

# **CRITICAL STUDY OF MAKARAND PARANJAPE’S INTRODUCTORY ESSAY TO INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH (1993)**

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## **ARJUN DANGLE’S “DALIT LITERATURE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE” FROM POISONED BREAD: TRANSLATIONS FROM MODERN MARATHI LITERATURE (1992)**

### **Unit Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives
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- 1.3 Arjun Dangle: “Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future” from Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Literature (1992)
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### **1.0 OBJECTIVE**

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The objective of this unit is to introduce Indian Poetry in English and Dalit poetry in Marathi. Makarand Paranjape’s introduction to his anthology Indian Poetry in English (1993) traces the origins and development of Indian poetry in English from the pre-independence period to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Paranjape explains the rationale for the periodization he has followed before he goes on to review the contribution of the poets included in his anthology. Arjun Dangle’s introduction to the collection of short stories, Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Literature (1992) introduces readers to Dalit poetry, with a particular focus on its historical development in Maharashtra and in Marathi. As a significant contributor to Dalit literature himself, Dangle provides an insider’s view that is impassioned but also critical about the detractors of Dalit writing, whether from within the Dalit community or without. Together, the two essays enable a nuanced understanding of some of the dominant trends in Indian poetry written in English and Marathi as well as Indian poetry translated into English from India’s regional languages.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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In comparison to other genres, the novel in particular, Indian poetry in English has often been accorded a secondary status. And within the broader category of Indian poetry in English, some kinds of poetry have been reviewed more favourably than others and hence more frequently anthologized. Bruce King observes, “Cultural tastes are usually formed by artists and passed on through the cultural avant-garde to influential critics who in turn persuade the public and students what is valuable” (60). If the “cultural avant-garde” that determines what people read and how they respond to it are themselves prejudiced, it follows that their biases will shape readers’ ideas about what kinds of literature has value and what does not.

The formation of a literary canon for Indian poetry in English and the politics that shapes it has been a matter of much debate. Pre-independence poetry and Dalit poetry are two examples of writing that were rejected as inferior and unworthy of serious critical attention especially in their early years but this, as Makarand Paranjape and Arjun Dangle demonstrate in their essays, was the consequence of evaluations that were insensitive and discriminatory. Paranjape and Dangle illustrate how literary values can be both legitimised and contested by writers and critics with opposite ideologies ensuring that the canon remains open and flexible. In the introduction to their anthology, *Contemporary Indian English Poetry and Drama: Changing Canons and Responses*, Sinha et al, for example, note with concern that despite its vast and complex output, Indian poetry in English has not received due recognition. They appeal to readers “to consider this particular aspect of visibility and popularity as a threat to the future of Indian English poetry. Academics, critics, scholars and researchers must realize the need to address this crisis, and discuss the methods through which Indian English poetry may become as popular and visible as Indian English fiction” (8). The same appeal can be extended to Dalit literature and to every other body of writing that has been a victim of jaundiced approaches that have systematically sought to disparage or even erase literature that has not subscribed to their ideals.

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## 1.2 MAKARAND PARANJAPE: INTRODUCTORY ESSAY TO INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH (1993)

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### THE AUTHOR:

Makarand Paranjape (1960—) is a reputed critic who has extensively reviewed Indian Poetry in English as well as diaspora studies, nativism, and post-colonialism, subjects that are crucial to an understanding of Indian literature in English. His research in these and other areas has earned him awards and accolades from national and international bodies. After graduating from St. Stephen's College with a B.A. (Hons.) in English, he acquired an M.A. and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA on the topic *Mysticism in Indian English Poetry*. As a Professor of English at the Jawaharlal Nehru

University, he has taught undergraduate and postgraduate students in India. He has also taught courses at foreign universities as a Visiting Professor. He has been the chairperson of prestigious associations such as the Centre for Linguistics and English and the Centre for English Studies, and Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. A prolific columnist and reviewer, he is also a creative writer who has dabbled in genres such as poetry, the short story, and the novel. His knowledge of western literature notwithstanding, his voluminous creative and critical output are firmly grounded in the Indian context.

### **SUMMARISING THE TEXT:**

Paranjape's overview of Indian poetry in English is structured chronologically, beginning with its origins in the pre-independence period and making its way into the second half of the 20th century. The 32 poets included in the anthology are classified into four main categories, beginning with the nationalists and ending with the postmodernists. Paranjape's brief review of these poets is accompanied by some pertinent observations about the production and reception of Indian poetry in English.

Paranjape begins with the declaration that writing Indian poetry in English requires that the English language be "sufficiently Indianized" and that the poet be "sufficiently Anglicized." Of these two "preconditions", the Indianization of the English language began around the time of Vasco da Gama's arrival in Kerala in 1498. The phenomenon of "lexical borrowing" increased with British colonisation of India, and over the years, a number of Indian words became a part of the English language. Englishmen who were living in India at the time also began writing poetry about local Indian subjects. The second precondition, the Anglicization of Indians, became a widespread phenomenon once the British became the new rulers of the country. Political dominion over India paralleled its cultural colonization, and the English language soon became a language of power and prestige in India. It was not long before Indians started writing poetry in English. Although it originated in Bengal, it became increasingly urban, upper class and elitist in character as it spread to other cities such as Madras and Bombay.

Paranjape then moves on to discuss the identity and scope of Indian Poetry in English. We learn that the early Indian poets writing in English had to compete with British poets writing in English about India. Their creative output was subsumed under Anglo-Indian poetry and did not have a distinct identity. With the exception of a few poets like Henry Derozio and Kashiprasad Ghose, these poets barely found mention in works produced by British anthologists. But the struggle of Indians writing poetry in English actually began with the problem of giving themselves a name. It is today known as Indo-Anglian poetry, Indo-English poetry or Indian poetry in English, all of which are equally acceptable, according to Paranjape. Indian poetry in English is today accepted as a part of Indian literature although it is not written in any Indian language. However, it is still perceived as "a frontier or boundary literature" and its critics dismiss it as

“freakish” and “unIndian.” Paranjape claims that Indian poetry in English is largely urban and elite. Further, it is limited in creative output as well as in theme and form. And since it has remained confined to a few cities and a particular class, it is not pan-Indian as some claim. However, Indian poetry in English is not without value for while it is a reminder of our colonial past, it also bears the marks of our struggle against colonialism. Moreover, it has access to the consciousness of the nation as a whole.

In the next section, “Periodization,” Paranjape discuss the problem of a method of classification to enable a systematic study of Indian Poetry in English. He observes that different scholars have attempted this task in different ways but he thinks them inadequate. For this reason, he offers a different classification based on a combination of “political and poetic ideologies.” These categories are Colonialism, Nationalism, Modernism and Postmodernism.

Colonialism (1825-1900): This category begins with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) who is considered to be the first Indian poet writing in English. Despite his Christian upbringing, his deep love for India is all too evident in his poetry. He was quite westernised in his outlook and critical of orthodox Hindu thought and social evils he saw around but in his poetry he was “almost nativist.” Kashiprasad Ghose (1809- 1873), Derozio’s contemporary, was the first Hindu poet writing poetry in English. He adopted the stance of a poet who was primarily a shair even though he was writing in English. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) was one of those poets who turned to writing in their mother tongue (Bengali) after having failed to produce worthwhile poetry in English. Dutt is, in fact, remembered as one of the first and finest modern Bengali poets. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) is commended as a poet of merit who showed great promise before she died at a young age. *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1875) and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (published posthumously in 1882) are her best known works. In the latter collection, she attempted a retelling of stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in English. Poems such as “Our Casaurina Tree” and “Sita” bear witness to her skill as a poet as also to her successful efforts to express Indian subjects and sentiments in the English language. Lastly, we have Manmohan Ghose (1869- 1924) who migrated to London for a while, but returned to India disillusioned. Although a talented poet, he could not produce poetry that appealed to Indian readers.

Nationalism (1900-1950): This period was characterised by a sense of hope because the movement for independence was gaining momentum. It was a productive era not only for Indian poetry in English but for Indian poetry in all Indian languages.

The first poet in this category is Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who is regarded as the greatest Indian poet in English, according to Paranjape. A poet who was also a philosopher and a mystic, Aurobindo tried to combine the literary traditions and the spirit of the east with that of the west. He owes his literary reputation to his voluminous retelling of the myth of Savitri and Satyavan in *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (1940), one of the

longest poems in the English language. Next comes Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), one of the most popular Indian English poets. She favoured the lyric as a genre and was primarily a love poet who examined love in all its different forms. Her command over melody in verse was especially remarkable and her poems are more in the nature of songs than poetry, hence better heard than read. The third figure is Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Except for “The Child” (1931) and his own translations from *Gitanjali* (for which he won the Nobel Prize), Tagore wrote his poetry in Bengali. However, he translated much of his Bengali verse into English and considered them as originals rather than as translations. Tagore was critical of both British oppression and of fanatical nationalism but his poetry was idealistic and romantic, and characterised by an “aestheticized neo-mysticism.”

In addition to these reputed poets, Paranjape includes some relatively unknown poets in this category—Sri Ananda Acharya (1881-1941) who wrote spiritual and mystical poetry influenced by Buddhism and Vedanta; Puran Singh (1881-1931) who is remembered for his contribution to Punjabi literature more than for his output in English; J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) who, under the influence of Tagore, wrote mystical and devotional prose poetry; Humayun Kabir (1906-1969) whose work links the nationalist phase with the modernist phase and who wrote in a style very similar to that of Nissim Ezekiel; and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1898-1989), Naidu’s younger brother, whose work is mostly “predictable and cloying.” Despite their rather meagre output and somewhat mediocre poetry, Paranjape still includes these poets in the anthology because he believes that their contribution to Indian poetry in English should not be ignored or forgotten.

Modernism (1950-1980): More than half the poets in the anthology belong to this period. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, Dilip Chitre, A.K. Ramanujan, Shiv Kumar, Gieve Patel, R. Parthasarathy, Keki Daruwalla, Jayant Mahapatra, and Arun Kolatkar produced some of the best poetry by Indians writing in English although, in Paranjape’s view, they cannot be compared to Tagore or Aurobindo. The Indian modernist poets were heavily influenced by Western Modernism, a movement they found attractive given their own disillusionment with post-Independence India. Their work is thus naturally characterised by a rejection of the past and of tradition. They turned away from the kind of romanticisation their predecessors favoured, and displayed a strong penchant for experimentation in form and content, exploring themes such as human sexuality, personal relationships, and the city in an unsentimental way and in everyday language. Candour, detachment and above all, irony were some of the dominant traits of their poetry. Paranjape believes that it was the Indian University system that led to these poets to favour irony but it was more of a pose they had learnt and adopted. Paranjape also notes that Indian modernist poets like Nissim Ezekiel, though enamoured by the West at first, rejected it later only to return to their Indian roots once again. Though similar in many ways, the poets in this category also differed from each other in many ways. Hence, Paranjape divides them into two subcategories: high-modernists and neo-romantics. The high

modernists are further divided into “the clear and the obscure” or “the conversational and the esoteric.” In conclusion, while Paranjape finds much to admire in the work of these poets, he also tells of how they launched rather vicious attacks on their predecessors and even their contemporaries. Some made it a point to exclude the work of poets like did not like, with the result that poets like Dom Moraes, Adil Jussawalla and Pritish Nandy rarely appeared in their anthologies.

Postmodernism (1980 -): Together with younger and newer poets like Agha Shahid Ali, Saleem Peeradina, Manohar Shetty, Vikram Seth, Imtiaz Dharker, Ranjit Hoskote, Melanie Silgado and a host of others, some of the older poets like Meena Alexander. Arun Kolatkar and Jayant Mahapatra also moved into the postmodernist phase. These poets herald a new phase in Indian poetry in English. Their poetry privileges pastiche, parody, intertextuality, an emphasis on the poetic self that observes, and a commentary on the nature of poetry itself. However, these postmodernist traits notwithstanding, they continue to have an interest in Indian subjects.

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### **1.3 ARJUN DANGLE: “DALIT LITERATURE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE” FROM POISONED BREAD: TRANSLATIONS FROM MODERN MARATHI LITERATURE (1992)**

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#### **THE AUTHOR:**

Arjun Dangle (1945—) is remembered as a founder member of the Dalit Panthers, a militant Dalit youth organization he talks about in this essay. His work has been translated into Indian and foreign languages. His anthology of short stories, *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Literature* (1992) helped legitimise Dalit poetry as a fitting medium of expression for the angst of the Dalit community. Revisiting the collection 25 years after its publication, Prakash Bal Joshi writes about the *Poisoned Bread*: “For the first time, Dalit authors mustered the courage to listen to their inner voice and pen down their experiences using words and imagery not known to the literate world. The unexpected language and imagery of the outpourings in the poems, short stories, essays and songs by the Dalit youth in Maharashtra rattled readers. This literature of protest motivated a large number of Dalit young men and women, who wanted to change the system” ([www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com)). Dangle’s other well-acknowledged works include [Homeless in my Land: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Short Stories](#) (1992), [A Corpse in the Well: Translations from Modern Dalit Autobiographies](#) (1992), and *No Entry for the New Sun: Translations from Modern Dalit Poetry* (1992). Each of these anthologies made Dalit literature accessible to readers across India and abroad, and helped make Dalit literature a body of writing to be taken seriously by the literary community.

#### **SUMMARISING THE TEXT:**

At the outset, Dangle outlines his aim in this essay as “an objective attempt to review the Dalit literary movement in Maharashtra.” He begins



by sharing Dr. Ambedkar's observations about the caste system in India. Dr. Ambedkar rejected the idea that the caste system owed its emergence to the Manusmriti, that it was created by God, or that it was a product of a special evolution of Indian society. Religious texts such as the Rigveda helped validate the caste system. To make matters worse, the State and religion colluded in the exploitation of the Shudras. The oppression of Dalits continued until the arrival of the British in India. The British brought with them industrialisation, science, technology and a codified legal system, all of which jolted the caste system in India. The emergence of social reformers further rattled the caste system but it was not until the appearance of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar that the caste system was most severely attacked.

Dangle notes that Dalit literature has not been examined through a sociological lens as it should. Because Dalit literature is much more than just an aesthetic movement, looking at it from a purely literary perspective is inadequate. As for the origin of Dalit literature, Dangle insists that while both Jyotiba Phule and Gautam Buddha played a part, the credit must go to Dr. Ambedkar. Although he was not a creative writer himself, he was the one who freed Dalits from "mental slavery" and gave them a sense of self-respect. If it flourished after Dr. Ambedkar's death it was only because after so many years of suffering, it took Dalits some time to develop a literary consciousness. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar and of those before him, Dalit literature could not rid itself of white collar values. Some Dalits "Brahmanised" themselves but fortunately there were other Dalit writers who argued for a separate identity for Dalit literature instead of having it subsumed into mainstream Marathi literature. One such writer was Anna Bhau Sathe who, under the influence of Marxism, gave more than frank expression to the struggles and the anguish of the Dalit community.

In its early years Marathi literature was influenced by two strains – Gandhism and Marxism but Dalits could not identify with either. As for the progressive writers of this time, they ignored Dr. Ambedkar's efforts to fight casteist ideology because they were too weak.

Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on 14 October 1956 was a landmark event for the Dalit community as was the first Dalit conference organised by the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh in Bombay in 1958. Although the conference went largely unnoticed, it was by a resolution passed at this conference that the term Dalit literature was coined. However, no important Dalit writers emerged at this time. The Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh also failed to make an impact, and the Republican Party split after Ambedkar's death. Also, not all Dalits supported Ambedkarite thought, and this lack of unity had an adverse impact on the Dalit movement.

Things changed in the 60s with the rise of writers like Baburao Bagul, the emergence of the Angry Young Man, and the onset of the Little Magazine Movement. Bagul's collection of short stories *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I Had Concealed My Caste) showed how Dalit lives could be

represented in imaginative literature, and created a stir in the world of Marathi literature. It was no surprise that “ivory-tower” critics dismissed the works of Dalit writers like Bagul, Narayan Surve and others who published their works in the Little Magazines. But neither the Little Magazine movement nor the Angry Young Men who called themselves the “ball-less generation” could make Dalit literature a literature to contend with because they lacked the “social orientation” required for a sharp critique of Marathi literature.

Narayan Surve’s anthologies *Aisa Ga Mi Brahma* and *Majhe Vidyapeeth* gave hope for Dalit poetry at that time. Soon, the staff and students at Milind College (established by Dr. Ambedkar in Aurangabad, Marathwada), most of whom were Dalits, made it the centre of the Dalit movement. They established the Milind Sahitya Parishad and a quarterly publication called *Asmita* (later *Asmitdarsha*) which published the works of older, established writers together with that of new and emerging ones. Other significant events in the 60s included the establishment of the Maharashtra Bauddha Sahitya Sabha and Bagul’s second collection of poems *Maran Swastha Hot Ahe* (Death is Getting Cheaper) published in 1968 and which won a State award. Encouraged by Bagul’s revolutionary work, a number of new poets like Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Namdeo Dhasal and Dangle appeared on the scene. The few upper-caste mainstream writers and critics who reacted favourably to the works of these poets were often criticised, at times by those from within the Dalit community itself. Dangle uses the term “Dalit Brahmins” to describe those Dalits who sought to benefit from the concessions given to them but remained insensitive to the struggles of their people, a hypocrisy that reflected their “mental impotence.” These Dalits were in no way different from the non-Dalit upper class. Ironically, those who distanced themselves from Dalit literature initially proudly claimed them as their own once Dalit literature came into its own.

A particularly significant event in the development of Dalit literature was the literary meet held at Mahad. Baburao Bagul presided at the meet, and his views on Dalit literature helped define it more clearly. In fact, his arguments in favour of Dalit literature became a manifesto of Dalit writing. Energised and more confident, Dalit writers began to contribute to periodicals and journals in a big way. Baburao Bagul launched *Amhi* to compensate for the lack of journals Dalits could contribute to. Although it shut down within a year, a new journal called *Magiva* took its place, but it alienated its supporters when it became progressively more leftist in its outlook. In 1972, the world of Marathi poetry was taken by storm with the publication of Namdeo Dhasal’s *Golpitha*. Dhasal’s explosive rendition of Dalit lives was expressed in a language that was alien to Marathi poetry. Another significant work was Sonkamble’s *Athvaniche Pakshi*, which focussed on the horrors of Dalit childhoods. Dangle notes that white-collar reviewers could neither comprehend nor appreciate Dalit poetry of the kind written by Dhasal and Sonkamble, either its content or its form, because they lacked an awareness of the social, economic, and political conditions that had produced Dalit literature.



Education enabled Dalits who had been exploited and marginalised to express their angst in their writing. Influenced by Bagul and also by the Black movement and literature in USA, writers like Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, Ramdas Sorte and Dangle established the Dalit Panthers on 9 July 1972. Having realised that writing was not enough to bring about change, they became political activists. Still, one must not forget that the Dalit Panthers was a movement led by Dalit writers and had got its impetus from Dalit literature.

1972-1978 marked the second stage in the development of Dalit literature. Although Dalit literature was now perceived as more respectable, it was also ridden by internal conflicts and vested interests. But Dalit writers still managed to make a mark: between 1978 and 1986, they won many awards and Dalit writing even made its way into school textbooks. Dalit autobiographies began to proliferate and gained fame for their evocative renditions of Dalit experiences.

After providing a broad overview of the development of Dalit literature, Dangle moves on to identify issues he believes Dalit writing must consider if it has to survive and flourish in the future. He lays down some ground rules for Dalit writers to follow and calls for an introspection of Dalit writing so that it can grow in scope and depth. Yet, the challenges that Dalit literature had to face are never far from his mind, and Dangle draws attention to the cultural conflict that existed in the Dalit community because not all Dalits had followed Ambedkar's example of converting to Buddhism. These Dalits also colluded with the establishment and further weakened the Dalit struggle. In fact, a large part of the conflicts between Dalits were due to differences in their allegiances to the philosophies of Ambedkar, Buddhism and Marxism but Dangle is of the opinion that the three philosophies are in harmony with each other because they all support rebellion against exploitation.

Dangle then turns his ire onto reviewers who privilege writing that is esoteric and intellectual as opposed to that which is grounded in everyday reality. He questions the theory that Dalit literature has adversely affected the image of Marathi literature and attacks those traditional reviewers who call Dalit literature "loud and propagandist" because it demands social change. Dalit writers have never favoured tradition because their exploitation was carried out in its name. In response to all those who say that tradition must be revered and perpetuated, Dangle asks how Dalits can enrich the traditions that have systematically excluded them from every sphere – social, religious, political and literary. Dangle accuses Marathi literature for the lack of a sociological basis for the study and evaluation of literature. This is why even non-Dalit writers from the middle class shied away from expressing the dark social, political and economic realities of their lives which is why mainstream Marathi literature writing does not reflect real life. Even as Dangle supports the rejection of tradition, he urges Dalit writers to search for alternative myths in the Puranas, in history and in Buddhist literature, but more than that, to find or create their own myths from within the tradition of Dalit literature itself.

Today, Dalit literature is widely accepted but there is still some about ambiguity surrounding its definition and scope. Dangle argues that Dalit literature is not only about Dalits because Dalit “is not a caste but a realisation” associated with people from the lowest sections of society. Hence, it represents anyone who belongs to an oppressed group, not Dalits alone. While Dalit literature is related to caste, it is flexible enough to include non-Dalit literature within its boundaries. However, because Dalit literature is still considered derogatory in some quarters, other literatures are reluctant to be associated with it.

As for the future of Dalit literature, one area of concern is the dearth of literature in genres such as the novel, the short story, and drama. But Dalit literature is more than just form, hence the greater issue to be worried about is the artist’s commitment to Dalit ideology. Those who have forgotten the Dalit struggle for affirmation of a Dalit identity are today more concerned with the benefits that accrue from aligning themselves with the establishment. Yet, Dangle believes that Dalit literature will survive. He places his faith in the new generation of Dalits and Dalit writers, certain that they will not succumb to divisive politics and continue the fight of their predecessors to create a future that may not be “glamorous” but will still be a “dazzling” one.

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## 1.4 LET’S SUM UP

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As creative writers and critics themselves, both Makarand Paranjape and Arjun Dangle provide an incisive summary of the body of literature they write about. Their portrayal is as sensitive as it is critical. Paranjape adopts an inclusive approach to his anthologizing and adds as many poets as he can even if their poetry was not particularly remarkable. On his part, Arjun Dangle gives voice to the subaltern as he argues for a legitimate identity for Dalit literature and appeals for a fair review of their works. Paranjape and Dangle expose the fault lines in Indian poetry in English and Dalit literature respectively and also highlight the caustic politics that underlies the shaping of the literary canon. Both attack those they think have been unduly critical of the works of the writers that did not subscribe to their definitions and standards of literature. In the process, they make an effort to redress the injustices suffered by poets dismissed as inferior and mediocre by critics and other writers, and challenge the grounds on which Indian poetry in English and Dalit literature were historically evaluated and found wanting.

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# CRITICAL STUDY OF VIJAY TENDULKAR'S "CHARACTERIZATION AND STRUCTURE: TWO ESSENTIALS FOR A PLAYWRIGHT"

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# RAJESWARI SUNDER RAJAN'S "ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES, WOMEN'S STUDIES AND FEMINISM IN INDIA"

## Unit Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction – Vijay Tendulkar
- 2.2 Vijay Tendulkar's "Characterization and Structure: Two Essentials for a Playwright"
- 2.3 Introduction – Rajeswari Sunder Rajan
- 2.4 Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's "English Literary Studies, Women's Studies and Feminism in India"
- 2.5 Questions

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objective of this unit is to introduce renowned playwright Vijay Tendulkar's take on characterization and structure in drama which he consider to be the two most essential elements for a playwright. The unit is also a study of Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's views on feminism and women's studies in India. Both the essays are important studies of Indian dramas and women writings.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION – VIJAY TENDULKAR

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**Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar** was a leading Indian playwright, movie and television writer, literary essayist, political journalist, and social commentator primarily in Marathi. He is best known for his plays *Shantata! Court Chalu Aahe* (Silence! The Court is in Session) (1967), *Ghāshirām Kotwāl* (1972), and *Sakhārām Binder* (1972). Many of Tendulkar's plays derived inspiration from real-life incidents or social upheavals, which provide clear light on harsh realities. He has provided guidance to students studying "play writing" in US universities. Tendulkar

had been a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality in Maharashtra for over five decades.

Vijay Dhondopant Tendulkar was born in a Gaud Saraswat Brahmins family on 6 January 1928 in Girgaon, Mumbai, Maharashtra, where his father held a clerical job and ran a small publishing business. The literary environment at home prompted young Vijay to take up writing. He wrote his first story at age six.

He grew up watching western plays and felt inspired to write plays himself. At age eleven, he wrote, directed, and acted in his first play.

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## **2.2 VIJAY TENDULKAR'S "CHARACTERIZATION AND STRUCTURE: TWO ESSENTIALS FOR A PLAYWRIGHT"**

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Vijay Tendulkar begins his essay by stressing on two important skills which, according to him, every playwright should possess. One is the skill of characterization and the other one is the sense of structure. The first skill is a literary skill which is ascertained when a writer writes a fiction and without which no fiction can exist. He further states that the skill of characterization in fiction is not exactly the same as required in writing a play. In fiction, writers can describe characters in detail and also present their state of mind from time to time in words at length. But in play such description will not work as plays are performed. In plays, dialogues of characters define them, though general get-up can help as a visual description. The characters must come to life as soon as he or she enters the stage.

Fiction also features dialogue. Some have more some less. There are some fictions which are made mostly up of dialogues than narrative. But still they are called fiction not plays. So wherein lies the difference? The difference is the way dialogues are used in both. The dialogue in fiction are flat and unimpressive when read aloud, though they sound good when read in mind. Even when multiple characters speak with each other in a fiction, they sound alike when read aloud. It happens so in fiction because they speak in the same speech pattern. According to Tendulkar, all speech has a pattern. Certain words or combination of words are often repeated in a speech and some come once in a while. Such combinations make a speech sound particular. Speech pattern does not only consist of words. They include speech rhythm, style of speaking or voice pitch. Every human being have a different way of speaking. Use of such variances in dialogue is necessary as they help in establishing a character as a living and real person. Even the choice of words indicates the cultural background, region or profession of a person. Thus, the speech pattern helps to particularize the character and make him or her an individual rather than just a type. A good playwright stores such variations in his or her memory so that he or she can use them while creating a character and its dialogue. Also, a playwright should have a mouldable style of writing rather than a fixed style of expression.

Tendulkar further states that some playwrights impose their personal style over characters and as a result their characters acquire same speech pattern thereby becoming monotonous. Such writings reduce plays to monologues. A playwright needs also somewhat to be an actor. He must act out the roles to present characters more artistically. Acting in plays of other playwrights will help a writer to be aware of how an actor stands in front of the audience and projects the words, voice and character. This will help a writer to realize that a play requires living characters who speak their own language in their separate personal style. This experience will certainly help a writer to compose a play and characters more artistically. He also stresses upon the utilization of silence in dialogues. Silence or pause in dialogues can bring in more desired effect of the character and their emotional state. Silence can be used by playwrights as a very powerful medium of expression sometimes. Along with all of these, visual element is also a core of a play. Theatre is a visual medium though words play an important role in it. Visual elements give more vibrant feeling and experience to the audience and hence it should be given equal importance in a play. Visual elements may include lights, movements of characters and other aesthetic ways of presenting characters which would help in arresting the interest of audience. A playwright has to be cautious of the strength of his medium in totality and not on a single element alone.

Tendulkar further elaborates on his views on the structure of a play. By structure he does not mean the plot or the story. By structure he means the total form or the framework of the play. Even a play without a coherent plot or a story has to have a structure. Though there are no set rules of structuring of a play, it should have the most elementary requirement of a base and an outer form which rests on it. The base should be able to hold the outer form with its inner content. A structure must be firm enough and must not crumble, collapse or crack. In a performing art structure is not seen but felt. A performing structure is not static but it should have a fluent and steady movement. A playwright cannot master his art overnight. He or she has to work for a long time with total involvement to accomplish it even a little.

Tendulkar stresses that a writer who wishes to write for the theatre must first learn the theatre. Writing play is an individual work of a writer who has internalized the theatre with its do's and don'ts by working in the theatre. As a playwright he or she may be on his or her own as he or she writes a play. That means, a playwright has to be his or her own audience and critic who will sit and judge his or her own play. Such an approach towards his or own play would make a playwright to master over his or her writing skills, characterization and storytelling. Since the audience are tend to interpret the play according to their own perception or understanding, a playwright must not fail in giving out his best so that the audience could think and understand, to some extent, in sync with the views of playwright.

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## 2.3 INTRODUCTION – RAJESWARI SUNDER RAJAN

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**Rajeswari Sunder Rajan** is an Indian feminist scholar, a professor in English, and author of several books on issues related to feminism and gender. Her research interest has covered many subjects such as of the pre and postcolonial period, Indian English writing, gender and cultural issues related to South Asia, and the English literature of the Victorian era. She has also edited a series called the “Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism”, and “Signposts: Gender Issues in Post-Independence India”. She has authored many books of which the notable ones are the *Scandal of the State: Women, Law and Citizenship in Postcolonial India* and *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*.

Rajan was born in Mumbai in 1950. She received a degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A) in English in 1969 and a Master of Arts (M.A) degree in English in 1971 from the University of Mumbai. Later, she pursued her doctoral degree from George Washington University. After working in India as a lecturer she moved to the United Kingdom where she was a Fellow at the Wolfson College and then worked as Reader in English in the University of Oxford.

Rajan has debated on issues of gender, postcolonialism and culture in relation to nationalist issues in Independent India. Her research work has covered English literature of the nineteenth-century United Britain including literature of the Anglophone postcolonial period. Her editing assignments have covered issues in Indian Feminism. She is also a Joint Editor of *Interventions*, an international journal of postcolonial studies. Her essay on the practice of Sati (1990) has appeared in the *Yale Journal of Criticism* and her book *The Lie of the Land* (1992) is on post-Independence English studies. She has worked as co-editor of *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (2006). She also served on the Humanities jury for the Infosys Prize in 2019.

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## 2.4 RAJESWARI SUNDER RAJAN’S “ENGLISH LITERARY STUDIES, WOMEN’S STUDIES AND FEMINISM IN INDIA”

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Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s essay “English Literary Studies, Women’s Studies and Feminism in India” examines the trajectories of teaching literature in the classroom and the kinds of contestations and transgressions that the women’s movement and women’s studies initiated, and the influence of English studies across and beyond the disciplines.

Rajan argues that the literary studies in India mostly focuses on canonical British literature. Rather, it requires attention to two different issues: on the one hand that of the specific language and nationality of the literature in question, and on the other the institutionalisation and protocols of literary studies as such. To the first of these issues: the connections between the study of English literature and feminism in India are not far to



seek, and they are not limited to the academy. Both in conflict and in juxtaposition with the anti-colonial nationalist movement and representation of women in western literature were responsible for creating the model of the liberated female subject for the bourgeois Indian woman. A prototypical fictional representation in Indian literature of such a female subject is to be found in Tagore's *Ghare Bhaire* (1916) in the figure of the female protagonist, Bimala. Bimala's access to sexually advanced and most often forbidden texts, such as Robert Browning's poems and Havelock Ellis's psychology manuals, is made possible because of the tutoring she receives in English. It is this education that gives her a sense of maturity and courage.

Rajan's article primarily focuses on the influence of women's studies on English literature. Further, she examines how English teaching can be done in university level class rooms with the initiation of women's studies which have been began with women's movements. She maintains that disciplinary literary studies in India was focused on the British canon literature. Due this influence the questions of relation between literary study and feminism has arose. The representation of women in western literature gives the model of liberated women subjects from the bourgeois Indian women.

The western education of bourgeois women had promoted the individualism in women subjects which is formulated by the elite class of women. This connection between the western education and the elite class women institutionalized the study of English with women studies in universities, which further allowed female students and teachers to engage with so called courses like English honors programs in universities. Later on the Sunder Rajan also look upon the crisis of English studies in India, which gives further details about the colonial educational history, institutional constrains and the syllabi of the system. From this point of view of institutionalization of English literary study, the female teachers are even become more aware to teach gender studies in the class rooms. The conditioning of students and teachers of literature actually demands a teaching context across culture and gender specificities, caste, colour and community. These are the criteria that involved in the formation of so called literary studies in universities of India today.

Literature referred to be a reference for the feminism and gradually this context improved the literature into its other branches translation too by the bilingual characteristics of teachers in a country like India. This helps to find out the literary representation of women in a sexually imagined literary establishment as a result of women's oppressions. Literary studies also concentrate on particular skills like close reading, genre, prosody, figures of speech, poetics and rhetoric along with the usefulness of cultural studies, legal studies and historical studies. The shift from the concern of pure literature to culture studies is because of the influence of study of gender. Feminism in India has "represented" beyond searching of "images of women". Representation is a dynamic process in which it "recast" women through forms like law, religion, myth, legend, books, manuals, theatre and oral performances, songs and popular literatures.

Film studies in India actually have a feminist investment in representation of gender issues, which has its roots in cultural studies. Film is the most popular contemporary culture and media which represents the issues of women beyond the boundaries of class, age, region and language. The second chance of area in literature is the comparative literature, with the critical understanding of gender, politics and culture as well as the revaluation of women's writing. Influence of English literature is responsible for the culture with feminism and women's studies for representation in recent time. So in fact literary studies in Indian university created a room for women writers and feministic criticism.

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## 2.5 QUESTIONS

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1. Discuss Vijay Tendulkar's take on characterization and structure in this essay.
2. How according to Tendulkar a playwright can give justice to his/her characters by having personal and firsthand experience of stage and acting.
3. Examine Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's analysis of feminism and English studies in India.
4. How, according to Rajan, promotion of suitable higher education to female can have a significant impact on the social and academic lives of women?

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## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA'S 'HUNGER' AND 'FREEDOM'

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## KEKI DARUWALLA'S 'MAP-MAKER' AND 'A TAKE-OFF ON A PASSING REMARK'

### Unit Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction: Jayanta Mahapatra
- 3.2 Critical Appreciation of the Poem Hunger
- 3.3 Reference to Context of the poem
- 3.4 Critical Analysis of the Poem Freedom
- 3.5 Reference to the context
- 3.6 Introduction: Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla
- 3.7 Poem: A Take-Off On A Passing Remark
- 3.8 Poem: Map-Maker
- 3.9 References

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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1. To introduce Indian English poems to students
2. To examine the contributions of Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki Daruwalla to Indian English Poetry
3. To study prescribed poems of Jayanta Mahapatra and Keki Daruwalla

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION: JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most celebrated Indian poets along with Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan as these three are the founders of Indian English poetry. His published poetry is not only read in India but in many other countries. He is well known for obscurity and allusiveness in his poetry. He is distinguished from his contemporaries in creating contrive images and learned vocabulary, in which he has given a flavour of Indian indigenous language.

After winning National Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 1981 he influenced many poets of his age. In fact, he is the first Indian poet to win

this award. He won many other prestigious national and international awards in his life time such as Padma Shree Award (2009) Jacob Glatsein Memorial Award (1975), Allen Tate Prize (2009), SAARC Literary Award (2009).

The evolution of Indian English poetry has a great impact on his poems. The status of Indian poetry achieved different turns before and after independence of India. In regard to this change in Indian poetry a prominent poet R. Parthasarthy stated that Indian poetry “did not seriously begin to exist till after withdrawal of the British from India.” Jayanta Mahapatra belongs to the group of modern experimentalists in Indian English poetry. He is considered as poet who expresses his emotions in full swing through his poetry such as, pain, love, sadness, death and faith etc. The major themes in his poetry covers all the sections of society, which is his call for change for instance, poverty, women, myths, nature, seasons, temples, history, time, and suffering. According to critics Dipak and Pradeep Chaswal, Mahapatra “admits that the setting background and sensibility in a poet’s work should be rooted in his soul.” Jayanta Mahapatra himself throws light to his poems as: “My poems deal with the life within myself where the mind tries to find a sort of coherence from the mass of things in the world outside it”

Jayanta Mahapatra values the form of poetry along with content. The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra is a product of new complex world that he encounters and he highlights the value of symbols and images in it. He mentions: “Today’s poems utilize a number of images and symbols to form a whole, leaving the reader to extricate himself with the valid meaning or argument from them...This is true of much of the poetry I have written.” He used personal symbols for specific purposes. His symbols are not static like T.S. Eliot but dynamic like W.B. Yeats. The symbols in his poetry heightens the significance of the meaning. Mahapatra has written twenty-seven books of poems in Odia and in English. He has experimented various other forms of prose and published few prose books include: Green Gardener and Door of Paper. He is a distinguished editor of literary magazine, Chandrabhaga. He stated writing poems in his forties and his first book of poems-Svayamvara and Other Poems was published in 1971. He has also translated literary works from Odia into English as he has translated senior writers as well as young writers of Odisha, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

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### **3.2 CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE POEM HUNGER**

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The poem consists of 4 stanzas having 5 lines each. The poem follows no fixed rhyme scheme. The poet uses several literary devices to describe the events that led from one hunger (sexual) to the other (physical). The backdrop of the poem is sea-shore where the poet meets the fisherman.

The poem Hunger is based on the idea how poverty pushes people to take extreme steps to protect themselves from starvation. In this poem the poet explored the themes of starvation, poverty, sexual exploitation and

bestiality of males. Through the character of the fisherman in the poem it describes his plight and helplessness to surrender his daughter in order to meet his need for food. A poverty-stricken father murdered his conscience and entices clients for his daughter, who has become a prostitute. The fisherman in the poem 'Hunger' is a very poor man. He makes both the ends meet with much difficulty. He goes to the sea daily and catches fishes for his livelihood. But he is not able to fulfil the needs of his family. Every day he drags his old net and lives a very miserable life. His body was so weak that his white bones thrash his eyes. These all conditions compelled the fisherman to make his daughter to sell her body. This is very tragic. No father could act in this way. He has lost all his moral values against hunger.

Jayanta Mahapatra touched the sensitive cord of human emotions and present realistic picture of people who are poverty-stricken. This poem presented the degraded conditions of human beings who are struggling for food every day. 'Hunger' is such a powerful instinct in human beings that it can force humans to any extent and even to compromise on one's moral values and human relationships. A father sacrifices his daughter and the relationship between a father and a daughter is spotted but fisherman has nothing to think beyond the need, which he has to fulfil for his family. The act of selling his daughter's body is not acceptable for any father but he has lost his moral values. He leads a very miserable life and his work fishing is not helping him. He is also presenting the glimpses of patriarchal society where the consent of a girl is not asked and she is oppressed by the males. The fisherman pushed his daughter in this flesh-trade without even knowing her consent. She is powerless in front of her father's decision as well as the visitor who is sent by her father. This is poem presents the follies of our society, where on the one hand people take advantage of one's helplessness and on the other hand few people can go to any extent to satisfy their sexual desires.

The title of the poem is very apt as it talks about 'Hunger' of body and stomach. This hunger is the reason for a human being's compromise to his ethos and values. The speaker is compelled by the hunger of his body and the fisherman and his daughter are compelled by hunger of their stomach. In the first stanza the fisherman offers her daughter to the poet to satisfy his sexual gratification. The fisherman just returning from the sea with his net as he could not find fishes. His physical appearance shows he is extremely poor and this trade which he fixed with narrator is to meet his daily needs. He takes the poet to his shack and poet is surprised with the normal behaviour of fisherman to offer his daughter. The poet describes the fisherman's shack which symbolizes the poor condition of the fisherman which forced him to sell his daughter. The speaker is surprised with the words and reaction of fisherman as he readily offers his daughter. The poverty made the fisherman stone-hearted and cold and is compelled by his conditions to this tragedy. The daughter of the fisherman is just fifteen years old and pushed in flesh-trade by her father. She follows her father's order's but her age made poet to compare her with rubber. Though she is physically involved with the poet as directed to her by her father but like a cold rubber she is lifeless and senseless without emotions. The poet

compares her with a fish who is caught in a net and could only slide unsteadily. The reality of life is not easy to escape and she is caught in the tragedy of life.

### 3.3 REFERENCE TO CONTEXT OF THE POEM

It was hard.....trash his eyes.

In the first stanza, the reader is introduced to two characters who are making a transaction of sorts of someone who is referred to as 'her'. The narrator is a first-person speaker and he expresses a heaviness of the flesh in his back. This is a metaphorical reference to his carnal hunger that struck him as strange too. In the first reading, the reader may think that the poet has a heavy load or luggage on his back. However, the phrase hard to believe refers to something that is deep and profound. The poet here says that he couldn't believe that he had strong sexual desires at that time and was striving for sex which he couldn't believe. In the next line, we come to know that he is on a boat with a fisherman who says to him, "Will you have her". 'Her' here refers to the daughter of the fisherman whom he offers to the poet to have sex with her. The fisherman offers the narrator his daughter out of abject hunger and poverty. It is quite strange and impossible as no father ever offers his daughter to strangers for quenching their sexual thirst. While asking, the fisherman seems to be carelessly trailing his nets. But he was in no way careless. His nerves were stretch and white bone thrashing his eyes meaning that he was quite curious for the poet to say yes as he and his daughter have nothing to eat and are striving for food. Thus, he offers his daughter to the poet so that the latter may quench his sexual hunger while the former two may quench their physical hunger. Thus, we are introduced to the two types of hunger physical (food) and sexual. The line, "as though his words sanctified the purpose with which he faced himself" refers to the pain and shame the fisherman must feel for offering her daughter as an object but the purpose of doing so made it legitimate. Despite the shameful, painful, and unbearable bargain the "fisherman's white bones thrashed his eyes" meaning he looked at the narrator with hope so that both parties can quench their hunger albeit different ones.

I followed him.....up from the seas.

In the second stanza, narrator started following the fisherman to his hut. On his way, the narrator is excited about his sexual hunger, which he is about to meet and his sexual desires are really high on his mind. Suddenly, he is surrounded with little guilt after seeing the body of the fisherman which is lean and weak. It shows the helplessness of the fisherman and also throws light on the reason behind his act. The empty fishing net that the fisherman carries on his back symbolizes his failure to get fishes which will devoid him of any earning. It also symbolizes the net with which he is catching the customers for his daughter. It is interesting to note that both the fisherman and the speaker are doing this out of hunger and both feel guilty about the pathway they chose to satisfy this hunger.



In the flickering dark.....space of my mind.

The third stanza describes the hut where fisherman and his daughter lives. The narrator and the fisherman reached the fisherman's hut which is ramshackle. The narrator calls the hut as 'dark' and 'opened like a wound' which symbolizes their lives lacks light of prosperity and their poverty-stricken living conditions. The darkness described in the poem is not merely physical but also metaphorical. It is the darkness of poverty, hunger, helplessness, and suffering that does not seem to end anytime soon. The speaker's guilt intensifies inside the hut. The wind is a metaphor for the guilty conscience of the speaker. The phrase 'palm fronds scratched my skin' signifies that scratch or jolt he receives physically and mentally. It acts as his brain's signal to make him realize his sin. There is an oil lamp burning inside the hut and its smoke is reminding the narrator about the low living conditions of the fisherman.

I heard him.....turning inside.

The last stanza throws light on the act of fulfilment of hunger be it sexual hunger or hunger of food. The fisherman tells the speaker that his daughter has just turned fifteen. He asks the speaker 'to feel her' meaning to satisfy his sexual hunger and he will come after sometime and reminded him that he has to leave by nine as it is narrator's bus's time. The narrator feels as if the sky has fallen on him after knowing the age of fisherman's daughter. It also reflects father's exhaustion of his moral strength after he has pimped his daughter in want of another alternative. The speaker tells us about the scrawny physique of the fisherman's daughter because of hunger and malnourishment. He used the phrase 'cold rubber' for the girl which symbolizes her helpless and lifeless life. She is present there to follow the instructions of her father but without emotions. The narrator feels the physical hunger when she opens her legs for him and it shows her wretched state. He compares the girl with a fish who is squirming because she knows she cannot escape this net.

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### 3.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM FREEDOM

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The poem 'Freedom' is written in the first-person point of view. It consists of 12 stanzas and has no set rhyme scheme just like his popular poem 'Hunger'. The loose structure could also mean the loose structure of India despite freedom. Freedom, death, corruption, patriotism, exploitation are the themes of the poem. Imagery, metaphors, and symbols are some of the literary devices used in a poem. The narrative is the first-person speaker.

The poem Freedom stresses on the concept of freedom and need to achieve it. It poses few questions like who are free people or what real freedom means or what this free country has to offer its citizen. The poet enforces those false promises cannot make one nation strong or lies of a leaders cannot keep strong foundations for liberty. The poet is lamenting that we are not justifying the promises we made at the time of independence. Now as our country got independence but still, we have very less to offer its citizens. The poet sheds light on the meaning of

freedom, which is different from person to person. It is also poet's search to know the meaning of freedom after independence and after the establishment of democracy. This poem unveils the picture of inequality and paradoxical state of life after the hard struggle of Independence.

Sometimes when the poet introspects his thoughts it appears to him as the body of country is floating on the river water, which means idealistic state of happiness and freedom is still to achieve. He feels as if he is left alone in his reflective mood to ponder over the acerbic realities of country even after the years it claims its freedom. This country is dying as it has not enough food and resources for everyone and equality is still a dream. The politicians and corrupt people are damaging this country as Britishers had damaged for so many years. In fact, Godmen are no better they have captivated gods are ruling people the way they want. The poet asked this question if we are still slaves of poverty, corruption, superstitions then why we celebrate our freedom? There are few questions which no one has answers as new generation is finding this lost independence in their own respective ways. The religious system as well as political system cannot save people and help them to get freedom. Freedom is the state of being free from barriers and restrictions this society imposed. The title of the poem is ironical where he ridicules the independent status of India and state of being free is a farce. Every one of us is in search of light but it is more like shadow without life.

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### 3.5 REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT:

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At times, as I watch.....somewhere on the river.

In the first stanza, the speaker expresses his anguish to see his country going down just like a body floating down the river. It gives the reference to the body cremated on the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi, and half remains are left in the river to float down. The Ganges are vast so when and where remains eventually settle no one can tell. The floating of the body is a reference to a ritual in the Hindu tradition where the ashes of the body are left to float on water. Similarly, the ashes of the country are floating down the river after being burnt by its corrupt citizens i.e., corrupt politicians, religious leaders, government servants, etc. The 'body' in this poem is not used for any human being but whole country and floating of its body or remains refers to the lack of development of the country, where patriotism cannot be seen in anyone. Freedom is not fully acquired in true sense.

Here, old widows.....into itself on the bank.

In the second stanza, poet makes a reference to the widows who have lost their husbands in the struggle of independence and men who fought courageously in this struggle are getting old. This old generation knows the worth of freedom and values it. At the same time these people are aware of the fact how hopeless is the situation in today's world. They pray with eternal hope that one day this country will be free from all evils and attains happiness as dreamed by many. The poet compares the country to a

'half-disembodied bamboo' whose lower part has sunk into itself. The poet assumes himself to be the country himself that is dying because its people are destroying it. The people who have made it sink into the water are no others but the rulers and the corrupt politicians. The country got its independence from colonial masters years ago and free in different ways but still its people are striving for food.

While children scream with the desire.....it is necessary for me to be alone.

In these two stanzas the poet has contrasted the old and the young. While young children scream and cry for freedom and the desire to transform the world. This cry for freedom is going to get unheard because of the deafening noise of corruption that's widespread. Therefore, the old and the young are going to meet the same fate. In the fifth stanza, the speaker expresses his helplessness and fear to become 'wander back to either of the two' i.e., the old and the young. As young people have idea of 'utopia' in their minds to create a dreamy world, without working for it, which poet doesn't agree to and he is not able to relate himself to old slot who are dying in their desire to get complete freedom. That's why he chooses to be alone.

Not to meet the woman.....one daily meal these fifty years.

In this stanza, the speaker tells us how poor economic conditions and slavery is rooted in this country where 'meeting the woman and her child in that remote village in the hills who never had even a little rice for their one daily meal these fifty years.' This line is a symbolic reference to the people who lost everything in the freedom struggle and cannot even afford one daily meal and these are the people who thought Independence would be a cause for celebration not knowing how the scavengers in their own country will snatch away their resources to fill their own bellies. The poet shows his reluctance to meet that mother and children who have very little to eat and who have no idea of freedom in their remote village. Independence has not changed any conditions for these people and existence of parliament has no meaning. These poor people who are struggling for day-to-day meals and living have nothing to do with beautiful structure of Parliament House. Parliament house stands for equality but unfortunately not everyone in this free Indian enjoying it. This presents symbolic state of India where people who are enjoying freedom are the ones associated with higher positions.

In the new temple.....shadows find excuses to keep.

In this stanza, the speaker expresses his skepticism of the Indian Parliament and the proceedings that take place therein. Despite being into a system of democracy people are being ruled like in a monarchy, they don't have a say in making the decisions and are too caught up in making their ends meet. Here, the poet talks about the exploitation of people at the hands of priests. 'God hides in the dark like an alien ' meaning the priests do not care about God or the people they only care about themselves. They decide when God will be available and when He won't. There is no

freedom even in worshipping God. The priest is one of us but he enjoys being close to God and to communicate to him. He is the one who takes decisions on the behalf of devotees. Here, poet draws this analogy of temple to throw some light on the political system of India. The higher authorities who are sitting in well-made buildings has nothing to do with people who are homeless as they are interested in their own monetary benefits. As priests display their freedom on God as He is available to them the ministers sitting in the Parliament enjoys democracy and only these people enjoy freedom.

The poet shows his pain, guilt, sorrow, hunger and desire to be free from social and religious shackles which man made to rule the weaker section of the society. The narrator is trying to find out freedom and equality for everyone but social and religious institutions are making it difficult to achieve.

Trying to find the only freedom.....not to wear them on  
my forehead.

The following stanzas expresses poet's idea of freedom, which means both social and political. Freedom is the freedom of mind, of the heart and soul. The poet is enjoying his freedom to communicate to his readers where he is conscious about the evils and discriminations in the society and trying to transfer this idea to his readers. This is a wakeup call for the readers and to ponder over this partial freedom. For the poet, liberation means combination of past heritage with the present and has no meaning without aesthetic realization. In his attempt, he tries to recreate the glorious past of India and gives a reminder to its people about the ideals and identity of this country. The poet explicates when the ashes float on the water is when one experiences true freedom. The speaker concludes by saying that he doesn't wear the ashes on his forehead so that he does hinder the freedom of the body/bodies. He says only river and rocks have true freedom as they remain dead. One can attain complete freedom only if he/she is lifeless or dead. This sounds ironical as freedom has no meaning for dead people.

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### **3.6 INTRODUCTION: KEKI NASSERWANJI DARUWALLA**

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Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is an Indian English poet, novelist, and short-story writer. He was born in Lahore in undivided India in 1937. He has been influenced by the western style of poetry and follows the poetic form. He is an artistic, brilliant poet and contributed his expressions of poetry in a wide spectrum to Indian English poetry. His poetry has been translated into many languages including Swedish, French, and Magyar. His poetry has appeared in many significant anthologies. His use of symbols, images, and metamorphic craftsmanship of the various elements in his poetry give the new arena in the artistic development. He has contributed to Indian English poetry and his poetical works has wide variety of themes as in "Under Orion" which was his first book of poetry published in 1970, "Attrition in April", "Crossing of Rivers", "The Keeper of the Reed" and "Landscape". His contribution to the literary society

acknowledged by the government and awarded him “Sahitya Academy Award” in the year 1984 for his poetry collection *The Keeper of the Dead*. He was also awarded the Padma Shri in the year 2014.

Daruwalla has developed a love for English literature from his father. He has published more than twelve books and published his first novel *For Pepper and Christ* in 2009. Daruwalla pointed that ‘writing a poem is like a clot going out of the blood’ and poetry is personal and exploratory. According to him poetry acts as therapy and helps the individual to come to terms with his/ her internal world. He has portrayed the contemporary Indian socio-political world through his poems. His poems also trace the irony and sarcasm in Indian society. Daruwalla exposes the evils of communal tension, riots, exploitation, grief, criminalization of politics, dowry profiteers through his poetry. Indian poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel has shown appreciation to Daruwalla’s work as “Impressive evidence not only of mature poetic talent but of literary stamina, intellectual strength and social awareness”.

His poems describe the beautiful landscape of India. His work “*Crossing of the Rivers*” contain some remarkable word pictures of nightscape, riverscape, mudscape, etc. He also experimented with legends and myths as the main themes in his poems. He chooses words freely includes the words, which indicate rituals and religious aspects of Hindu, Muslim, and Parsis communities. Thus, it can be said that Daruwalla’s poems represent the composite religious cultural picture of secular India. His canvas of poetry represents world literature concerning literary canon. He represents modern Indian poetry at a large scale and becomes the powerful voice of the country. His literary communication has been reflected through his poems and depicts the social issues through his powerful poetic ability. Vilas Sarang writes, “Daruwalla is at his best when he works with selective image and metaphor... juxtaposed effectively, and described with the economy, achieving an intense, dramatic effect.” (Sarang 228)

Most of his poems depict the social conditions of life and gives strength to the multi-layered contradictory realities of Indian life. The major themes in his poems include family, history, cultural diversity, mythic landscapes and social issues. He has used simple language to reach common people. His main aim is to express the internal feelings and to cross the barriers of social stigma. Through his poetry he experimented various metrical patterns and also write in free verse to combine his capacity to create epic canvas with miniaturist’s eye for details.

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### **3.7 POEM: A TAKE-OFF ON A PASSING REMARK**

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Keki Daruwalla’s “A Take-off on a Passing Remark” (From *'The Glass-Blower: Selected Poems'-2008*) composed the beautiful picture of nature and environment together in his poem. The poem has iambic tetrameter with alternate rhyme and sonnet form and some punctuations marks are varied as per the different lines represented in the poem.

He has expressed internal feelings for the role of nature in human life and deliberately has a great impact on the reader's mind as well. The element of naturalism and humanism is found in his poetic device. Nissim Ezekiel and Daruwalla both are the pioneer of Indian poetry and demonstrated the naturalistic poetic forms through their writings and also, they have an interesting touch on the collection of poems. The poet loves and praises the natural beauty and the spirit of naturalism. The poet wishes to expand nature through his ideas when he says, "But I want flowering trees, long" (A Take-Off On A Passing Remark) as he believes trees add divine beauty to nature and gives a new way of life. The poem has multiple dimensions and reveals the supernatural element in his writing and defines the wonderful aspects of nature which is associated with the human world. He expressed his concern about the development and construction of buildings by cutting the trees. For him nature itself is perilous and should be preserved. The opening line of the poem set the theme where poet described his love for nature and is against the cutting of trees for human profits as he addressed that, "Tall buildings impress me the ones which cut off half the sky." He is worried as the world is moving towards the so-called development of but on the terms of destroying the nature and its phenomenon. The poet depicts the shallow picture of the world where everyone along with poet like the advancement, which is short lived. Therefore, the imbalance in ecology that occurred due to deforestation has awful impact on the lives of humans. The poet agreed with the fact that development is necessary but he is against destroying nature, which he believes is not considerable. He deliberately focuses on the conservation of nature as an important aspect along with the development and advancement through the following lines:

"But when you ask, still squirrel-young

short as twilight

short as a shadow at noon

why I love you, what can I answer?"

The poet exhibited his desire to watch blooming trees, squirrels on the trees along tall buildings and stressed on not to disturb the flora and fauna. However, the poet has accepted the fact of development without hurting or loss of nature. The poet is urging the readers not to run after materialistic things and value life in natural ways. In his opinion there is no specific reason to love nature and all its natural beings but he still wants to see nature in its raw form with all kind of parasites and moles. He has no answer of the question why he loves nature and he focused that this love will grow and will not diminish with time. All the constructions of human beings will be destroyed one day but if we grow this love of nature in us and let it free from human intervention then it will flourish with each passing day and makes this world worth living. This poem presents poet's concern for humanism and reflections on life.



Daruwalla's poetry is based on the social sensibility in post-modern India. "Map-Maker" is another important poem that depicts the beautiful picture of nature and awe-inspiring creation across the shore and mountain and added that "Perhaps I'll wake up on some alien shore." The metric form is iambic pentameter, alternate rhyme in blank verse with tercets stanza form and is divided into four sections. The poet illustrates the description of a sea as a living being. He depicts that the geographical distribution of town by map maker gives the naturalistic sense through the lines. In this poem, the author uses monologue and narrative verse throughout the stanzas. His thematic canvas is well equipped with nature. He also touches the postmodern elements through his verse. Daruwalla uses natural images for the enlightenment of humans. He is very compassionate for crafting his poetry.

In the beginning of the poem the poet muses if someday he'll wake up on some unfamiliar shore at dawn to find "the sea talking to itself", scouring and turning over the imaginary map lines drawn by the speaker, looking for something or someone, perhaps an old, "gnarled" voyager. The speaker wonders if the loving hands of the gnarly voyager could awaken the sluggish map lines he drew and turn the shoreline he drew into real sand.

The speaker says that the spyglass or the telescope will help see the voyager the features like the cape and the promontory that the speaker has forecast, which will make the voyager feel like he has been here before. The voyager will feel as if voyaging unlocks the doorways of the past.

Deep in the night, in the clarity of the dream, the voyager will collect his rewards by "raking in his islands like pebbles from a stream". In the second part of the poem, the speaker questions the need for maps in the following lines:

"Does the world need maps, where sign and symbol,  
Standing as proxies, get worked into scrolls?"

The speaker argues that the beauties of nature, the "mountain chains", the rivers, the "glaciers", the "desert, scrub, pasture" all exist in front of us, for our eyes to perceive and understand. The speaker, therefore, questions if there is any need to trap them in the maps, in the signs and symbols that stand as their proxies on a piece of paper. He asks if shading the "desert, scrub, pasture" on a map allows us to understand and appreciate them or if a mere symbol on a cartograph is enough to tell us where these bodies begin and where they end.

The speaker continues by saying that such questions about the necessity of maps confound him. He says, "I'd rather paint for a while" than spend his time substituting nature for symbols. Alas, despite nature being right in front of our eyes, it continues being mapped on paper, with symbols made with "pencil strokes" that substitute it.

In the next part, the speaker nudges humans to “go easy”, to “breathe” instead of running after the markings on some paper. He tells people to look towards nature for directions instead of the “Eastings” and “Northings” on the maps for they stand for “order” which, in the chaos of reality, is only an illusion. The speaker suggests people map, if they must, the “wrinkles on the aging skin of love” or shed tears over the barbaric brutalities caused by the partition, which is an outcome of invisible lines.

The speaker urges his fellow humans to mark a poem that hasn’t “broken forth” yet, to try to “map the undefined”, to mark the swamp of hatred within, to try and map the hedge that separates love and hate instead of marking “the coastal casuarinas” on a piece of paper. He continues saying that one can handle mapping the jagged reefs easily but it is impossible to map the deep pit of lust or the overpowering desire that floods the narrow creeks of our being.

In the last part of the poem, the speaker advises against trying to map the future. According to him, trying to map the future while “a millennium moves on its hinges”, barely holding on can result in anachronism- you may no longer feel as if you belong to your present. The moments you share with other people are important and delicate, like silk threads that need to be handled with care.

Having stuck to love and poetry, heeding to reason, the speaker allowed himself to experience the different textures of love. It is the “love’s eternal season” that helps the speaker to slow or impede yearning, to “shun” the rigid structures of “latitudes” and “form”. It is also love that allows the speaker to turn his eye to the past battles, no matter how deadly, to “dampen” the fiery rage within and turn away from “lighthouse, spire, steeple”. Now, instead of seeking directions from “lighthouse” on a map or religious institutions represented by “spire” and “steeple”, the speaker is set to study the dry and “parched” future of “brown people” or people of his country, India, instead.

The poem thus concludes with the speaker urging the readers to question the need for maps and to study the stories of humans in various cultural aspects instead of maps. This questioning suggests the urge to question the politics behind the maps and borders, a few lines on a paper that change the lives of thousands of human beings without considering the majority of them. Pramod K Nayar, in *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2010) says that this postcolonial anxiety over maps suggests the anxiety related to the “colonial redrawing and reframing of borders and lands, the unsettling legacy of [the] colonial cartography, the impossibility of aligning a lived experience of cultural mixing with cartographic divisions (a theme we see with considerable poignancy in conversations about India and Pakistan), the anxiety over map-making as a means of redrawing populations, assigning property and rights of belonging.”

Daruwalla’s writing reflected the development and changes of the Indian socio-political scenario. As K.K. Naik states that Keki Daruwalla is one of the most significant poets of modern India. He uses national and social

issues through his monologue and narrative poems. His imagery as a poetic device is essential and discourse style gained the reader's attention. He has used the concrete and abstract form of images in "A Take-off on a Passing Remark" and "Map-Maker" poems. His language used the subject matter in the form of diction. As Sinha depicted that "Daruwalla projects his understanding of the contemporary Indian reality with its multivalent contradictions" (10).

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# CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MEENA KANDASAMY'S 'EKALAVYAN' AND 'THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS' & DILIP CHITRE'S 'FATHER RETURNING HOME' AND 'ODE TO BOMBAY'

## Unit Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction: Meena Kandasamy
- 4.2 Eklavyan
- 4.3 Interpretation
- 4.4 The Flight Of Birds
- 4.5 Interpretation
- 4.6 Introduction: Dilip Chitre
- 4.7 Father Returning Home
- 4.8 Interpretation
- 4.9 Ode to Bombay
- 4.10 Interpretation
- 4.11 Questions

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## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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1. To introduce Indian English poems to students
2. To examine the contributions of Meena Kandasamy and Dilip Chitre to Indian English Poetry
3. To study prescribed poems of Meena Kandasamy and Dilip Chitre

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION: MEENA KANDASAMY

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Meena Kandasamy is a poet, fiction writer, translator and activist who was born in Chennai. She has published two collections of poetry, *Touch* and *Ms. Militancy*, and the critically acclaimed novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*. Her second novel, *When I Hit You*, was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2018. Her latest novel is *Exquisite Cadavers*. Her op-ed/essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The White Review*, *Guernica*, *Al Jazeera* among other places.

*Her family's involvement in the anti-caste struggle led Meena to work alongside Dalit movements and it influences all her work. In her late teens (2002) she was the editor of *The Dalit*, a bimonthly that provided a platform to record atrocities, condemn oppressive hierarchies and document the forgotten heritage. Subsequently, she translated the essays and speeches of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi founder-leader Thol Thirumavalavan into English: *Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation* (2003) and *Uproot Hindutva: The Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panthers* (2004). In 2007, she translated Dravidian ideologue Periyar's feminist tract *Penn Yaen Adimai Aanaal? (Why Were Women Enslaved?)* and co-wrote the first English biography of Kerala's iconic Dalit leader Ayyankali.*

*Her debut collection of poems, **Touch** (2006) was themed around caste and untouchability, and her second collection, **Ms Militancy** (2010) was an explosive, feminist retelling/reclaiming of Tamil and Hindu myths. Apart from asserting her varied cultural and social identities, Kandasamy works at subverting them through poetry. Her discontent with the essentialization of culture and the very project of nationalism ruptures the texture of her poetry.*

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## 4.2 EKLAVYAN

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You can do a lot of things  
 With your left hand.  
 Besides, **fascist** Dronacharyas warrant  
 Left-handed treatment.

Also,  
 You don't need your right thumb,  
 To pull a **trigger** or **hurl** a bomb.

### Glossary:

**fascist:** a political philosophy, movement or regime that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation and forcible suppression of opposition.

**trigger:** a small device that releases a spring or catch and so sets off a mechanism, especially in order to fire a gun.

**hurl:** throw or impel (someone or something) with great force.

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## 4.3 INTERPRETATION

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The poem Eklavyan is a tool of political dissent. It is focussed on what the poet rightfully believes are injustices in history. It embodies a long withstanding fight against the stringent subjugation and atrocities undergone by the non-dominant caste community. While her poetry

revolves around issues of caste, sexuality, political agendas, violence, gender oppression and language, her work mainly urges her readers to act. Kandasamy uses her poetry as a means of violent resistance against the nationally ingrained and prevalent system of caste which enables dominant caste people to subjugate the non-dominant caste persons. She points out the inception of the caste system in Hindu mythology in this poem where Dronacharya refuses to teach Eklavya. Dronacharya discriminates against teaching him in order to teach the Kshatriyas. Kandasamy critically comments upon this casteist practice soldered in mythical validation through this poem.

She states: “*You don’t need your right thumb, / To pull a trigger or hurl a bomb*” (*Touch*). Her poetry voices out her resentment against the very core of the caste system which according to Gandhi, was the “*genius of the Hindu society*”. Her scathing rebuke of Gandhi and his ideals is well reflected in her poem *Mohandas Karamchand*.

Spivak asserts that the ‘subaltern’ should favour to write their own body and stories. Kandasamy’s attempts to dig out the inscribed voices from history and to reread them retrieves the diffusive traces of suffering and pain which are often overshadowed by the facade of empathy shown by the dominant existing socio-political discourse. Meena Kandasamy tries to problematize this camouflaged circulation of power through her intensely inquisitive poetry.

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#### 4.4 THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS

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“a poem should be wordless  
as the flight of birds.”  
—Archibald Macleish, *Ars Poetica*.

birds don’t sing in their flight

for them flying is a muse  
they compose mid-air  
weave **agnostic** verse  
**sneering haughtily** at our absurdity  
as they float over our meaningless mosques and churches  
and those **patrolled** international borders  
and other disputed sites  
where the guns go bang bang bang all the time  
they swing over there losing their birdegos  
(ego is difficult to retain in mid-flight)  
wondering about and watching men plucking out  
and **quashing** the lives of other men and women and  
poor helpless children and they



shed a birdtear or two from there  
a birdtear that is lost midway due to heat of some explosion  
down below some crazy **fanatical** bomb detonating  
killing instantly the people and the city and the forests  
and even the pitiable babybirds who are yet to learn to fly

they contemplate of writing poems  
about a bird's egg **charring**  
before even being boiled and scratch their beaks  
unsure if this is a metaphor or simile or other poetic device  
o the birds have lots and lots and lots to write about  
o their writings will never be banned

they borrow freedom  
to write poems in the sky  
they come back and  
pass it on to us  
we take the song only  
brutally  
but at least we take the song

to take the poem  
to unscramble the words from the song and to put it back again  
as song so spontaneously that it remains the poem and the song  
to remember forever this refrain whose melody haunts us  
and to hum that **refrain** which preserves our sanity  
perhaps we need to fly  
a **trifle** aimlessly like birds

or because we are humans  
six-sensed creatures with massive egos  
and massive **superegos** and massive egos on the ego  
and because of possessing gray matter  
what doctors call **medulla oblongata**  
we need to feel with our red hearts  
than think with some unlocatable mind

we need to look deeper...  
into ourselves, into eyes  
we need to lose ourselves

then, and only then

the poems will come  
silent  
wordless  
as the flight of birds

### **Glossary:**

**agnostic:** a person who believes that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God.

**sneering:** contemptuous or mocking.

**haughtily:** disdainfully proud

**patrolled:** keep watch over (an area) by regularly walking or travelling around it.

**quashing:** reject as invalid, especially by legal procedure.

**fanatical:** filled with excessive and single-minded zeal.

**charring:** partially burn so as to blacken the surface

**refrain:** stop oneself from doing something.

**trifle:** something of little value, substance, or importance.

**superego:** the part of a person's mind that acts as a self-critical conscience, reflecting social standards learned from parents and teachers.

**medulla oblongata:** the continuation of the spinal cord within the skull, forming the lowest part of the brainstem and containing control centres for the heart and lungs.

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## **4.5 INTERPRETATION**

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Active resistance or revolutionary activism, the discourse which seeks to analyze what needs to change and set it right, is the core theme of Kandasamy's raw and outrightly unbridled poetry, "*full of jagged edges*" (Duarte). Her poems are revolutionary and there is fire in her words. She is bold and assertive and expresses her ideas without fear or favour. She expresses strong will power and determination. Dying and then resurrecting herself again and again in a country that refuses to forget the unkind myths of caste and perhaps of religion, Meena carries as her twin self, her shadow the dark cynicism of youth that must help her to survive as remarked by Kamala Das..

She expresses her anger against caste based discrimination which has crippled the Dalits/marginalized to dehumanized state as they are subjected to humiliation and oppression. In other words, her work focus on poverty, oppression, injustice, caste annihilation, linguistic identity and

pangs and predicaments of women. focus on oppression, pangs and predicaments of Dalit women, and caste annihilation. She attacks rampant social evils like injustice, atrocities, inequality, violation of human rights. She places human at the centre and registers a strong protest against the hierarchy of castes, race, tribe and gender showing the value of human liberty. She champions the cause of the marginalized and pleads for their liberty, equality, fraternity and justice so that they can live with honour and dignity. This poem is a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to scream into national imaginary those subaltern voices that lie beyond fringes of political tokenism. It has aesthetics of pain and resistance and a prolonged longing.

By giving the woman wings, she gives them hope to soar above all the atrocities. It is a scathing, militant attack on the perpetuation of the social oppression of the Indian women. It discusses the issue of the sexual harassment of women. Meena Kandasamy, unlike other poets and writers dealing with this subject, portrays women, particularly the Dalit women not just as the victims of the lust of the higher caste men but as rebels fighting against the injustice perpetuated against them and champions the cause of the equality of women.

A woman is considered a chattel by the male dominated society. Men of all castes and classes collude in making certain rules of behaviour and circumscribe the trajectory of female growth and confine her to the four walls of her house. A woman's goodness is graded upon her degree of submission and servitude to her father, husband, brothers, sons and almost every other man in her family and society. Gender discrimination is an omnipresent social evil which is very much prevalent in the society even today. Meena Kandasamy espouses the cause of the gender equality in her poetic discourse by dissecting the matrix of female suppression and expressing her concerns about it. Hers is an acerbic attack on the social malaise of the systematic domination of the female sex. Through her witty arguments and polemical style of writing she attempts to champion the cause of the gender equality.

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## 4.6 INTRODUCTION: DILIP CHITRE

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Dilip Chitre was a bi-lingual writer, painter, critic, and filmmaker and all these roles he saw as seamless 'extensions' of his 'poetic sensibility'. He felt that poetry was the mainstay of his creative practice for more than fifty years. He is known not only for his English poetry but also for his work in Marathi. His dual sensibilities inform his creative work. The dialect is an integral part of who the poet was. His career took shape with his work in a Marathi magazine, he was one of the major influences in the 'little magazine movement' in Marathi, and along with Arun Kolatkar and Ramesh Samarth, he created a magazine devoted entirely to poetry. His first collection of Marathi poetry, *Kavita*, was published in 1960, followed by *Kavitenantarchya* *Kavita* eighteen years later. His collected Marathi poems, *Ekoon Kavita*, appeared in three successive volumes in the nineties, the first volume winning the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1994. The year 2008 saw the publication of two

important Chitre collections: *Shesha*, a volume of new and selected translations from Marathi, and *As Is Where Is*, a book of new and selected poems in English.

Chitre always viewed the writing and translation of poetry as part of a continuum. His book, *Says Tuka*, is a well-loved and much-acclaimed rendition in English of the haunting poetry of the 17th-century mystic of Maharashtra, Tukaram. It won the Sahitya Akademi award for translation in the year 1994 (making him the only poet to have won awards for both poetry and translation in the same year).

Dilip Chitre's poetry has a distinct style and beguilingly simple words. Even the titles of his collections fill the mind with pictures. It is interesting to read the work of poets who show ease and expertise in more than one language. There are expressions and experiences that populate the pages that are alien to the non-native eye. But one does not need to know the customs to appreciate the emotion. His writing is sparse, his imagery, immense.

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#### 4.7 FATHER RETURNING HOME

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My father travels on the late evening train  
 Standing among silent commuters in the yellow light  
 Suburbs slide past his unseeing eyes  
 His shirt and pants are soggy and his black raincoat  
 Stained with mud and his bag stuffed with books  
 Is falling apart. His eyes dimmed by age  
 fade homeward through the humid monsoon night.  
 Now I can see him getting off the train  
 Like a word dropped from a long sentence.  
 He hurries across the length of the grey platform,  
 Crosses the railway line, enters the lane,  
 His chappals are sticky with mud, but he hurries onward.  
 Home again, I see him drinking weak tea,  
 Eating a stale chapati, reading a book.  
 He goes into the toilet to contemplate  
 Man's estrangement from a man-made world.  
 Coming out he trembles at the sink,  
 The cold water running over his brown hands,  
 A few droplets cling to the greying hairs on his wrists.  
 His sullen children have often refused to share  
 Jokes and secrets with him. He will now go to sleep  
 Listening to the static on the radio, dreaming  
 Of his ancestors and grandchildren, thinking  
 Of nomads entering a subcontinent through a narrow pass.

## Glossary:

**soggy**: wet and soft

**dimmed**: make or become less bright or distinct.

**contemplate**: look thoughtfully for a long time at.

**estrangement**: the fact of no longer being on friendly terms or part of a social group.

**sullen**: bad-tempered and sulky

**nomads**: a member of a people that travels from place to place to find fresh pasture for its animals and has no permanent home.

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## 4.8 INTERPRETATION

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This is a poem that is often mentioned from his vast repertoire of work. In the poem, time seems to slow down, grow sluggish, muggy as the poem progresses. The father stands among silent commuters, is unseeing of the world going by, his clothes are not in the best of shape. A word dropped from a long sentence. The old man is no longer part of the train journey and his space is filled up by others, other things. Even at home, the father is not galvanised into comfortable rest. He drinks weak tea, eats a stale chapatti, reads a book. In the bathroom, he contemplates. The utter loneliness of the father's life perhaps stems from this line being left bereft, the father contemplates the distance and dreams of better days.

Could the 'pass' be geographical? It would appear so, but it may also be the return of the children, seizing a window of opportunity to be a family again. The poet's father is representative too, of the many dwellers of Mumbai who have settled in the massive city, having left behind their people and their lands. Their pangs of homesickness are well depicted in the poem.

The poem is a dull yellow. It colours everything in the work and represents the twilight of the father's life. Things are faded, discoloured, shabby. The see and unsee the slow eroding of reality. The creation of a deep and deeply felt atmosphere is where the true remarkableness of this poem lies.

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## 4.9 ODE TO BOMBAY

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I had promised you a poem before I died  
Diamonds storming out of the blackness of a piano  
Piece by piece I fall at my own dead feet  
Releasing you like a **concerto** from my silence  
I unfasten your bridges from my **insistent** bones  
Free your railway lines from my desperate veins  
Dismantle your crowded **tenements** and meditating machines

Remove your temples and brothels pinned in my skull

You go out of me in a pure spiral of stars  
 A funeral progressing towards the end of time  
 Innumerable petals of flame undress your dark  
 Continuous stem of growing

I walk out of murders and riots  
 I fall out of **smouldering** biographies  
 I sleep on a bed of burning languages  
 Sending you up in your essential fire and smoke  
 Piece by piece at my own feet I fall  
 Diamonds storm out of a black piano

Once I promised you an epic  
 And now you have robbed me  
 You have reduced me to **rubble**  
 This concerto ends.

#### **Glossary:**

**concerto:** a musical composition for a solo instrument or instruments accompanied by an orchestra, especially one conceived on a relatively large scale.

**insistent:** continuing in a prolonged and demanding way.

**dismantle:** take apart

**tenement:** a room or a set of rooms forming a separate residence within a house or block of flats.

**smouldering:** the process of burning slowly with smoke but no flame.

**rubble:** waste or rough fragments of stone, brick or concrete especially as the debris from the demolition of buildings.

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### **4.10 INTERPRETATION**

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The city of Bombay suffuses so much of Dilip Chitre's work. In 'Ode to Bombay,' the poet dismantles the city's 'crowded tenements and meditating machines'. 'City poems' distills relationships that people share with the city. Sometimes they talk about nostalgia, or about the idea of a home, infusing commonplace elements of modernity with affect.

This poem captures the paradox that is Bombay, written with such metaphorical intensity and familiarity about things that could easily be ignored in some boring catalogue about the city. It triggers personal



memories of moments spent in deep communion with the space, with home.

The mention of the word concerto seems to be the life force or the drive for the poet. Musical instruments such as the piano, symbolize several things, notably family or a past with nostalgic relationships, but it could have been dark as well. It can also be a portal to communicate or the need to express. The writer was overwhelmed by the aura of his city to such an extent that it consumed him, it possibly took more than it gave. As symbolized, the tiny pieces of himself are his ashes as his fiery death turned him into diamonds from coal.

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#### 4.11 QUESTIONS

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1. Critically examine Meena Kandasamy's poems 'Ekalavyan' and 'The Flight of Birds'.
2. Analyse Dilip Chitre's 'Father Returning Home' and 'Ode to Bombay'.
3. Justify Meena Kandasamy as a socialist poet.
4. Appreciate Dilip Chitre as a modernist poet.

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# CRITICAL STUDY OF MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S *HARVEST* PART - I

## Unit Structure

### 5.0 Objectives

#### 5.1 Introduction

#### 5.2 Introduction: The Meaning of Drama

#### 5.3 Indian Drama

#### 5.4 The Development of English Drama in India

#### 5.5 Manjula Padmanabhan- The Dramatist

#### 5.6 Harvest- Summary

#### 5.7 Summing Up

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## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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On Completing the Unit, the students would be able to:

- 1) Discuss about Drama
- 2) Apply Different Techniques of learning Drama effectively
- 3) Understand the works of Indian English Dramatists

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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Drama is a representation of real life events upon the stage; basically drama imitates the reality and presents it in an artistic way. The real life incidents around us in the society find a place in literature in one way or the other. Being a powerful literary genre, drama also recreates the social life. Therefore, the themes and plots of drama revolve around real issues so that the audience can relate to those issues, naturally and effortlessly. Drama in the present time has become more realistic and audience centric. It aims at involving the audience into the story and making them ponder over the social issues. It also tries to offer solutions to some of the social problems. There are various kinds of drama - mythological, historical, social, reality based and Science dramas. A drama that has Science and technology based themes, basically, is known as Science Drama. *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan is also a Science Drama that talks about the future life of humans. The theme of this drama is based upon the development of Technology and Science. The dramatist shows how a technically developed nation may subjugate an under-developed nation. This play is a futuristic Science-Drama which highlights the over-effect and impact of machines upon human lives.

## The Elements of Drama:

Every drama has a message to convey and this message is conveyed with the help of story and characters. The story, characters, theme, music, dialogue and plot make an integral part of every drama. These parts are known as elements of drama.

**Theme:** It is the central idea of the play, which is stated either by dialogue and action or can be inferred after watching the drama. Theme is the base of the story that gives a moral lesson to the characters and the audience too.

**Plot:** The order of the events in any play makes its plot. In other words plot is the story that the play narrates or presents. The sequence of the events in any play and the connection between the events and the characters are two essential features for the success of any drama. The actions of the characters and their part in the story altogether constitute the plot.

**Characters:** Characters form an integral part of any drama and every character has a personality of its own and follows some set rules and principles which are pre-designed by the dramatist. The actors of the play take the responsibility of making those characters alive on the stage. The main/lead character of the play is called protagonist, while the villain is known as antagonist. The theme of the play is presented through the protagonist with whom the audience relates.

**Dialogue:** In a drama, the story is narrated to the audience with the help of interaction between the characters, this verbal-interaction is called dialogues. The statements, questions, interjections of the characters on the stage that carry forward the story of the drama are in the form of dialogues. These dialogues also help in revealing not only the personality of the characters but also their social status.

**Setting:** The era or time in which the action of the play takes place, affects the story and the appearance of the characters. The theme of the play is also related with the time-setting, the issues, problems and social context of the play. It is the time period and the place where the story is set that forms the setting of the play.

**Music:** The use of sounds, the rhythm in the dialogues, the songs that are used to compliment the action. The music and the lyrics should be according to the requirement of the play; sometimes music makes the play more effective.

**Symbols:** Symbols are used to provide hints of the future events in the play. These symbols compliment the action and the story of the play. Symbols denote some hidden meaning, sometimes that meaning contrasts with the apparent sense but eventually leads to the real and intended meaning.

**Check your Progress- 1**

1. What is the importance of dialogues in a drama?
2. How do the symbols convey the real message of the drama?
3. What is a 'Plot'?

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**5.2 INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF DRAMA**


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The word "Drama" is not new; it had existed for many centuries. This word has been derived from the Greek word "Dran" which means "to do or to perform". "Dran" is very much related to another Greek word "Drainein", which means "action on the stage". When we relate the word Drama to this technical meaning of "Drainein", it certainly creates a relation with action which is an integral part of Drama. A collection of characters or mere dialogues cannot be called Drama. The characters of drama have to be involved into some action which marks the development of the plot. Thus, in brief, it can be said that a sequence of events as a part of a plot, leading towards climax and acted upon the stage with the help of characters and dialogues, produce a drama, which intends salvation and purification of hearts rather than mere entertainment.

Aristotle's *Poetics* is all about drama. He suggested that several forms of poetry could also be identified as drama and performed by the actors in the presence of an audience. He said that dramatic action imitates the real life and presents it on the stage. This process of imitation was called 'Mimesis' by him. "Mimesis" means imitation and this imitation should be of real actions. Another term that Aristotle had mentioned is "Action", he said that drama offers real actions and views of reality. Aristotle had considered imitation as an integral component of drama because humans have a desire to copy or imitate others. This imitation of real life is presented in the form of drama. He had defined two forms of drama-tragedy and comedy and considered tragedy as the real drama and comedy as the lower category of drama. He said that the real world is more about sober and sombre emotions than about comic. So, drama should also present the serious side of the real life.

**Aristotle's definition of Tragedy-** Tragedy is an imitation (Mimesis) of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in a language beautiful in different parts with different kinds of embellishments, through action and not narration, and through scenes of pity and fear bringing about the "Catharsis" of these or such like emotions.

"Catharsis" means purgation/release of strong emotions. When the audience sees the scenes of tragedy, their minds are either filled with pity or with fear because the audience relates itself with the characters of drama. These emotions of pity and fear are released in the form of sympathy, regret or repentance.

However, Later on, E.M. Forster considers drama as a tool for the exposure of social conditions which not only entertains but represents

political and social changes as well. Drama, thus, is connected with the representation of social life upon the stage.

### Check your Progress-1

1. What is the meaning of the word 'drama'?
2. What does the term 'Mimesis' mean?
3. Why is drama considered as a representation of society?

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## 5.3 INDIAN DRAMA

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Drama in India has an age old history, having its roots in Vedas. It came into being to convey the truth of things to human beings. It was considered that Drama represents the whole circle of life covering both the material and the spiritual spheres. While tracing the evolution of Indian Drama, we reach back to the Vedic Period. The Sanskrit drama during Vedic Period was essentially romantic in its expression and it mostly concluded on a note of peace and harmony. This drama had an aesthetic impact upon the audience. It was not only based upon the sequence of events, characters and other mechanics but it also strived to employ symbols and gestures to bring forth the truth.

In Sanskrit, Bharata's *Natyashastra* ornately talks about the earliest stagecraft. *Natyashastra* defines and describes all aspects of Drama like stage-setting, music, plot-construction, characterization, dialogue and acting. It discusses that the plot could be idealistic or realistic, characters could be divine or semi divine or human and they can be heroic or unheroic. Along with these, Bharata had also described 'Poetic Justice' where good always wins over the evil and this winning implants a message of truth, justice and optimism in the minds of the audience and deepens their faith in values and ethics.

The Sanskrit Drama has followed the norms set by Bharata and this drama mirrored the eternal India. However the best Sanskrit drama was associated with the representation of the lives of the elite class people. Some remarkable plays then produced were by Bhasa, Shudraka, Kalidasa, Harsha, Bhavabhuti and Vishakahadatta. There is a long list of Sanskrit plays, a few of which are- *Mrichakatika*, *Malathimadhava*, *Shakuntala*, *Vanisamhara* etc.

### Check your Progress-2

1. Who had written *Natyashastra*?
2. What is the meaning of 'Poetic Justice'?
3. What norms did Sanskrit drama follow?

## 5.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH DRAMA IN INDIA

The initial creative efforts were in the form of translations and adaptations from Sanskrit into various Indian languages as well as into English. Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* was translated into some regional languages; similarly Shakespeare's plays like *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Cymbeline* were translated and adopted into Indian languages, for instance, a Tamil adaptation of *Cymbeline* came in 1898 and a Bengali edition of Shakespeare's plays came between 1896 and 1902.

However, the western impact gave a new lease of life to the dying tradition of Indian Drama and opened new vistas for plays, written originally in the Indian languages and sometimes translated into English. This modern drama was a result of various new thoughts, ideas and forces. These new ideas were more idealistic, reformist and revolutionary.

The British Drama influenced and encouraged the theatre movement in Indian languages but it could not encourage the theatre in English language on the expected lines. The major reason for this limited growth of Indian Drama in English was the medium of social interaction. It was always necessary to connect the audience with the characters on the stage and this connection could be made through the mother tongue only. It was difficult to create a convincing and effective communication in English. Nonetheless, this difficulty was overcome by the next generation of dramatists. Their intelligent choice of subjects and situations along with their impressive presentation upon the stage had transcended time, place and languages.

The Indian Drama in English can be traced back to 1831 with the publication of Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta*, and then in 1871 Micheal Madhusudan Dutt wrote *Is This Civilization?* This latter was considered the first proper Indian play/drama in English. After that Ramkinoo Dutt's *Manipura Tragedy* appeared in 1893. These plays focused upon presenting the real social life of the time. But, there were no other creative efforts for around a decade or so. There were a sufficient number of plays written from 1847 to 1947 but those qualified rarely for stage production. During the pre-independence era, the contributions of Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, T. P. Kailasam, A. S. P. Ayyar, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharathi Sarabhai, were remarkable. While Rabindranath Tagore was incredibly remarkable for his lyrical excellence and allegorical magnificence, the dramas of Sir Aurobindo brought back the tradition of Elizabethan poetic drama of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Amongst a list of playwrights, Rabindranath Tagore and Sir Aurobindo enjoyed some success, but to some extent their plays too lacked in stage-ability.

The scene of Indian Drama in English in the post independence phase got far better. There are various reasons for its development and growth. The expansion of English as a second language and later, the emergence of



electronic media and increase in T.V. and film viewership affected the production of drama too. Indian Drama in English got better opportunities and the theatre groups in Calcutta, Bombay (Mumbai) and New Delhi produced successfully the plays of Gieve Patel, Asim Currimbhoy, Pratap Sharma, Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani and many others. These dramatists used different themes and techniques to enrich the field of drama. This was the time when Indian Drama in English flowered and attained a significant position as a literary genre. To a great extent, the credit for this significant advancement goes to Asif Currimbhoy for his productiveness and versatility in the production of plays. At the same time Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani are the two pillars of Indian Drama in English. They introduced novel themes relating to contemporary societal issues. Girish Karnad established that Indian Drama in English which can refresh itself by going back to the ancient Indian Drama, while Mahesh Dattani brought the socio-political realities of the Indian society to the stage. Karnad's *Hayavadan*, *Tughlaq*, *Naga-Mandal* and *The Story of Tipu Sultan* are very famous plays, while *Thirty Days in September*, *Tara*, *Dance Like a Man* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* are Dattani's well-known plays.

Apart from them, there are many other playwrights who have produced remarkable amount of work and deserve attention as well. Some of the famous playwrights are - Pratap Sharma for his *The Professor has a Warcry* and *A Touch of Brightness*, Dina Mehta for *The Myth Makers* and *Brides are not for Burning*, Rajindra Paul for *Ashes Above Fire*, M. V. Rama Sarma for his eleven plays in *Collected Plays*, Uma Parmeswaran for *Sons Must Die*, Vera Sharma for *Life is like That* and *The Early Bird*, Khushwant Singh for *Tyger, Tyger Burning Bright*, Shashi Tharoor for *Twenty Two Months in the Life of a Dog* and *The Five Dollar Smile*, R. Rajarao for *The Wisest Food on Earth*, G. K. Kottoor *The Fire in the Soul*, B. Ahmed for *Three Days* and *The Rani of Jhansi* and Manjula Padmanabhan for *Harvest* and *Lights Out*.

### Check your Progress-3

1. How did the Indian Drama in English get new ideas?
2. When was Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta*, published?
3. What were the major themes of Indian Drama in English?

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## 5.5 MANJULA PADMANABHAN- THE DRAMATIST

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Manjula Padmanabhan is a fiction writer, artist, and playwright and is known as India's first woman cartoonist. She was born in 1953 in Bangalore in a diplomat family. She grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand. She attended a boarding school. She did her B.A. in Economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay and M.A. in History from the Bombay University (University of Mumbai). After finishing her University

education, she moved to a media-related-career and her interest in writing took her to publishing. Presently, Padmanabhan lives in Delhi.

She has written numerous children's stories and is very famous for her plays like *Harvest*, *Lights Out*, *Hidden Fires*, *The Artist's Model* and *Sextet*. She has written books such as *Escape*, *Getting There*, *Hot Death* and *Cold Soup*. There is also a short story collection – *Kleptomania* - written by her. Along with writing plays, she has worked as a cartoonist for the leading newspaper – The Pioneer. Her character Suki for a comic strip has become very famous. The character Suki became instrumental in making Padmanabhan a more well-known writer and a beloved figure. This cartoon character started appearing in Sunday Observer in Mumbai in 1982 and later it also appeared in The Pioneer in New Delhi. The character Suki retired in 1987 but it was revived around 19 years later. It is a strong minded character that now appears in The Hindu Business Line. Since its first appearance the character has become more vocal and boldly talks about the recent issues, whether it is women's issues or intolerance of the times.

Her latest semi-autobiographical book *Getting There* talks about her life between 1977 and 1978; it is based on the events in her life while the author was in Mumbai sharing a flat with her friend Sujaya. The book is all about the quest for self awareness. Another book by Padmanabhan – *Escape* – presents the life of an only girl in a world where all the other women have been eradicated. This book is a powerful but harsh sketch of a dystopian world that reveals the cruel reality of the time.

She is an insightful writer of the age who likes to ponder over serious issues of our society. In the field of Indian Drama in English she is a well known name who has very effectively portrayed many realistic problems through her dramas. Along with some other dramatists, Manjula Padmanabhan also projects the presentation of social and political realities of the time. She selects social problems to talk about, be it presentation of gender discrimination or organ smuggling. Her drama *Lights Out* very effectively presents the suppression of women and gender division in our society. The playwright presents a world where women are totally dependent on their male counterparts for every decision; they are not even allowed to think on their own instead they have to agree with the views and thoughts of the males only. This play is based on a real life incident of the rape of a woman in 1980s. Leela hears the sounds coming from the nearby building, the sounds of body violation, the sounds of molestation and the sounds of helplessness. She wants to raise her voice against the crime but her husband Bhaskar does not allow her to do so, rather he asks her to close her ears if those sounds are hurting her so much. The playwright has divided the characters into two sections- one section is males, who enjoy discussing the voices coming from that crime scene and are totally indifferent of the trauma and the pain of the victim. The other section is females, who want to help that victim, rescue her and stop those frightening voices but they are so subjugated that they fear their own existence and security. The males represent power and authority while the

females represent weakness and powerlessness. Males are presented as the giver of strength and shelter while the women are receptor of these.

Her most famous play is *Harvest*, which was published in 1998 and has won the first prize in the final Onassis International Cultural Competition. Manjula Padmanabhan is the first Indian dramatist to win an honour abroad. It is a firmly built futuristic and revolutionary play. It deals with a very unusual theme of organ selling, bringing forth a scary picture of a cannibalistic and savage society, where selling of organs has become too common and human organs are treated as if something harvested and then reaped whenever required.

#### Check your Progress-4

1. When was Manjula Padmanabhan born?
2. What is the name of her autobiographical book?
3. Name some of Manjula Padmanabhan's famous plays.

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### 5.5 HARVEST- SUMMARY

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*Harvest* is about the difference between the first and the third world countries, which highlights the exploitation of the third world countries at the hands of first world. The play is about the desperation and anxiety of a man to survive and manage his family. His desperation leads him to an agency which directs him to someone in the first world who is into organ buying for a large (not specified) amount of money. The dramatist caricatures very aptly the vulnerability caused due to the poverty and keenness of a poor man to make money. *Harvest* is about the donors- the third world and the receivers- the first world. The wealthy but sick people in the first world get treatment easily and become healthy. Even the worst of their diseases are cured easily. It is not only the availability and accessibility of treatment but also the poverty stricken and helpless population of the third world that become suppliers of their organs. In the play, *Harvest*, there is an organ purchaser - Ginni - though she is never presented on the stage but is visible on a screen only. There are four organ donors, belonging to the same household- Om Prakash, his wife Jaya, his mother referred to as Ma and Om's younger brother Jeetu. Om, the lead character of the play, tries to protect his family and decides to sell his organs. The play shows how poverty compels someone to go to any extent in order to earn a livelihood and provide for his/her family. In this play, Om is all ready and eager to sell his as well as his family members' organs to live a comfortable life. When Om goes to Interplanta Services, he is totally unaware of the kind of job they would offer him. There are many others like him, anxiously standing in the queue and waiting for their turn. The queue, which continues to several floors made up of bars and grills, just like a cage, is moving constantly, Om wonders when do they have to stop and fill some forms and answer some questions. But nothing of that sort happens; they walk and walk, pushing each other. Even when a man in the queue faints, others keep on pushing and walking. After a while, Om is asked to remove his cloths and some warm scented water is splashed on his body and then again some cold water. Om could not

understand anything but he follows all the instructions. His eyes are covered and then again uncovered, he is asked to sit and some injections prick his body. After that, he is instructed to put on his cloths and is informed that he has been selected. Om feels very proud of his selection.

Later on, three guards from Interplanta Services visit Om's house and do some sort of renovation. It is like clearing up all the eatables from his house and replacing those with some other packaged, highly hygienic and healthier food, removing and replacing the kitchen section etc. They place a computerized unit along with other technical equipments at his house. This computer unit is for connecting with Ginni and later on with Virgil. The guards instruct Om about food and other necessary things and then leave. Not only this kitchen setup and computerized unit, but Om's family is also provided with a personal toilet too. Earlier, they had to go outside the house, whenever they needed to, but now this personal toilet is a privilege for them and some of the neighbours too. Initially things seem good and the family is happy with all the luxuries. When, the time for organ donation comes, the real tensions starts. Neither of the characters wants to donate his/her organs.

The play divides the characters into two groups - the first world buyers and the third world sellers, the wealthy and the poor and the exploiter and the exploited. These wealthy but ailing patients are used as tools to highlight the exploitation of the third world due to the system of global capitalization. Though the human organs can't be taken to be equal to something that can be produced or cultivated by the third world for the consumption and convenience of the first world, yet these can be extracted from it for the betterment of the first world. This play compares and contrasts the selfishness and indifference of the first world with the vulnerability and susceptibility of the third world.

*Harvest* shows organ selling as a source of making more money – and also fast - that the poor people can't think of earning even after years of toil and labour. Organ-selling is considered by Om, the main character of the play, as an escape from poverty and as one of the best means to make easy money. There is a high-tech contract organization - Interplanta - that selects physically fit donors to donate (sell) their body parts to the first world buyers. These buyers are, either ill people or the people who live in constant fear of old age and natural signs of physical decay. These organ-receivers (buyers) use their money to find a healthy body (donor) to get its organs to keep themselves healthy and alive for a longer period of time. Om Prakash goes through a medical test and passes it and is declared an eligible, healthy candidate for selling the rights to his entire body to an anonymous buyer in America. After agreeing to the contract, he informs his mother very happily that now they would have more money than they could ever imagine. His wife Jaya, however, considers his decision wrong and unwise and expresses her dissatisfaction with it. Her dissatisfaction creates some hesitation and confusion in the mind of Om and here we notice a struggle between hope and despair. But Om argues and defends his decision.

Advanced technology has provided humans with machines that can work better and more efficiently. This efficiency of machines has resulted in unemployment and joblessness for many poor people. On one hand, this technology has brought development and progress but on the other hand people like Om have lost their jobs and livelihoods. Om's poverty has forced him to take such a drastic decision. Though his judgment is based on his desire to earn unlimited money, yet it is the result of his helplessness.

Om Prakash justifies his decision of signing the contract for selling his own organs, as he is unable to face the problems associated with poverty. The play draws the attention of the audience towards this organ trade which would bring destruction to many people like Om Prakash. However, towards the last scene of the play, Om Prakash did not have to donate his organs. Instead, the guards from Interplanta Services forcibly take away his younger brother Jeetu with them. Jeetu has to undergo the entire process and his body is taken up by Virgil, an American who had purchased his body to save himself from old age and death. By the last act of the drama it is revealed that the first world has developed technically at a faster rate and this development has given them access to defeat death too. They have found out a way of transforming and transferring themselves into new bodies (bought from the poverty stricken third world) and this way they proposed to live forever.

However, by the end of the play, Jaya refuses to be a part of this game of psychological suppression and financial subjugation. She refuses to let the Interplanta Services' guards enter her home and implant a device in her body. Even her determination forbids them from breaking the door. Her will-power, strong fortitude and self awareness defeats the first world buyer of organs and establishes a balance between the two worlds.

### Check your Progress-5

1. How many characters are there in the play Harvest?
2. What justifications did Om give for donating his organs?
3. What were the demands of Ginni?

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## 5.6 SUMMING UP

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*Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan is a play based on the excessive powers of Science and Technology. Padmanabhan imagines a world where the first world has progressed so rapidly that it can defeat the death too. Here, in this play, the disproportionate dependency on Technology and Science has made humans devoid of humanity and have converted them into machine-like creatures. At the same time, the play talks about the poor population of the third world, who due to extreme poverty have started believing that their lives have no value. Thus, they are ready to do anything for the rich people, only to earn their livelihood.

The characters are intentionally divided into two groups – the first world humans and the third world humans. This division is done to draw a contrast between the rich and the poor. Manjula Padmanabhan creates a comparison between the two different worlds of the same globe. One world is of rich, educated and developed people who are eager to consume the other part of the globe that is poor, uneducated and needy. She presents very aptly, how humans can devour – literally - and utilizes other fellow humans for their own benefits as if the other person is not a human-being but a crop that can be harvested as and when required.

### Check your Progress-1

1. A drama is the presentation of a sequence of events upon the stage, with the help of characters and dialogues.
2. 'Mimesis' means Imitation.
3. Drama is considered a representation of the society because it imitates the actions of the real life.

### Check your Progress-2

1. *Natyashastra* was written by Bharata.
2. 'Poetic Justice' means the victory of good over the bad/wrong.
3. Sanskrit drama followed all aspects of the theatre like stage-setting, music, plot-construction, characterization, dialogue and acting.

### Check your Progress-3

1. The Indian Drama in English got new ideas from the earlier plays written in Sanskrit or in other Indian languages. It got its themes from the English Drama as well.
2. Krishna Mohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindu Society in Calcutta*, was published in 1831.
3. The major themes of Indian Drama in English were the representation of society and social issues.

### Check your Progress-4

1. Manjula Padmanabhan was born in 1953.
2. The name of Manjula Padmanabhan's autobiographical book is *Getting There*.
3. Some of Manjula Padmanabhan's famous plays are *Harvest*, *Lights Out*, *Hidden Fires*, *The Artist's Model* and *Sextet*.

### Check your Progress-5

1. There are four major characters- Om, Jaya, Ma and Jeetu. The receiver of organs are- Ginni and Virgil. The other supporting characters are Guards from Interplanat Services, Bidyut Bai (Om's neighbour) and the crowd.



2. Om said that he had agreed to donate his organ to provide all the luxuries of life to his family.
3. Ginni demanded them to follow a set pattern of life so that their organs remained healthy and happy.

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## CRITICAL STUDY OF MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S *HARVEST* PART - II

### Unit Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 The theme of *Harvest*
- 6.2 The Plot of *Harvest*
- 6.3 The Character
- 6.4 Summing Up

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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On Completing the Unit, the students would be able to:

- 1) Discuss about the play *Harvest*
- 2) Apply Different Techniques to understand *Harvest* as a Science-Drama
- 3) Understand and discuss the *Harvest* as a futuristic drama

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### 6.1 THE THEME OF *HARVEST*

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Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* is about a novel theme, which is set in the imminent future, it takes for its theme the purchase and sale of human organs. It is a Science-Drama, highlighting the impoverished side of the world, where the lives of the people are cheaper than many material substances. The first world reaps the harvest of organs from the third world as and when required.

The play is about the relations of first world and the third world- here the first world is the exploiter and the third world is the exploited. The theme of the play is about the selling of body organs due to extreme poverty in the third world to the wealthy and technically developed clients of the first world. The play (drama) presents an imaginary world where the first world is so much technically developed that they have overpowered death too. This technical development has given them liberty and power to use other person's body organs to defeat their age and even death, whereas the poor population of the third world still struggles to meet its ends.

*Harvest* presents technical development and the role of machines in human life. Here, the theme is interwoven around three things- machines, machine-like-humans and humans. Out of these three, the most powerful and effective is the machine-like-humans, who control and direct real humans. These machine-like-humans are a representation of virtual world

that is created with the help of technology. This virtual world impresses the poverty stricken family of Om and he agrees to donate his body organs.

### Check your Progress- 2

1. What is the theme of Harvest?
2. How does the first world use the third world?
3. Why does Om agree to donate his organs?

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## 6.2 THE PLOT OF HARVEST

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Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* is a three act play which focuses upon how the first world cannibalizes the third world to fulfill its inhumane desires. The series of events is very compactly designed and tightly interwoven. The play revolves around a poor family of four members that lives in a cramped one room tenement in some slum area of India. The four characters of the play are- Om Prakash, his wife Jaya, his old mother and his younger brother Jeetu (Jeetu). Om is a clerk, who is dismissed from his job; his mother loves him more than his younger brother. Jeetu is an ill-natured, satirical figure who works secretly as a gigolo. The protagonist, Om Prakash is tired of his unfortunate conditions, fed up of struggling for food and other basic needs and tormented by the unavailability of jobs. He agrees to sell his organs to save his family from economic and emotional disaster. In this play, Om and Jaya represent an apparently normal and sound marital life, where the husband is eager to fulfill his duties towards his family and the wife is worried about the life and wellbeing of her husband. But, Jaya has a secret relationship with her brother-in-law Jeetu. The love of Om's mother is limited to Om only because he is the only bread winner of the family and she dislikes her younger son Jeetu because of his immoral habits. Om's mother is jealous of her daughter in law Jaya and keeps taunting and criticizing her. All these four main characters of the play are confined within the four walls of a decrepit room and live with each other in a loveless relationship. The events of the play start with Om signing an agreement to sell his body organs to some wealthy American. When he informs his family about this new anonymous job, his mother feels happy but his wife gets worried. Later on, after entering a luxurious life, they all forget about the impending doom. Suddenly, one day the guards from Interplanta Services appear and take Jeetu instead of Om. Though, Jeetu is mistakenly taken and his eyes are removed but afterwards he agrees to the conditions set forth by Ginni and donates his body. Jeetu's body is used by Virgil, who later on persuades Jaya to get impregnated with his child. The play ends with Jaya's refusal of Virgil's offer.

The development of the plot presents the psyche of human beings in different situations. As the events move forward the behaviour and nature of the characters also change. Initially, Om is delighted by his new job but when the time comes, he hides like a coward. On the other hand, Jeetu,

who talks high about his ideals, selfishly rejects Jaya's love and chooses to go to Ginni. The growing selfishness and the insensitiveness create a feeling of frustration as well as pity in the minds of the audience. The most indifferent attitude is shown by Ma, she remains selfish throughout the play.

### Check your Progress- 3

1. How many acts are there in *Harvest*?
2. What relationship is shown in this drama between the first world and the third world?
3. Why does Ma love Om alone?

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## 6.3 THE CHARACTERS

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**Om Prakash-** Om Prakash is the central character of the play, *Harvest*. He opts to sell his organs instead of living in penury. Om is presented as a tormented and tired man who lost his energy to struggle and thereby lives a normal life or rather he is a defeated man who sells himself up. After signing the agreement to donate his organs he justifies his decision by saying that his decision is for the betterment of the family. When his wife confronts him, he does not feel guilty or bad.

Om Prakash was working as a clerk but because to the use of machines he had lost his job. The machines work more efficiently and produce better results. That's why; the mill-owners and other employers preferred setting up machines. Many employees like Om were rendered to unemployment due to the intervention of machines and they had to struggle to find a new job. Om, after trying at several places, decides to agree to the terms and conditions of Interplanta Services so that his family and he can live happily. He tells his family that some others are also selected along with him - "Some other men were also there with me, looking at me, I suppose blank. They told us we had been selected. They wrote down our names, addresses...and this-that. All details. Then they gave us these packets, told us not to open them and said we must go home, the guards would come with us for final instructions." (17)

Om Prakash signs the agreement and declares that he is unmarried. He does not hesitate even once in making (on paper) his wife his own sister. When Jaya objects to this, he says that it is only for the sake of work and it is just to make the people believe that he is unmarried, "You think I did it lightly. But at the cost of calling you my sister...we'll be rich! Insanely rich!" (*Harvest*, 27)

Somewhere, his decision is due to his bad circumstances and unemployment. His poverty forces him to sell himself. Initially, it seems that Om Prakash is totally worried and concerned about his family and their needs. But as the time of organ donation approaches, he hides himself in the toilet (made for his family by the Interplanta Services) and the guards mistake Jeetu for Om. When the guards forcibly take away

Jeetu and his eyes are operated then also Om Prakash does not realize his mistake, rather he feels safe and secured with all the luxuries provided by the wealthy donors. However, when he comes to know that only Jeetu can see Ginni and only he will be close to her, then Om starts shouting and telling that he is the real Om and Jeetu is a fake one. His desperation is not due to the pain and troubles of his brother but he could not bear his brother's ability to talk and be connected to Ginni, the wealthy and beautiful American lady. Om Prakash's later behaviour shows his self-centric and selfish nature.

**Ma-** Ma is an uneducated old woman and mother of Om Prakash and Jeetu. She represents that section of Indian women, who are financially dependent on men and also the women who unjustly love their first male child more than the other children. When Om comes back home Jaya objects to his decision then Ma intervenes deliberately and says, "Who cares about her? Wife or sister, Mother comes first! So tell me – these people, your employers, who exactly are they?" (26)

She loves Om, her elder son more than the younger one, Jeetu. She supports every decision of Om and keeps on praising him. As a typical Indian mother, she is unable to find fault with her son. Even the ill treatment of Jaya at the hands of Om is also justified by Ma. She feels that whatever her son does that is correct and just. This lavish treatment of Om turns him into a coward, weak-willed and a spineless man.

The ill treatment of women by their husbands makes them submissive and subjugated. Consequently, they treat their sons in a lavish way and this over-reflection of love makes men more self-centric and patriarchal. Such women take revenge by wielding power to their sons and inflicting pain on their daughters in law. Ma provokes Om to ill treat his wife and drives sadistic pleasure from the pain of Jaya.

Ma hates Jaya and dislikes Jeetu, her own younger son, "The gods left a jackal in my belly by mistake when they made him-". (11) Her hatred towards Jaya has two reasons- first she finds out about the illicit relation of Jaya and Jeetu, and secondly, she wants Jaya to undergo the same pain that she herself had suffered as a daughter in law and as a wife. Her love for Om has taken the shape of sycophancy while she herself has become a tyrant towards other family members.

Her sadist attitude detaches her from everyone and everything in the family. Even when the guards drag Jeetu away then also, she is interested only in watching T.V. "...Why should I care what happens to Jeetu? I've stopped caring about anybody. (*she replaces the earphone and turns back to her set*) (102).

Her detached and indifferent attitude is a kind of escape from all sorts of pains and responsibilities. This escape is dramatized very aptly.

**Jeetu-** He is the younger brother of Om Prakash who most of the time stays out of the house and earns his livelihood by working as a gigolo. He has a hidden relationship with Jaya and claims his love but never wants to

enter into any sort of responsibility. His own mother dislikes him and his elder brother does not want him in the house. He is shown as a careless man who, despite his unethical and immoral ways, boasts of his self-respect and refuses to be a part of Om's money-game, "At least when I sell my body, I decide which part of me goes into where and whom! But it's the money in the end, isn't it? My poor brother. Thought he was so pure. But he's like everyone else after all! only as pure as the price of his rice." (45) But, after getting injured Jeetu himself comes back to his house for help and shelter and then again he is supported by Jaya only.

When he is dragged (in place of Om) by the guards and his eyes are operated, he blames Om and shouts a lot. However, later on, he feels happy seeing Ginni for the first time and he eagerly agrees to the terms and conditions of the buyer and donates his body, "She exists. That's enough for me. She's a goddess and she exists. I would do anything for her – anything!" (99) Unlike Jaya, he surrenders to the wishes of the buyer from the first world. He represents the opportunist section of the society who acts according to their benefits.

**Jaya-** She is the only character in the play that survives the power-game between the first world and the third world, between the wealthy and the poor and between the receiver and the giver. While, the other three members of her family give up so soon to the power of the first world-buyers of their organs, she is the only one who fights till the end. Her husband runs away and hides himself to save his life, her brother in law surrenders to his fate and gives up and her mother in law succumbs to the material charms, Jaya alone fights to maintain her individuality and identity. She is shown as a fighter since the beginning of the drama. Jaya is a member of the same poor family and yet she objects to Om's decision of selling his organs. She also faces the same problems and struggles in similar ways but unlike other characters she refuses to surrender.

She undergoes extreme anguish when she comes to know that Om has declared her as his sister (without even discussing with her), only to avail the luxuries offered by the company. Om has done this to circumvent the preconditions of the company that the donor should be unmarried. This negation of relationship ruptures her identity; in that house Jaya's identity is only as 'the wife of Om'. On knowing all this, Jaya wipes her kumkum and says, "My forehead burns, when I say the word sister." Though wiping off the kumkum denotes widowhood, yet she does so to prove her individuality and to release her mental anguish. The word sister is like a death knell to her marriage. Her action of wiping off the Sindoor, creates empathy in the minds of the audience.

Jaya has an illicit relationship with her brother in law Jeetu. This relation of hers has been critiqued and condemned by her mother in law every now and then. In fact, she herself realizes the futility and immorality of this relation but the indifferent attitude of her husband and the physical requirements of a young woman make her justify her relationship with Jeetu.



In the last act, she refuses Virgil's proposal of going through some technical process and bearing his child. Her life is at stake yet she maintains and prefers her human identity and refuses to get defeated by the technology. She realizes that she has been the real target of the organ buyer Virgil, who after using the body of Jeetu, now wants to impregnate her with his seed mechanically to increase his race. The wishes of Jaya never mattered to her own family now also her wishes don't matter to Virgil. He is adamant to make her have his child but Jaya's determination and strong will-power defeat him.

**Jaya-** I'm bored of this argument! Don't you understand? This game is over! Either you have to erase me and start again or...accept a new set of rules.

**Virgil-** You're not stupid, Zhaya – you know it's possible to win against me.

**Jaya-** Stupid or not, if I lose my life, I win this game.

**Virgil-** You won't be alive to savour that victory.

**Jaya-** But I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far! (122)

She is the only character who shows development within the play. She is the only bold character who dares to question her husband's decision and also the guards at the time of installation. Again, by the end of the play she questions and stands up to Virgil too.

#### Check your Progress- 4

1. Why is Jaya considered to be the strongest character in the drama?
2. What is the major contrast between the characters of Om and Jeetu?
3. Is Jaya correct in refusing Virgil's offer? How?

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### 6.4 SUMMING UP

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This play has a very apt title- *Harvest*. It describes how a poor family falls in the trap of the western world. This play is Manjula Padmanabhan's attempt to represent how the excessive use of machines overpowers the humans and creates troubles for humanity. She also brings into focus the rapidly increasing trap of organ-selling trade. The play creates a balance amongst humans, machines and machine like men, who instruct and govern the humans. This play is a war against wrong use of technology and at the end, this war is won by Jaya. The dramatist has created a futuristic image of our world, where one day machines may rule the world and humans would become weaker. The character of Jaya is used to instruct people how to govern the machines instead of being governed by them.

Moreover, there is another aspect of organ selling in the play. This organ-selling changes the system of control- by selling organs, the donors shift the control in the hands of the receivers. The donor does not have any control on either on his body or on his life. He has to live according to the instructions of the receiver. In the play, when Om goes to the Interplanta Services, he is asked to sign a contract which makes him surrender all the rights of his body to the organ receiver. Again, when the contact module is set in motion at his home then also Ginni keeps on instructing them about how to lead a healthy life. This contact module enables the receiver of the organ to keep a vigil on Om's family. This exchange of rights over organs is another example of subjugation of the third world by the first world. This control and subjugation is not only physical but also emotional and psychological. That's why Jaya refuses to agree to Virgil's demands because she does not want to be controlled by anyone.

### Check your Progress- 1

1. In a drama, dialogues are used to maintain interaction between the characters and also to help the story to progress.
2. The symbols always have a hidden meaning which is different from their apparent sense. This symbolic (hidden) meaning conveys the real message of the play.
3. A Plot is a sequence of events that carries the story forward and shows the relation between the characters.

### Check your Progress- 2

1. *Harvest* is a futuristic play which has organ-selling as its main theme.
2. The first world controls and exploits the third world for its benefit. The first world uses its technology and money to subjugate the poverty stricken people of the third world.
3. Om agrees to donate his organs because he wants to get rid of his poverty.

### Check your Progress- 3

1. There are three acts in *Harvest*.
2. In this play, the first world is shown as the usurper and the third world is the subject.
3. Ma loves Om alone because he is the elder son and she knows she can rule the house through him only.

### Check your Progress- 4

1. Jaya is considered to be the strongest character in the play because she refuses to accept the conditions of Virgil and prefers to maintain her individuality.

2. Om and Jeetu both are selfish and opportunists but while Om is a coward, Jeetu accepts his fate openly.
3. Jaya is very much correct in refusing Virgil's offer because her individual identity is more important to her than the money offered by Virgil.

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# CRITICAL STUDY OF MOHAN RAKESH'S *HALFWAY HOUSE* PART I

## Unit Structure

### 7.0 Objectives

- 7.1 Introduction: A Short Bio-literary Sketch of Mohan Rakesh
- 7.2 Literary Output of Mohan Rakesh
- 7.3 Influences on Mohan Rakesh
- 7.4 Halfway House – A Brief Overview
- 7.5 Halfway House - Plot Outline
- 7.6 Conclusion
- 7.7 Important questions

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## 7.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are to:

- Know the life and works of Mohan Rakesh
- Get familiarized with literary trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hindi literature
- Understand the background of *Halfway House*
- Be familiar with the characters in *Halfway House*

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION: A SHORT BIO-LITERARY SKETCH OF MOHAN RAKESH

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Literature is considered to be a mirror of the society in which it is created. Being a very sensitive minded human being, the creative artist naturally gets influenced by various personal, familial, social, religious, and political events and incidents that take place around him/her and these incidents get reflected in one or the other way in the creative works created by that artist. In a way, it can be said that the artist's personality and its growth is conditioned by his/her environment. The history of literature all over the world is a proof of this universal phenomenon. And the same is true with reference to Mohan Rakesh, one of the most prolific writers in India, who writes his literature in Hindi.

Born in Amritsar, Punjab on January 8, 1925, Mohan Rakesh is the pioneer of the literary movement in Hindi known as New Story (Nai Kahani) that changed the entire course of Hindi writing of the time. Initially he attended College, Lahore and then completed his Master's

degree in English and Hindi from Punjab University, Lahore. Mohan Rakesh took up several jobs including those of a postman for two years in Dehradun, Head, Department of Hindi at DAV College, Jalandhar and also as a Hindi teacher at Bishop Cotton School in Shimla before he decided to undertake writing as a full-time profession. He also edited *Sarika* a well-known literary magazine for a year in 1962-63.

When it comes to Mohan Rakesh's personal life, the records show he belongs to a Sindhi family that had migrated from Sindh to Punjab. His original name was Madan Mohan Guglani and his father was a lawyer by profession, who met an untimely death when Mohan Rakesh was just fifteen years old. He married thrice in his life time. The first arranged marriage ended in divorce after seven years of married life in 1957. His second marriage also proved short-lived. However, his third marriage with Anita Aulakh with whom he lived in Delhi continued till his death on December 3, 1972.

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## 7.2 LITERARY OUTPUT OF MOHAN RAKESH

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Mohan Rakesh's literary career spans for little less than three decades during which he tried his hand at writing novel, short story, drama, travelogue, memoir and criticism. He became the name to be reckoned with in Hindi literary circle with the publication of his play, *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* (*One Day in Aashad*) in 1958, which won a competition organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. Many critics consider this play as the revival of Hindi theatre. Its film adaptation with the same title was directed by Mani Kaul and won him the Film Fare Award for the Best Film of the Year.

As the play, *Ashadh ka Ek Din* has special significance in the literary career of Mohan Rakesh, it'd be worthwhile to see how Mohan Rakesh tried to interpret ancient Sanskrit playwright Kalidas' *Meghdoot* from a creative artist's point of view as he looked at the love story narrated in *Meghdoot* as the personal event from the life of Kalidas on which he based his *Ashadh ka Ek Din*.

The story line of *Ashadh ka Ek Din* revolves around the personal life of Kalidas. The play begins in a small but peaceful Himalayan village, where Kalidas lived happily with his beautiful beloved, Mallika. The natural surroundings of the place and Mallika's inspirational company enabled Kalidas' literary career to bloom so much so that his name and fame had reached far and off resulting in his receiving an invitation from King Chandragupta II of Ujjayini. Though Kalidas wanted to accept this invitation, he could not take a decision as going to Ujjayini meant separating from Mallika. But Mallika had recognized Kalidas' literary talent and wanted to see him on the zenith of success, persuaded him to accept the King's invitation and go to Ujjayini. With a very heavy heart, Kalidas, left for Ujjayini and within a short period of time became very famous throughout the kingdom on account of writing wonderful plays like *Kumarasambava* and *Meghdoot*. This success made him forget his love for Mallika further resulting in his marriage with Priyangu Manjari.

Once on his way to Kashmir, Kalidas visited his native village accompanied his wife, Priyangu Manjari. During his stay there, Kalidas did not meet Mallika as if he had forgotten her. On the other hand, Mallika was still deeply in love with Kalidas and was ready to sacrifice her life for him. Priyangu Manjari had heard her husband often speaking about his village and the villagers and realized their significance in Kalidas' getting inspiration for writing his plays. Therefore, during this visit, Priyangu Manjari met Mallika and offered to help her in marrying to one of the royal attendants. But Mallika declined this offer. Towards the end of the play, Kalidas realized his mistake of getting engaged in politics rather than focusing on his literary career. Meantime Mallika is married and had a daughter. He knew it well that Mallika was the true inspiration for his creativity but now it was not possible to start a new life with her. Thus the play ends on a sad note both for Kalidas and Mallika.

This simple love story attracted many leading directors like Shyamanand Jalan and Ebrahim Alkazi, who took the play to the theatre-goers all over the country. It is officially translated as *One Day in the Season of Rain* by Aparna Dharwadker and Vinay Dharwadker and was performed for the American audiences at Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Mohan Rakesh's other plays, *The Halfway House* (*Adhe Adhure*) and *The Swans of the Waves* (*Lahron Ke Rajhans*) also received a lot of critical attention and added to his glory as a playwright. *Lehron Ke Rajhans* is based on the life of Nand, the younger brother of Gautam Buddha, who is represented in this play as a person in conflict with his two minds – one wishes to follow the path of renunciation and the second wanted to enjoy the material pleasures by remaining at home in the company of his wife.

He has translated two Sanskrit plays, namely *Mrichchkatikam*, and *Shakuntalam*. Besides these plays, Mohan Rakesh has also written novels including *Closed Dark Rooms* (*Andhere Band Kamare*) and *The Tomorrow That Never Comes* (*Na Aane Wala Kal*), *Antaraal* and *Bakalama Khuda*. His short story collections are *10 Pratinidhi Kahaniyan*, *Rat ki Bahon Mein* and *Mohan Rakesh ki Meri Prem Kahaniyan*.

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### 7.3 INFLUENCES ON MOHAN RAKESH

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A close look at Mohan Rakesh's literature shows that he was very sensitive towards the contemporary socio-political conditions, particularly the Indian freedom movement that was gaining momentum under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. He was also influenced by the activities of Arya Samaj that was attempting to transform the Hindu ways of life by moving away from idol worship and paying attention to the studies of the Vedas. Besides, Mohan Rakesh had a lot of inner inclination towards the post-independence happenings in India. After the British left, the leaders of free India had started paying more attention towards rebuilding the Indian nation by establishing industries, developing agriculture, investing in education and strengthening foreign relations. The expectations of the people were on high and to fulfill them government agencies were trying

their best. However, there were still many unfulfilled desires of the people resulting in social restlessness among the masses.

Mohan Rakesh was in his twenties and was aware of the contemporary socio-political milieu from which he picked up various events and situations to write his short stories upon. Not only the events of his time, but even there are some characters in the works of Mohan Rakesh that resemble the middle class people around him. This feature of his writing helped him to hugely contribute to the Nai Kahani (New Story) movement in Hindi literature that brought a remarkable change in the selection of the themes and their treatment. This new story moved away from the traditional Hindi short story and brought a sea-change among the later year Hindi writers in their approach and manner of writing stories.

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#### **7.4 HALFWAY HOUSE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

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Mohan Rakesh wrote his famous play, *Aadhe Adhure* (The Incomplete Ones) in 1969. It is translated in English by Bindu Batra. During its first production for the theatre, it was directed by Shyamanand Jalan. The play was much ahead of its time as it depicts a middle-aged woman, who dreamed of marrying a perfect man but soon realizes that there cannot be a perfect husband and one has to make compromises if one wishes to be happy in married life.

The story-line of the play moves around the central character of Savitri, who was the sole bread-winner of the family. Savitri was not happy with her married life as she always felt that all the members of her family including her husband, Mahendranath were dependent on her. Nobody wanted to do anything to support the family. She had seen Mahendranath trying his hands at different occupations but he had failed every time and now he was an unwanted burden for Savitri.

Mahendranath and Savitri had three children – Ashok, the unemployed and perhaps unemployable son used to remain at home without doing anything. The elder daughter, Binni had fallen in love with a young man, Manoj and eloped with him. But soon she realized that Manoj was not the kind of person she was looking for and so she came back home probably with no intention to return to her husband. Kinni, the younger daughter of the family, seemed to be little spoilt and was always found trying to grab attention of the others. There are four more men characters – Juneja, Manoj, Jagmohan and Singhanian - in the play. It appears that they are little better off than Mahendranath, and so Savitri is found developing relationships with them. But finally she realized that there was no hope of moving out of her relationship with Mahendranath as there cannot be anything like a perfect man. That is why whenever she tried to get in any relationship, whether it was with Manoj, Singhanian or Jagmohan, she kept finding faults with them on one or the other count and was forced to return home to continue her unwanted relationships with Mahendranath.



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## 7.5 PLOT OUTLINE OF *HALFWAY HOUSE*

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Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* is structurally well-knit play that primarily revolves around the middle-class family of Savitri and Mahendranath. It has two acts. The first act opens at the living room in the house of Savitri. The entire room is in disarray. The pieces of furniture are worn out. It seems that nobody is bothered about keeping it tidy. But as soon as Savitri enters the room, she begins to arrange it properly. It is learnt that Savitri is a middle-aged working woman, who lives with her husband, Mahendranath and three children – Ashok, Binni and Kinni. Mahendranath is a jobless person, who according to Savitri, is a useless person as rather than taking care of home properly during Savitri's absence, he makes it untidy by keeping newspaper, tea-cups, his pajamas all over the room. Naturally, when after a day's work, Savitri comes home tired, she is frustrated to see the untidy place and gets angry with her husband. This quarrel between the two tells the audience it must be the regular scene of the house wherein lives an unhappy couple.

The real reason of Savitri's anger and frustration is not just the untidy home but it is the incompatibility of the husband and the wife. It is learnt that Mahendra was running a printing press in partnership with Juneja but the business fails and he had to shut it before it accrues more financial losses. However, Savitri seriously feels that Juneja was responsible for the failure of the business as he took away the profits and left losses for Mahendra. Savitri is more angry with Mahendra because after the shutdown of the press, whatever share of amount Mahendra received, he squandered it on his parties. On the contrary, Juneja was going to use his share of amount to start the new business. She feels that Juneja has deceived Mahendra and taken undue advantage of his simple nature. And still Mahendra did not cut short his friendship with Juneja that enrages her. Mahendra tries to pacify her by saying that Juneja sympathizes with him and seriously wanted to help him.

The arrival of Binni, Savitri's daughter, reveals one more thread of the plot. It is told that Binni was the elder daughter of the family, who fell in love with him and got married against the wishes of her parents. But this love-marriage does not yield sweet fruits as Binni fails to get any kind of satisfaction from her married life as it seems to be haunted by the kind of relationship Manoj shared with Binni's mother and her house.

Ashok and Kinni are other members of the family who are seen sharing sibling love for each other. Ashok was an unemployed young man in his twenties and Kinni was a school-going child of thirteen years old. She was not much happy with the way her parents treat her. Even her basic school-related needs are not fulfilled. It is learnt that Savitri was trying to find a job for Ashok with the help of her boss, Singhanian. But Ashok did not like Singhanian for his pompousness.

Savitri had soft feelings for her friend, Jagmohan, who was an upper class man of society. Savitri seemed to be in relationship with him before marriage. And as she was not satisfied with her present life, she wanted to

move away from her family and get settled with Jagmohan. That is why, one evening she went to meet him. During this meeting, she revealed her plan to Jagmohan. But Jagmohan declined her proposal thinking of his social status. At the end of the play, Savitri is seen trying to understand herself and her life. She feels that there are so many incomprehensible and unintelligible issues in her life. Whether she realizes them or not is a different question; however, she seems to have better understood that all men are the same and will remain the same. Mohan Rakesh has tried to reveal Savitri's heart in these words: "...All of you...every one of you...all alike! Exactly the same. Different masks, but the face...? The same wretched face...every single of you!"

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## 7.6 CONCLUSION

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From the foregone pages, it can be observed that Mohan Rakesh was a sensitive writer, who usually dealt with the contemporary issues through his literary works. His contribution to New Story movement in Hindi literature is immense that actually changed the course of Hindi writing and took it to the national level. Mohan Rakesh's play, *Aadhe Adhure*, presents a man-woman conflict in married life and shows how his protagonist, Savitri, was much ahead of her time with reference to her expectations from a person with whom she was required to live entire of her life, which was unknown for the women of her time.

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## 7.7 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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1. Draw a literary sketch of Mohan Rakesh.
2. Write a note on the literary influences on Mohan Rakesh.
3. How far does Mohan Rakesh's literature represent him as the voice of new age?
4. Draw the following character sketches:
  - A) Savitri
  - B) Mahendranath
  - C) Mohan
  - D) Binni
  - E) Kinni

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# CRITICAL STUDY OF MOHAN RAKESH'S HALFWAY HOUSE PART – II

## Unit Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Halfway House: Important Characters
  - 8.1.A Savitri
  - 8.1.B Mahendranath
  - 8.1.C Ashok
  - 8.1.D Binni
  - 8.1.E Kinni
  - 8.1.F Singhanian
  - 8.1.G Manoj
  - 8.1.H Jagmohan
- 8.2 Theme of Love and Marriage in Halfway House
- 8.3 Conclusion
- 8.4 Important Questions
- 8.5 References

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## 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit are to:

- Know the dramatis personae of Halfway House
- Understand the relationships among the characters
- Look into the thematic concerns of Mohan Rakesh in his Halfway House

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## 8.1 HALFWAY HOUSE: IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

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In his Halfway House, Mohan Rakesh has created some really memorable characters though he has not given them proper names. He simply refers them as The Man in a Black Suit, The First Man, The Second Man, The Third Man, The Fourth Man, The Boy, The Woman, The Older Girl and The Younger Girl. It's only during the course of the play that the audiences come to know about the proper names of these characters. These characters include Savitri and Mahendranath and their three children – Mohan, Binni and Kinni, Mahendranath's partner-cum-friend - Juneja, Savitri's boss - Singhanian, Savitri's friend - Jagmohan and Binni's husband – Manoj. Though all of these characters are essential for the

development of the plot as they play their respective roles faithfully, not all of them are equally important; hence an attempt is made below to draw the word-portraits of some of the most significant characters:

### 8.1A Savitri:

Savitri is a middle-aged married woman, who lives with her husband, Mahendranath and three children, namely Ashok, Binni and Kinni. The audiences come to know that like all other young women, Savitri too had her own dreams about her marriage and would be husband. She expected him to be a perfect person, who would shoulder her responsibility and make her happy in life. However, when the audiences meet her in the first act of the play, they see her as a frustrated woman whose all dreams of having perfect husband and utmost happiness in married life are shattered. Now even though she has reached her middle age, she could not find her heart's content with regard to her companion and home. So when the play opens, she is seen expressing her frustration as, at home, she's the only person, who takes care of everyone and everything. After a day's work, when she gets back home, as usual, she finds it in disarray. It is nicely depicted by the playwright in these words:

The Woman: Phe-e-ew...! No one's ever at home! Kinni! Out I suppose! (goes towards books) This child is impossible! Another torn book! (goes to sofa) And Ashok has been...! Elizabeth Taylor... Audrey Hepburn... Shirley Maclaine...! That's right, just live for these pictures! (is about to sit down when she sees the pyjamas) The Bara Sahib...! (Picks up the pyjamas with a distance, is about to throw them in the corner but then starts folding them) Idle all day but he can't take care of his clothes...or even clear the table! Everything's left for me to do....(7)

This kind of atmosphere at home has led her towards her frustration and probably because of it she seems to be trying to be happy by means of developing relations with other men. There are reference in the play of her having relationship initially with Jagmohan, and then with Singhanian; even it is suggested that there was something between her and Manoj that made her husband blame her for Binni's ruined married life. But in none of these relationships, she could find happiness. It was Ashok, who rightly understands why Savitri fails in all her attempts to fix the house. It was during his one of conversations, he asks his mother why she keeps inviting people home that makes all feel smaller than they actually are. He goes on to say that:

**The Boy:** ...Whoever you've invited up to now...Why did you do so?

**The Woman:** Why do you think?

**The Boy:** For the glamour of it all. An intellectual. A man with a salary of five thousand. A Chief Commissioner. Whenever you've invited any one, it hasn't been for the person himself but because of his name, his salary, his position

At the end of the play, she is seen in the company of her husband, Mahendranath, which suggests that she has nowhere to go but her husband as there does not exist anything like 'perfect' husband and she has to adjust with him if she really wants to be happy in her married life.

### 8.1B Mahendranath:

Mahendranath is Savitri's husband and is a person, who seems to have no importance in his personal, familial and social life but as the play moves on it becomes clear why he is treated like this by all the members of his family. He is a middle-aged man of about 50 years of age, who seems to have miserably failed on all counts of his life. Once he lived a decent life but now it has been turned into a mess like his "once a fairly well-to-do middle-class home. Several pieces of broken furniture, sofa set, dining-table, cupboard, dressing-table, etc. having lost their proper function, appeared to have acquired uses dictated by the limitations of space. Teapots, a couple of cane poufs, a shelf of dilapidated, old books, and a writing desk and a chair add to the over-crowded effect of the room."

Mahendranath believes that he has done and is still doing whatever he can to keep his family happy but everybody ignores his sincere efforts and treats him as if he is unwanted in the family. That is why he says: "For how many years have I been bearing the burden of the life? And for how many years have I been looking after this family? And despite that, what have I come to... that everyone answers me back, is rude, disrespectful, impertinent... everyone finds some cause or other! What is my status in this house? Silent acceptance, perpetual snubs, constant insults, is that all I deserve after so many years?... I am of no use, of no use at all. I'm only an idler ...to be kicked and bullied just as you please. Can anyone tell me why should I stay here?" (25-26) He seems to have reached this state because he could not succeed in any of his business ventures. The audiences are told that he used to run a factory in partnership with Juneja, his friend; but it proved to be a failure. So he took away his share of the capital and slowly the entire money was spent on household needs including his expensive parties.

As a husband, Mahendranath could not keep his wife, Savitri, happy and content because she expected him to be her 'perfect' companion and for whom 'perfectness' includes to be a responsible and successful breadwinner of the family. As a father, too, Mahendranath is seen falling short of his fatherly responsibilities as none of his children seem to be giving him fatherly respect. It must be because from their early childhood they had seen their mother fighting with him due to his failure as an entrepreneur. These constant fights of the parents at home had a negative impact on their tender minds, who seem to have developed little love or respect for Mahendranath as well as Savitri.

However, when the audiences try to objectively assess the character of Mahendranath, they might find him as a different person. One, of course, cannot ignore the fact that he was a failure but even it should not be forgotten that he might definitely have tried his level best to succeed as

any other businessmen do, but unfortunately, again and again he fails in all his endeavours thereby providing Savitri and others a chance to blame him for his failures. Whatever may be the case, one cannot deny the fact that Mahendranath loved Savitri as much as he could, and perhaps that is why, even after getting insulted by her on numerous occasions, at the end, he returns to his family and accepts Savitri with all her faults. This feature in the character of Mahendranath certainly makes the audiences rethink about their assessment of Mahendranath as a worthless person, uncaring husband and irresponsible father.

### **8.1C Ashok:**

Ashok is the son of Savitri and Mahendranath. He is a young man about twenty-one, who is shown attempting to get a job but every time he fails to grab the one perhaps because he has not acquired the essential skills the employers look for in their prospective employees. This jobless presence of Ashok is one more cause of concern for the family as the father, Mahendranath, was already there having nothing to do. Perhaps as the product of the new educational system of his time, Ashok lacks the required employability skills and suffers because of it. Through this character, Mohan Rakesh seems to have attempted to draw attention of the policy makers towards the urgent need of some effective education policies that would make the young generation fit to undertake the new jobs in the industry.

It is not just that Ashok is jobless; it also seems that he is not much interested to take one. And perhaps that is why, he is shown wasting his time in seemingly useless things like collecting the pictures of Hollywood actresses. However, one should not forget that Ashok is a victim of the kind of family atmosphere in which he is forced to live. Being the eldest child of the family, he must be the witness of the constant quarrels between his parents; he might have seen from close quarters his father's frequent failures in business and his mother's objectionable relationships with multiple men, which might have negatively affected tender mind. He is shown hating the very presence of Singhanian at his home as he might have realized his true intention in visiting his home. That is why, he says: "If he hadn't been your boss, I would have booted him out that day. Lolling on the sofa and scratching himself in the groin! His thoughts stray in one direction, his eyes in another, and I'm supposed to guess that he's addressing me. (mimicking him) 'Yes, could you give me your political views...the pompous ass!'" (28-29)

The manner in which Ashok behaves at home and his casual approach towards his career are certainly the causes of concern not only for his parents but also for the society as everyone wishes a young man to be little more serious so far as his career and his responsibilities towards his family are concerned. However, the kind of family atmosphere and its negative impacts on the growth of his personality should also not to be overlooked while evaluating Ashok's character.



## 8.1D Binni:

Binni is twenty years old married girl. She is oldest daughter of Mahendranath and Savitri. The audiences meet her soon after the first Act of the play begins as she has returned to her parents from her husband's home. Actually, it is little confusing to note the odd behaviour of Binni as she could not clearly tell her parents the reason of her not being with Manoj, her husband. It comes to the knowledge of the audience that Binni had fallen in love with Manoj and ran away with him to get married. But soon after the marriage, she feels that it is difficult to cope up with Manoj that leads to frequent quarrels between the two.

When Binni is questioned by her parents as to why she has come back home, she is unable to answer it properly. The conversation that ensues does not seem to be leading somewhere as Binni is found not opening up:

**The Woman:** Are you happy?

**The Older Girl:** (evasively) Yes, very

**The Woman:** Really?

**The Older Girl:** Do you think I'm lying?

**The Woman:** (looking away) This is no answer!

**The Older Girl:** Would it be an answer only if I said I'm unhappy?

**The First Man:** But you don't look happy!

.....

**The Older Girl:...** Life goes on one way or another.

**The Woman:** (leads The Older Girl to the writing-desk) Sit down! Is there anything...?

**The Older Girl:** No. Nothing and yet... everything!

.....

**The Woman:** Then there must be a reason...(15-18)

**The Older Girl:** What reason? A cup of tea split from his hand or a short delay when he returns from work? These little things are not really reasons; they become reasons. A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and spreads like poison through my whole being. Everything I touch or see or hear becomes distorted and I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate. But Mama, I don't know why ... I just can't see why. It happens unasked, unforeseen. It... It... tortures me till I think I'm going mad...

Binni's this state of mind forces her to get in conflict with Manoj as he believes that it was from her home that he had taken something that

prevents him from being natural. And if her husband was not to be natural with her, how can one expect Binni to be natural either with him or her parents, which seems to be leading the couple towards the fall of their marital bond.

### 8.1E Kinni :

Kinni is referred as The Younger Girl in Mohan Rakesh's Halfway House. She is thirteen years old school-going daughter of Savitri and Mahendranath. Though she seems to be a spoilt child from the way she speaks with all the members of her family including her parents, she can also be considered a victim of bad parenting. It is learnt that her parents have not paid her school fees and also her other educational needs are not properly provided for. This leads Kinni to express her frustration in little harsh and even insulting attitude towards her family members. It seems that she has been friendly with Ashok, her elder brother as both of them spend more time with one another than others. It is also found that she is often subjected to beatings by her mother, whenever she feels that Kinni's behaviour is improper. Nobody would take sides with Kinni for her bad manners and words; but some sections of the audiences, particularly, the teenagers, would surely sympathise with her as there is certainly a room for them to think that Kinni is not properly taken care of by her parents.

**Juneja:** The partner and also a friend of Mahendranath, Juneja is portrayed with some negative features. Mahendranath considers Juneja as a person, who will help him to succeed in his life. But there is every possibility (at least according to Savitri) to look at him as the person, who deceived Mahendranath in the dealings of their business. This conversation between Savitri and Mahendranath throws light on this view:

**THE WOMAN:** That's right! Keep hoping! He's just dying to help you! (starts dusting the furniture) There's always so much dust. Where does it come from?

**THE FIRST MAN:** You have no right to keep abusing him. He has always helped me.

**THE WOMAN:** We would have been better off, if he hadn't.

**THE FIRST MAN:** (sits down) Alright, I won't go! I don't go there to have a good time! If fate has been against me up to now...

**THE WOMAN:** ... One can excuse what happened the first time. But what about the second time? Both Juneja and you invested equal amounts of money. There was one factory. The profit and loss occurred in the same factory. Yet, fate favoured him and not you?

**THE FIRST MAN :** (swallowing his anger with difficulty) If you had been a partner in the factory you'd have realized—

**THE WOMAN:** that I've already realised! Haven't I? (10)

This was Savitri's observation about Juneja. When the factory was closed, Mahendranath squandered whatever money had got from selling the factory. However, the audiences are told that Juneja was to start a new business with the money he had received as his share. Particularly, the way in which Savitri talks of Juneja creates this impression. He is more often than once named the reason for Mahendranath's failure in the business.

### 8.1F Singhanian:

Singhanian is introduced in the first act of the play as the boss of Savitri. He is an elderly person who lacks even the basic social manners for which he is hated by Ashok, Savitri's son. The audiences first meet him at Savitri's home as she had invited him with the hope of getting some job for Ashok. But even before this visit, Singhanian had come there twice. And Ashok had realized the true nature of his visits as Savitri's past points to something more in inviting Singhanian home than just her intention of getting a job for her son. That becomes quite clear when Binini speaks with Savitri:

**The Older Girl:** I said... Are you thinking of something?

**The Woman:** No... I was just looking around to see if there's anything else to be tidied up. Someone's coming over....

**The Older Girl:** Who

**The First Man:** ... Singhanian. Her boss. He's the latest visitor we have....

**The Older Girl:** Mama! What's the matter. Mama:

**The Woman:** Nothing

**The Older Girl:** There is...

**The Woman:** Haven't I said it's nothing! (goes near the cupboard and starts rummaging in it.)

**The Older Girl:** (follows her) Mama! (The Woman does not reply...) You're used to all this...How long will you allow it to happen with you?

This conversation certainly makes the audiences to think that Savitri was behind something more than just getting Ashok a job. And Singhanian seems to be a kind of person who has been habitual in taking disadvantage of the women of his office his position. And a woman like Savitri easily falls prey to him.

### 8.1G Manoj:

Manoj is Binini's husband. The audiences are told that Binini fell in love with him and ran away with him and got married. It is also told that Manoj used to frequently visit Savitri's home before his marriage with Binini.

Actually, it was during these visits that he got acquainted with Binni. There are hints suggesting some relationship between Manoj and Savitri before he got married with Binni.

### 8.1H Jagmohan:

Jagmohan is introduced in this play as a middle-aged man belonging to upper strata of the society. He shares close relationship with Savitri and her family. There are some instants in the play that show Savitri and Jagmohan as one-time lovers, like for example, Savitri calls her 'Jog' and in turn he calls her as 'Cuckoo'. As the audiences are aware that Savitri was not happy in her marital relationship with Mahendranath and wanted to move out of it as early as possible, she thinks that Jagmohan will accept her and she can lead a happy life with him. The presence of Jagmohan in her life, is not liked by Mahendranath but she doesn't care for it. It becomes clear from this conversation between Savitri and Binni:

**The Woman:** I'm going out for tea...Jagmohan is coming to fetch me.

**The Older Girl:** He's coming here?

**The Woman:** Yes...why do you ask?

.....

**The Older Girl:** When do you think you'll be back?

**The Woman:** (putting that handbag back and taking out another) I don't know. I may be late.

**The Older Girl:** If he asks where you've gone?

**The Woman:** Say I never told you...or say that Jagmohan came to fetch me...

**The Older Girl:** ...Will it be alright to tell him?

**The Woman:** Why shouldn't it be?

**The Older Girl:** If he tells Daddy...

**The Woman:** So what?...

**The Older Girl:** It will only...

**The Woman:** I'm only going out for tea...not to commit a crime!

**The Older Girl:** You know Daddy doesn't like...

**The Woman:** Does your father like anyone? (51-52)

From this conversation, it also becomes clear that Savitri wanted to leave her family permanently and get settled with Jagmohan. And that is why she tells Binni that she might not come back. But Jagmohan now looks at his relationship with Savitri from different perspective. So when they

meet, He tells Savitri that it was too late for them to restart their life again. He feels sympathetic towards Savitri's present situation and even shows readiness to help her financially. But Savitri declines his offer. Thus Jagmohan can be considered as many men in Indian society, who don't mind having extra-marital affairs but are not ready to accept the responsibility of that woman.

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## 8.2 THEME OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN HALFWAY HOUSE

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Mohan Rakesh's Halfway House belongs to a new trend of realistic drama in Hindi theatre. He seems to have believed in the fact that real human life is more fictitious than the fiction itself and that is why he has portrayed the day-to-day real life situations in almost all of his literary works including Halfway House. As is mentioned earlier that this play revolves around the family of Savitri and Mahendranath, naturally, it attempts to unveil various intricate layers in the familial relationships.

Halfway House narrates the story of a married couple – Savitri and Mahendranath. It is shown how Savitri is forced to continue to observe the marital bond with her husband, Mahendranath because Indian social structure does not permit the married couple to get easily separated from each other. It mandates them to keep on making compromises at any cost so that the family structure remains intact. However, this social structure ignores the fact that if the couple is incompatible, living together can bring in only happiness in their individual lives. That is what the audiences witness in Halfway House, where Savitri is shown suffering because she doesn't like her unsuccessful husband.

Throughout the play, it is observed that Savitri is expressing her displeasure towards her husband both by words and deeds. So far as her words are concerned she is seen speaking harshly, rudely and even sometimes cruelly with and about her husband. When the play opens, she is found expressing her unhappiness about the untidy house which she believes was the result of Mahendranath's careless behaviour, like for example, his pyjamas are lying on the sofa, newspapers are spread everywhere, tea cups are kept on the teapoy, etc. Actually, it was possible for Mahendranath to put the things at their proper places. But he did not do it. Even when Savitri returns home from her job, he expects her to prepare tea for him. And without helping her to do the household chores, he wanted to go out and spend some good time with his friend, Juneja. This approach on the part of a husband is certainly not acceptable and that is why Savitri gets upset with him.

The audiences are told that Mahendranath was a failure in his life on all counts: As a husband, he could not fulfil the expectations of his wife, Savitri; As a responsible father he failed to take proper care of his children; and he also failed in his business that he used to run in partnership with Juneja. All these reasons are more than sufficient for an ambitious wife like Savitri to humiliate him whenever and wherever possible. It is seen that she literally makes him 'stand and 'sit' as she

wishes; and poor Mahendranath could not even raise his voice on most of the occasions. It seems pathetic on the part of a husband to swallow his wife's insulting comments every now and then with or without being at fault.

With reference to Savitri's deeds against not only her husband but also against the social structure, it can be observed that many members of the audience might have found it difficult to accept Savitri's behaviour on many occasions. Some would accept Savitri's anger against Mahendranath when he doesn't take proper care of the household during Savitri's absence. But so far as her extramarital relationships are concerned there would be very few who would support Savitri. For example, when the play opens, it is found that Savitri had invited Singhanian for tea, of course with the intention of getting a job for her son, Ashok. However, when the audiences actually meet Singhanian, soon they realise that he is not fit a person to be invited in a decent family. From the conversation that ensues after Singhanian's arrival shows that he seems to be habitual with visiting the women employees of his office. The way he talks about women employees and their daughters presents him as a negative character who was just interested in taking undue advantage of the situation of his women employees. This feature of his character is understood by all including Ashok, who had visited him twice before his present visit. But still Savitri wanted to continue her relationship with him, which seems to be questionable.

There is also some unexpected and undesired element in the relationship between Savitri and Manoj. Binni had married Manoj and was not happy with him for which she blames her family. And due to this, she is seen frequently visiting her parents, which makes Mahendranath think that there must be something wrong in Binni's married life. So he insists Savitri to ask Binni about it. The conversation that follows reveals that Binni was very much perplexed in her marital relationship with Manoj. When Savitri asks her whether she was happy with Manoj, Binni says that 'What's the point of asking, Mama? Life goes on one way or another'(16) that makes the parents anxious and so Savitri takes her to the writing-table and says:

**The Woman:** ...Sit down Tell me the truth. Is there anything...?

**The Older Girl:** No. Nothing and yet...everything!

**The Woman:** For instance?

**The Older Girl:** For instance...everything!

**The Woman:** So you mean?

**The Older Girl:** I mean... that...before I got married I thought I knew Manoj very well. But now,...

**The Woman:** Hmm! is he unfaithful?

**The Older Girl:** No

**The Woman:** Bad-tempered?

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**The Older Girl:** No.

**The Woman:** Then what is it?

**The Older Girl:** That's what I just can't understand. I don't know what is wrong and why!.. It's...it's just the air we breathe...I can't really explain...not even to myself...That the longer the two people live together, breathe the same air,...the...more estranged they become from one another...A cup of tea split from his hand or a short delay when he returns from work/ these little things are not really reasons; they become reasons. A strange sort of feeling mounts up within me and spreads like poison through my whole being. Everything I touch or see or hear becomes distorted and I stand helpless and fearful under the spell of a destructive fate. But Mama, I don't know why...I just can't see why! It happens unasked, unforeseen. It...it... tortures me till I think I'm going mad. And in the end he too turns against me and says...That...it's from this house I have taken something with me which prevents me from being natural. (16-18)

These words from Binni are quite suggestive. If the audiences try to see how Binni got acquainted with Manoj, it can be observed that he was a frequent visitor to Savitri. And it was during these visits that Binni got attracted towards him that led to their running away and getting married. And when Manoj blames Binni and her house for being the reasons for their unhappy married life, it means that there might be something objectionable in the relationship between Manoj and Savitri before his getting married with Binni. This behaviour on Savitri's part is certainly unbelievable and unacceptable from any perspective.

It is also suggested in the play that Savitri was having an affair with Jagmohan before she got married with Mahendranath. And even after the marriage, she is seen meeting him, which is one of the major causes of her conflict with her husband. Mahendranath might have told her about his dislike for Jagmohan and also not keeping any relation with him. But Savitri, who sincerely thinks Mahendranath to be a fit husband for her, does not listen to him and continues meeting Jagmohan. Even she takes the bold step of leaving her husband and children for the sake of Jagmohan. However, unfortunately for her, Jagmohan refuses her offer as he thinks of his social status, which will be discredited if he starts living with a married woman.

This kind of environment is seen in the relationship between Savitri and Mahendranath that infects even the married life of Binni and Manoj. Actually, there seems to be the lack of real love between the husband and wife that leads them often to the conflict and on the verge of breaking of their marital relationship. Strangely, this lack of love is not there only in the relationship between Savitri and Mahendranath but it can also be observed that there is no or very little love amongst the other members of the family. For example, Savitri is not on good terms with her children, particularly Ashok and Kinni. She is found getting upset with Kinni for



throwing her belongings everywhere and tearing her books; she is also upset with the way Ashok was leading his life. Of course, she is seen trying to find a job for Ashok, but there is every possibility of suspecting her real intention behind it. The same can be said about the seemingly absence of love among other characters.

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be said that through this play, Mohan Rakesh is attempting to throw light on the complex web of family relations that is the outcome of imitating the ultra-modern, westernised ways of living of which the twentieth century Indian men and women are seriously fond of. It seems that these people forget that everything foreign is not good and unacceptable in Indian context. So there is a need of looking at everything carefully before accepting it. Otherwise this passion of theirs might lead them in the wrong direction.

In Indian social structure, marriage has been accorded a very special place. It is considered to be a must for every Indian man and woman. This social structure gives very little scope for individual aspirations forgetting that each and every person has her/his own distinct personality and it should be kept intact as far as possible. Needless to say that love is an indispensable aspect of every marriage and both the parties should recognize and respect it. If it happens, the marital life can become a blissful experience for them.

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### 8.3 CONCLUSION

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The critical analysis of Mohan Rakesh's *Halfway House* shows that the playwright has created some really brilliant characters that primarily move around the theme of love and marriage. Most of the characters are from one family that of Savitri and Mahendranath and their children. Other characters are closely connected with one or the other member of this family; for example, Jagmohan is Savitri's friend, Singhanian is her boss, Juneja is Mahendra's friend and business partner, and Manoj is Binni's husband.

The play speaks about the theme of love and marriage. Here Mohan Rakesh has shown how love or the lack of it can impact the married life of a couple in Indian society. Finally, he has tried to tell the audience that everybody should understand that there cannot be anything like 'perfect' human being; and hence one should try to adjust oneself with the prevailing circumstances of one's life.

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### 8.4 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

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- Q.1 Draw the character sketch of Savitri.
- Q.2 Do you think Mahendranath is a responsible husband and father in *Halfway House*?
- Q.3 Write a note on the relationship between Savitri and Jagmohan.
- Q.4 Compare the characters of Binni and Savitri.

Q.5 Write a detailed note on the theme of love and marriage in Halfway House.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAxfmbthIrw>

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