also dealt with the performative structure of the play, the various themes as well as the important characters of the play.

18.12. ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Refer to our discussion at 18.4

Refer to our discussion at 18.8.

Refer to our discussion at 18.9.1 and 18.9.2.

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18.14. TERMINAL AND MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Narrate in your own words the summary of *Ghasiram Kotwal* and describe how the events have been put in a sequence.

2. Write an essay on the design of the text of the play Ghasiram Kotwal.

3. What is the concept of power game illustrated through *Ghasiram Kotwal*? Substantiate your answer with the help of the textual evidences.

4. Write in detail the reasons for popularity of the play *Ghasiram Kotwal.*

5. Write a long critique of *Ghasiram Kotwal* as a theatre piece.