

## **Paper 14; Module 02; E Text**

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### **(B) Description of Module**

Item	Description of module
Subject Name	English
Paper name	Indian Writing in English
Module title	The Poetics and Politics of 'Language' and Indian Prose
Module ID	MODULE 02

## **The Poetics and Politics of ‘Language’ and Indian Prose**

### **Introduction**

This module “The Poetics and Politics of ‘Language’ and Indian Prose” addresses the question of cultural politics and history as well as the question of linguistic shift in the context of the progress of English Studies in India. The module traces the history of colonial encounter in terms of the exploration of an authentic Indian self through the question of authenticity of the Indian self mediated through the prism of an alien language. The impact of English language on the collective cultural imaginary remains crucial to the question of ‘Indianness’ and the history of Indian prose writings is embroiled in historical and cultural thought. The discourses of colonialism and nationalism in the context of India’s history of colonialism addresses the strategic evolution of such ideological and cultural formations in terms of articulating Indian national identity in the form of autobiographies, biographies, travelogues, serious philosophical essays, analyses of current affairs, religious discourses, and collections of light pieces and memoirs. The module is designed to read critically the plethora of writings imbued with nationalist rhetoric by Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Nirad C. Chaudhuri and others in the context of the process of identity formation. The poetics of language is integral to the politics of representations and the history of prose is crucial to the integration of English language.

### **Objectives**

The module is designed to help you

- read critically the history of Indian English prose
- understand the important socio-cultural events/contexts instrumental to the history of emergence of prose
- position the major writers in the proper historical context

- apprehend the major texts
- understand the performative and literary concerns of the writers

## Literary Representations

- **Non-fictional Prose**

Born in Radhanagar, Bengal in 1772, Rammohan Roy was the founder and editor of two vernacular weekly newspapers, *Sambad Kaumudi* (Bengali) and *Mir'at'l-Akhbar* (Persian). As founding member of the *Bengal Herald* (English) Rammohan Roy mobilised popular opinion and a consequent protest against the censorship of the press by the Governor-General. His reformist zeal is expressed in the public campaigns he organised to demonstrate his opposition to sati. A morning star of Renaissance, his famous writings include four *Appeals to the Christian Public* (1820-3), *Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance* (1823). The first stage of Rammohan's English writings include the *Bhagalpur letter* (1809). The second stage (1816-23) begins with *Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant* (1816), English versions of his *Kena* (1816), *Isa* (1816), *Katha* (1817), and *Mundaka* (1819), Upanishad expositions, *A Defence of Hindoo Theism* (1817) and *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas* (1817). This fruitful period is also marked by his social awareness in the form of the tracts against sati, *Translation of a Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of the Practice Widow Burning* (1818), *A Second Conference* (1820), *Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindoo Law of Inheritance* (1822), and the *Precepts* controversy (1820-3). Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912) and Govardhanram M. Tripathi (1855-1907) are also noted for excellent prose writings. Noted for *Gujarat and the Gujaratis* (1881), *Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood* (1884) Malabari brought out the weekly in English, *Indian Spectator*. He also edited *Voices of India* and *East and West*. Govardhanram M. Tripathi is the author of *Sarasvatichandra*, the first classic of Gujarati fiction published in four volumes over a period of fourteen years (1887-1901). He started writing *Scrap Book* in 1885 and *Classical Poets of Gujarat and their Influence on Society and Morals* was first delivered as a lecture in 1892 and published in 1894. The essays, 'The Hindu Ideal of Poverty'

(1903) and 'The Keynote of the Economics of Hinduism' (1905), and a short story called 'Chuni the Suttee: A Story of Hindu Life' (1902) are examples of Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912) and Govardhanram M. Tripathi's growing convergence.

Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) autobiography *Jiban Smriti* (1911) was translated into English as *My Reminiscences* (1917). His English prose includes *Nationalism* (1917), *The Religion of Man* (1931). In *Karmayogin*, the English weekly newspaper founded by Sri Aurobindo, he combines political journalism with tracts on education and art (*A System of National Education, The National Value of Art*), articles on yogic philosophy (later published in *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, 1918, and *Man- Slave or Free?*, 1922), translations from Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya and the Upanishads, and poems like 'Who' and 'Invitation'. His ability to integrate rhythm and diction as the vehicle of intense thought is crucial to his concept of 'integral yoga' which projects liberation from the world as a first step towards the transformation of the world into a vessel of the divine being. His essays on spiritual and cultural subjects are published posthumously in *Essays Divine and Human* (1994). His prose writings are: philosophy (*The Life Divine*), yoga (*The Synthesis of Yoga*), scriptural exegesis (*The Secret of the Veda, Essay on the Gita*), sociology and political science (*The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity*), literary and cultural criticism (*The Future Poetry, The Foundation of Indian Culture*) *The Life Divine* (1939-40). *The Human Cycle* (1949). In *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1919, revised edition 1950), *The Future Poetry* (1954). The political prose gets the momentum in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru(1889-1964). A political reformist, Gandhi's writings include pamphlets: 'An Appeal to Every Briton in South Africa' (1895), 'The Indian Franchise' (1895), 'Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa' (1896). He also launched journals like *Indian Opinion, Young India, Harijan. Hind Swaraj*(1909) is written in the form of a dialogue between an Editor and Reader addressing the issue of Indian independence. He translated it into English himself and published it as *Indian Home Rule*, again from his own press in March 1910. *Satyagraha in South Africa* (1928), *Discourses on the Gita* (1930) and his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Vol. I, 1927, Vol. II, 1929) are his seminal works. Nehru wrote numerous articles, essays, and pamphlets on political, cultural and literary subjects, the most famous being *Soviet Russia* (1928), *Whither India?* (1932), *Glimpses of World History* (1934), *An Autobiography*, and *The Discovery of India*(1946).

Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1999) is noted for works like *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997), *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), *Passage to England* (1959), *The Intellectual in India* (1967), *To Live or Not to Live* (1971), *Calcutta in the Vanity Bag* (1976), *Hinduism, A Religion to Live By* (1979). *The East is East and West is West* (edited by Dhruva N. Chaudhuri, 1996) is a collection of articles, while his last book, *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997) expresses his critique contemporary British society. The three “horsemen” are individualism, nationalism and democracy responsible for the declining values of civilization. *Passage to England* (1959), narrating the ‘Adventures of a Brown Man in Search of Civilization’ is an interesting book on his experience of visiting England in 1955. The book is replete with comparative assessments of India and England. *Rajiv Gandhi and Rama’s Kingdom* (1995) is the third of a trilogy of books based on Ved Mehta’s articles on India in *The New Yorker*. Mehta’s *The New India* (1978), and *A Family Affair: India Under Three Prime Ministers* (1982) are replete with contemporary sensibility. Ved Mehta (b.1934) is known for *John is too Easy to Please* (1967), a work of literary criticism and interviews. *The Craft of the Essay: A Ved Mehta Reader* (1998) provides a representative sample of Mehta’s prose.

## Letters

Letters provide a glimpse to the integration of personal and public life as evident in Nehru’s *Letters from a Father to a Daughter*. Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-1964* (edited by G. Parthasarathi, 1986) reveals his commitment to democratic idealism. Mulk Raj Anand’s *Old Myth and New Myth: Letters from Mulk Raj Anand to K.V.S. Murti* (1991) and *Anand to Atma: Letters of Mulk Raj Anand to Atma Ram* (1994) evidence his social purpose. The letters of David McCutcheon to P. Lal (*The Epistles of David –Kaka to Plalm’n: The Record of a Friendship*, 1997, first published 1972), Nayantara Sahgal and E.N. Mangat Rai’s *Relationship: Extracts from a Correspondence* (1994), *The English Language and the Indian Spirit* (1986), the correspondence between the Irish poet Kathleen Raine and the Pondicherry-based poet K.D. Sethna; *Letters of Sarojini Naidu* (1879-1949) published in 1997: *Selected Letters 1890s to 1940s*, edited and introduced by Makarand Paranjape (1997) and *The Mahatma and the Poetess: Letters* are some of the seminal collections.

## Essays (Personal, Political, Philosophical)

Essays-personal, political and philosophical add to the archive of prose writings. R.K. Narayan's *A Story-teller's World: Stories, Essays, Sketches* (1989) and *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988* (1988), Mulk Raj Anand's *Prose Kama Yoga: Some Notes on the Philosophical Basis of the "Erotic Art of India* (1991); *Poet-Painter: Paintings by Rabindranath Tagore* (1985); *Some Street Games of India* (1985, for children); *The Hindu View of Art* (1986, first published 1933); and *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (1981) are some seminal works. P. Lal has produced abridged versions of the *Ramayana* (by Valmiki) and the *Mahabharata*. J(iddu) Krishnamurti (1895-1986) has written *The First and Last Freedom* (1954) *Freedom from the Known* (1969) and other works include *Letters to the Schools* (1981), *The Flame of Attention* (1985, with Dr David Bohm, a physicist), *Krishnamurti to Himself: His Last Journal* (1987), *The Future is Now: Last Talks in India* (1989) and *Total Freedom: The Essential Krishnamurti* (1996), a selection from later as well as earlier work. Writings on social sciences proliferate as we see the publication of *Subaltern Studies: Writings on south Asian History and Society*. The first six volumes (1986-1988) were edited by Ranajit Guha. The later volumes were edited by Partha Chatterjee, Gynendra Pandey, Shahid Amin, Dipesh Chakravarty and others. Romila Thapar's forte is her work on ancient Indian history and historiography in *Interpreting Early India* (1993) and *Time as Metaphor of India* (1996) and *Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage* (1996). K.D. Sethna's *The Problem of Aryan Origins from an Indian Point of View* is a scholarly study in pre-Vedic history. Urban history resurfaces with Pamela Kanwar's *Imperial Simla: The Political Culture of the Raj* (1990), *Calcutta: The Living City* (edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri, 1995) and Percival Spear's *Delhi: Its Monuments and History*.

The post-Independence period is marked by the increasing no of books written on India and Indianness from various quarters which is often viewed as a strategic choice of the postcolonial writers. To elaborate, Amitav Ghosh's *Countdown* (1999) is about India after the nuclear test of Pokhran on May 11, 1998. Sasthi Brata *My God Died Young* (1967), *India: The Perpetual Paradise* (1986), Sunil khilnani's *The Idea of India* (1997), Shashi Tharoor's *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* (1997), Gurcharan Das' *India Unbound* (2000) are noteworthy contributions. An important historic landmark was the publication of the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* (published by the Sahitya Akademi in 6 volumes (1987-1994). *Dictionary of Indian Literature Vol. I Beginnings-1850* by Sujit Mukherjee (1999), *Masterpieces of Indian Literature*, edited by K.M. George (3 volumes, 1997), *Modern Indian Literature: An Anthology*

edited by K.M. George (1992-1995), Nayantara Sahgal's *Point of View: A Personal Response to Life, Literature and Politics* (1997), Raja Rao's *The Meaning of India* (1997) add to the growing concern with the problematic of identity construction. *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context* (edited by Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee, 1996) and Harish Trivedi's *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (1993, 1995) focus on the Indian context. Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1993) projects a Marxist stance in his attempt to revalue the work of Edward Said whereas Makarand Paranjape's *Decolonisation and Development: Hind Swaraj Revisioned* (1993) advocates a return to Mahatma Gandhi's ideals.

- **Women Writers on India and Indianness**

The writings by women also demonstrate the growing concern with the politics of language, imperial domination and the construction of a unique Indian identity. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and English Rule in India* by Gauri Vishwanathan reveals the politics behind the study of literature which is basically used as a tool of imperialist domination. Rajeswari Sundar Rajan (*Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, 1993) and Kumar Sangari (*Politics of the Possible: Essays on Gender, History, Narrative, Colonial English*, 1999) examine the Indian context the way Meenakshi Mukherjee's *The Twice-born Fiction* (1971) explored the issue. *Feminizing Political Discourse: Women and the novel in India 1857-1905* (1997) by Jasbir Jain transcends the linguistic barriers. G.N. Devy's first book *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (1992) is also on the idea of Indianness and construction of national identity.

- **Short Story**

The short story as a genre also contributes to the politics of representation as we witness the mingling of creative and socio-political issues, urban and rural, question of language in the

collections of short stories. T. L. Natesan's (pen-name Shankar Ram), author of *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933) deal mostly with rustic life in Tamil Nadu. The selection from both the books appeared under the title *The Ways of Man* (1968). A.S.P. Ayyar, the novelist and playwright, published the following collections of stories: *Indian After-Dinner Stories* (1927), *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1929) and *The Finger of Destiny and Other Stories* (1932). His *Tales of Ind* (1944) and *Famous Tales of India* (1954) are reworking of ancient Indian legends. Ayyar's recurring theme in his stories is social reform and especially the plight of woman in traditional Hindu society. S.K. Chettur's stories in *Muffled Drums and Other Stories* (1917), *The Cobras of Dhermashevi and Other Stories* (1937), *The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories* (1957) and *Mango Seed and Other Stories* (1974) are based on the material collected during his official tours as a member of the Indian Civil Service. Manjeri Isvaran is noted for *The Naked Shingles* (1941), *Siva Ratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *Rickshawallah* (1946), *Fancy Tales* (1947), *No Anklet bells for her* (1949), *Immersion* (1951), *Painted Tigers* (1956) and *A Madras Admiral* (1959). Raja Rao's collection of short stories *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) is a noteworthy contribution to the genre. Mulk Raj Anand is noted for *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934); *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944); *The Tractor and the corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947); *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1953); *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959); *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966); and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). Anand has also retold traditional Indian tales in his *Indian Fairy Tales* (1946) and *More Indian Fairy Tales* (1961). R. K. Narayanan's career as a short story writer is marked by the collections *Cyclone and Other Stories* (1943), *Dodu and Other Stories* (1943) and *Malgudi Days* (1943). His subsequent collections are *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawley Road and Other Stories* (1956), and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970). *Gods, Demons and Others* (1964) is a reworking of famous ancient Hindu legends.

Novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, and Arun Joshi also contributed to the subsequent development of short stories. Bhattacharya's collection of short stories, *Indian Cavalcade* (1948) is a re-telling of significant incidents from Indian history. *Steel Hawk* (1968) is a collection which sometimes lacks psychological depth and interest. Khushwant Singh is the author of four volumes of short stories – *The Mark of Vishnu and other Stories* (1950); *The Voice of God and other Stories* (1957); *A*



*Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories* (1967) and *Black Jasmine* (1971). Manohar Malgonkar's collections include *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975) and *Rumble Tumble* (1977). The stories are replete with unique perspectives on the world of army life, espionage, hunting, mining, smuggling, treasure-seeking and film-making. Chaman Nahal's *The Weird Dance and Other Stories* (1965) offers a glimpse of middle-class match-making in North-Indian families. His chief instrument is ironic portrait and the Partition and its aftermath is central to his stories. We witness a wide range and variety of characters in Arun Joshi's *The Survivor* (1975). Joshi offers sensitive portrayal of young eve-teasers, dotard claiming to be young, sex-obsessed rustic servant, middle aged travelling salesman etc. Ruskin Bond is known for collections of short stories: *Neighbour's Wife and other Stories* (1966) *My First Love and other Stories* (1968); *The Maneater of Manjari* (1972) and *The Girl from Copenhagen* (1977). His subjects include pets, animals, poor and marginal people like waifs, orphans, abnormal children, adolescents and aged men. His treatment is compassionate and full of sympathy. Manoj Das, winner of the Sahitya Akademi award for his Oriya writings, has published four collections of short stories: *Song For Sunday and Other Stories* (1967), *Short Stories* (1969), *The Crocodile's Lady* (1975) and *Fables and Fantasies For Adults* (1977).

### **Autobiography/ Memoirs**

The tradition of autobiography was initiated with R. K. Narayan's *My Days* (1975) and *My Dateless Diary* (1960) followed by Mulk Raj Anand's *Pilpali Sahab: The Story of a Childhood Under the Raj* (1985) published as the first part of an autobiographical series, "Seven Colours of the Rainbow". *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (1981) is a nostalgic narrative of reminiscences of his years in England as a young man, and the literary figures he met. Verrier Elwin's autobiography, *The Tribal World of Verrier Elwin* (1964) had won the Sahitya Akademi Award. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's autobiography, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) and *Thy Hand! Grat Anarch* (1987) provide account of Chaudhuri's childhood and student days till 1952. Chaudhuri's narrative is replete with his concern with the British Empire and its civilizing mission in India and provides an account of the historical events of the period from a subjective perspective. Ruskin Bond's *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir* (1997) and *The Lamp is Lit: Leaves from a Journal* (1998) are memoirs of lyrical intensity. *The Tunnel of Time* (1998) is an autobiography authored by R.K. Laxman, Narayan's younger brother. Dom Moraes has

published two volumes of his Autobiography: *My Son's Father* (1971) and *Never at Home* (1992). Kasthuri Sreenivasan's autobiographical book *Cancer Made me* (1992) chronicles the saga of fortitude when faced with the disease and *Climbing the Coconut Tree*, (1980) is replete with humorous descriptive sketches and social realism. Other narratives include G.D. Khosla's *Memory's Gay Chariot: An Autobiographical Narrative* (1985), Firdaus Kanga's integration of autobiography and a travelogue, *Heaven on Wheels* (1991), P. Lal's *Lessons*, C.D. Narasimhaiah's *N for Nobody: The Autobiography of an English Teacher* (1991), P.S. Sundaram's *Simple Simon* (1998), Karan Singh's *Autobiography 1931-1967* (1989) comprising of two books *Sadr-I-Riyasat* (1980) covering the period 1953-67, and *Heir Apparent: An Autobiography* (1982), Vijayalakshmi Pandit's *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir* (1979), .Manohar Malgonkar's *Princess: The Autobiography of the Dowager Maharani of Gwalior* (1985), Apa Pant's (1911-1992) autobiographical books, such as *A Moment in Time* (1974), *Undiplomatic Incidents* (1987) and *An Extended Family or Fellow Pilgrims* (1991), *An Actor's Journey* (1990) by Saeed Jaffrey narrating the autobiography of an actor whose achievement is known in both India and Britain, *The Fall of a Sparrow* (1990) by the well-known ornithologist Salim Ali, Prakash Tandon's *Punjabi Saga: 1857-1987* (1987), *The Untouchable Story* by D.P. Dass (1984), Prafulla Mohanti's *My village, My Life: Portrait of an Indian Village* (1973), *Through Brown Eyes* (1985), *Changing village, Changing Life* (1990), Sujit Mukherjee's *Autobiography of an Unknown Cricketer* (1996), Alyque Padamsee's memoirs, *A Double Life* (1999) and *Wings of Fire: An Autobiography* (1999) by Kalam are important contributions.

## Biography

Nirad C. Chaudhuri's biography of Max Muller (*Scholar Extraordinary*, 1974) and S. Gopal's *Jawaharlal Nehru* (Vol. 1 1975, Vol. 2 1979) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1976. S. Gopal's biography of his father, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography* (1989) is a notable contribution to the genre. Rajmohan Gandhi (b. 1935) is renowned for *Rajaji: A Life* (1997), *Patel: A Life* (1990), the biography of the "Iron Man" of India's freedom struggle, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi* (1995), an impartial assessment of Mahatma Gandhi. His most famous contribution is *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (1986, reprinted as *Understanding the Muslim Mind* in 1988). In his biography of Ambedkar, *Worshipping False*

*Gods* (1997), Arun Shourie is concerned with Hindu-Muslim relations. The figure of Gandhi predominates Raja Rao's *The Great Indian Way: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1998). Similarly Indira Gandhi has been the subject of many biographies like S S. Gill's *The Dynasty: A Political Biography of the Premier Ruling Family of Modern India* (1996), Ahmed Abbas's *Indira Gandhi: Return of the Red Rose* (1966) and *Indira Gandhi: The Last Post* (1985), Dom Moraes' *Mrs Gandhi* (1980). Tariq Ali's *An Indian Dynasty: The Story of the Nehru-Gandhi Family* (1985), Pupul Jayakar's *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (1992), Inder Malhotra's *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (1989) are some famous works. Ramachandra Guha's *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals and India* (1999) is a biography of the great anthropologist and *An American in Khadi: The Definitive Biography of Satyanand Stokes* (1999) by Asha Sharma narrates the life of Samuel Evans, a social reformer and political worker. Mulk Raj Anand's *Homage to Jammalal Bajaj: A Pictorial Biography* (1989) chronicles the life of the industrialist, Pavan K. Verma's *The Man, The Times* (1989) is on Ghalib and R. Raja Rao's *Nissim Ezekiel: the Authorized Biography* (2000) provides an account of the poet's life, John Lall's *Begum Samru: Fading Portrait in a Gilded Frame* (1997) is a factual biography of a nineteenth century woman.

### **Travelogue**

The first Indian immigrant, Dean Mohammed, published his travelogue *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1794. The descriptions of travel in South India is captured in *The Emerald Route* (1977) and *Cauveri: From Source to Sea* (1975) written by R.K. Narayan and K. Nagarajan respectively. Travel within the country is a subject for writers like G.D. Khosla (*Himalayan Circuit: A Journey in the Inner Himalayas*, 1989), Pankaj Mishra (*Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Journeys through Small Town India*, 1995). A.J. Sebastian's *My Travels: My Teacher* (1998) and C.Y. Gopinath's *Travels with the Fish* (1998) are travelogues. Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, I. Allan Sealy and Amitav Ghosh are also noted for their travel writings. Seth's *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983) replete with the pictures and the journal he kept when he returned home to Delhi via Tibet and Nepal in the summer of 1981. *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (1986) is based on the three weeks Salman Rushdie spent in Nicaragua in July 1986 as the guest of the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers. *From Yukon to Yucatan: A Western Journey* (1994), a travelogue contains anecdotes of the various

place visited by I. Allan Sealy during his three months travelling along the western length of North America from the Arctic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* (1998) by Amitav Ghosh is based on Ghosh's visits to Cambodia and Burma.

## Summing Up

This module on the evolution of Indian prose has helped you to situate the various categories of prose writings in the socio-historical and cultural context discussed in the first module. As discussed earlier, you have to integrate the theoretical knowledge into the arena of specific texts, genres as well as authors to critically deal with the ideas of self, identity, national formations and representational categories. You also need to focus on the problematic of language usage and trace the history in the context of colonial encounter and the modes of resistance. The questions are designed to help you think and read critically.

## Story-Board

### The Poetics and Politics of 'Language' and Indian Prose

#### Introduction

- This module addresses the question of cultural politics, linguistic shift, the progress of English Studies in India, the discourses of colonialism and nationalism in the context of articulating Indian national identity in the form of prose writings.
- The module traces the history of colonial encounter in terms of the exploration of an authentic Indian self though the question of authenticity of the Indian self mediated through the prism of an alien language.
- The impact of English language on the collective cultural imaginary remains crucial to the question of 'Indianness' and the history of Indian prose writings is embroiled in historical and cultural thought.
- The discourses of colonialism and nationalism in the context of India's history of colonialism addresses the strategic evolution of such ideological and cultural formations in terms of articulating Indian national identity.

- Autobiographies, biographies, travelogues, serious philosophical essays, analyses of current affairs, religious discourses, and collections of light pieces and memoirs etc are discussed.

## Objectives

The module is designed to help you

- read critically the history of Indian English prose
- understand the important socio-cultural events/contexts instrumental to the history of emergence of prose
- position the major writers in the proper historical context
- apprehend the major texts
- understand the performative and literary concerns of the writers

### *Literary Representations*

- The module situates the question of Indianness in the context of autobiographies, biographies, travelogues, serious philosophical essays, analyses of current affairs, religious discourses, and collections of light pieces and memoirs.

### *Non-fictional Prose*

- This section traces the history of Indian English non-fictional prose writings.
- Representative figures like Rammohan Roy, Behramji M. Malabari, Govardhanram M. Tripathi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Nirad C. Chaudhuri etc. are discussed.

### *Letters*

- Letters provide a glimpse to the integration of personal and public life.

- Such thematic concerns are evident in the letters of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mulk Raj Anand, Nayantara Sahgal and E.N. Mangat Rai, K.D. Sethna, Sarojini Naidu, Makarand Paranjape and this section deals with the genre.

### *Essays (Personal, Political, Philosophical)*

- This section traces the history of Indian English essay writing
- The works of representative writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh etc. are discussed.

### *Short Story*

- The short story as a genre also contributes to the politics of representation as we witness the mingling of creative and socio-political issues, urban and rural, question of language.
- The collections of short stories written by Chetur, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, Chaman Nahal, Arun Joshi etc.
- This section aims to address the subsequent development of short stories.

### *Autobiography// Memoirs*

- This section deals with the development of autobiographical narratives and memoirs.
- Discussion of the major writers like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Verrier Elwin, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Manohar Malgonkar etc. help to understand the larger concerns of nation and identity.

### *Biography*

- This section dealing with the development of biographical narratives focus on representative authors and texts.
- The focus is on Nirad C. Chaudhuri, S. Gopal, Rajmohan Gandhi, Arun Shourie, Ramachandra Guha, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao.

## *Travelogue*

- The first Indian immigrant, Dean Mohammed, published his travelogue *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* in 1794.
- This section deals with the subsequent development of the genre with R.K. Narayan, K. Nagarajan, G.D. Khosla, Pankaj Mishra, A.J. Sebastian, C.Y. Gopinath, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, I. Allan Sealy and Amitav Ghosh.



**Paper 14; Module 32; E Text**

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## MODULE 32

### KAMALA DAS'S *MY STORY*

Born on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1934 in Kerala's Malabar District, Kamala Das Surraya began to be known popularly as Kamala Das in the Indian literary scenario for her remarkable contribution to Indian writings in English as a poet. She received her education privately at home. Moreover, being a bilingual writer, Das also wrote poems and short stories in her native language Malayalam, most of which were published under her pen name Madhavikutty. From her childhood onwards she had been exposed to a literary environment at her home as her great uncle Nalapat Narayan Menon was a poet and she was greatly influenced by him. Her mother Balamani Amma's poetic passion and the religious writings of the Nairs too were great sources of inspiration for Das. Her father V.M Nair worked as the managing editor of the Malayalam Daily 'Matrubhumi'. The oeuvre of her writing in English include the collection of short stories *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992), poetry books *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *The Anamalai Poems* (1985) and also *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996). There is the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977) to her credit also. She was conferred with the PEN Poetry Prize and Sahitya Academy award. In the year 1984 she was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature.

*My Story* (1976) by Kamala Das is the translated version of her autobiography *Ente Katha* (1973) written in Malayalam. It was serially published in a weekly named Malayalanadu. In the preface she declares about writing the autobiography as:

*My story* is my autobiography which I began writing during my first serious bout with heart disease. The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death and, besides, there were all the hospital bills....I wrote

continually, not merely to honour my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets...

Das's desire to reveal her secrets constitute one of the important elements of an autobiography. *My Story* thus traces her childhood in Calcutta and Malabar, her marriage as well as her literary journey. It also documents her personal experiences of being a woman, her quest for love and most importantly her assertion of self.

To situate Kamala Das's *My Story* in the milieu of women autobiographers, a brief account of the development of women's autobiography in India is discussed here. Bahinabai's autobiography (1700) is recorded as the earliest autobiography written by an Indian woman. Rassundari Devi wrote *Amar Jiban* (1876), and she became the first woman autobiographer in Bengali. She was an ordinary housewife but possessed an extraordinary zeal to read the holy books, for which she learned the letters painstakingly from her son's book. Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924) wrote in Marathi *Amachya Ayshyatil Kahi Athwani* (Memoirs of our life together), Binodini Dasi (1863-1924) wrote *Amar Katha* (My Story) in Marathi. These women autobiographers hail from conservative patriarchal background, always remaining in the periphery, devoid of any space of their own. They were expected and taught by the senior women to be good wives. In their autobiographies, women like Lakshmibai Tilak, Ramabai Ranade express their view on marginality in parental households where singing, playing, reading and writing were out of question. Lakshmibai Tilak's husband converted to Christianity, and to live with her husband she also had to convert herself. She had tough time in trying to shed her original identity. On the other hand Ramabai Ranade was married to a western-educated husband, who insisted her to learn Marathi and English. In order to do so she had to confront the scornful attitude of the other women of the house, who tried to dissuade her from learning. She had to sustain her effort in difficult circumstances. She always remained

careful not to offend her husband in any condition. Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948), who was associated with reformist Prarthana Samaj, writes in her autobiography that women simply considered themselves unfortunate beings. Her own mother and stepmother, who were educated, believed that education made women harsh and ambitious. She also made tremendous effort in learning. These women were silent sufferers who were taught to please men and never to worry them with their problems.

Most of the mentioned memoirs are the women's personal experiences as individuals. The early women autobiographers always concealed their sexual life. There are no references therefore to menstruation, menopause and sexual experience in their autobiographies. Their autobiographies also reflect the turmoil and disagreements overshadowing their expectation of a liberal society, attaining freedom from their situation of being colonized. Their life stories also throw light on the ways through which they overcome the obstacles of life, making a space of their own. In the nineteenth century the common themes of the women's memoirs are their happiness and satisfaction derived from their husbands' progress along with their own education and the prospect of a renewed life for themselves.

The later group of women autobiographers is marked for their assertion of right to create new identity models for women to meet the challenges of the changed times. The autobiographies of Binodini Dasi and Cornelia Sorabji bear testimony to the mentioned fact. Binodini Dasi is a legendary figure in Bengali theatre. Her autobiography is a major document of the Bengali theatre and the earliest first person records of a woman who remained single and worked for a living. She was victimized and used by the male dominated society while trying to restore the theatre she was working in. Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1954) was the first woman to be graduated. She was not given the scholarship

which she obtained from Govt. of India after she acquired the first place in Bombay Presidency College. She had to wait for thirty long years to qualify as a practicing lawyer after she received her degree of Bachelor in Laws.

Another group of women autobiographers like Brinda (1910), Urmila Haksar (1922) and Sharan-Jeet Shan (1945) record their trauma of being women. But they cultivated the conviction that women can be liberated only when she is economically independent. Education and career assume great importance for these women. These autobiographers seek their fulfilment outside their domestic role. They were achievers by nature who would not remain satisfied only with their men's success. They had to excel in their own pursuits individually to satisfy their craving for self-fulfilment. The autobiographies of Durgabai Deshmukh, Dhanvanti Rana Rao, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay had the highest honor of being awarded the Padma Bhushan for their successful public life. They challenge the myth that woman is made only to be confined in the four walls of their home.

Kamala Das's *My Story* does not fall into the category of a typical woman's autobiography. For several reasons, her autobiography is considered as a notable one written by an Indian woman. She has revealed the bitter truth of life in a stunningly simple manner. The contribution of her memoir to women's autobiography in general and specifically to Indian women autobiography is also significant. She, while narrating her life without much apprehension, has crossed the gender boundaries of what is considered to be correct for a woman. Moreover, the autobiography reflect the life of an artist, giving us an insight into the creative development of one of India's controversial woman writer who seems to be compassionate about the possible protest of Indian women as extremely exploited agent in the social and domestic circumstances. She strongly protests

against victimization in *My Story*. Her protest is directed against the injustices and the persecution to which woman in India have always been subjected to. *My Story* brought Kamala Das to prominence for being exceptionally vocal about her most private experiences.

Kamala Das passed her childhood very nicely at Nalapat house with the host of relatives around. She studied in a European school in Calcutta for a few years. Her father used to work in a private firm. She mentions that at that time British families had friendly relation with Indian families. So, her family too had close connection with a number of British families. But Das's experience in school with the British and the Anglo Indian classmates was not good at all. She and her brother were treated very rudely by the other students. They were made fun of their colour. Kamala was called as "Blackie". She also realised that the white students were given priority in everything. Once, a poem written by Das was given to an English girl called Shirley Temple to be read in the assembly saying that the latter wrote it. Though her parents never expressed their disappointment over their colour, but her father made them drink a monthly purgative and insisted her grandmother to apply turmeric and oil on Das's skin. There are so many other things that affected young Kamala's mind. For instance, she was conscious of the reality that her parents were awfully incompatible. Her mother never loved her father, and only because she was a typical Indian wife who never raised her voice that domestic harmony prevailed in their household. Her father never articulated any word of appreciation for his children, which affected her as well as her siblings. Kamala felt a sense of alienation at school and at home also. The life she led all throughout might also have been affected by her childhood experiences.

Therefore, Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* can be termed more of a personal memoir, through which she reveals her most private and personal experiences. It is an account of her childhood days, her married life and her growth as a woman as well as an individual too. On reading her life story it becomes quite explicit that she had never been a tradition bound woman, who would conform to the social norms. She led her life on her own terms and conditions, turning a deaf ear to what others said and thought about her. She epitomizes a modern Indian woman who is extremely vocal about her feelings and experiences, and rarely succumbed to the situations which did not suit her temperament. She, through her courage and confidence, asserts her identity as an individual. She puts forward the reason of being different than the other women of the time as:

Society can well ask me how I could become what I became, although born to parents as high-principled as mine were. Ask the books that I read why I changed. Ask the authors dead and alive who communicated with me and gave me the courage to be myself. The books like a mother cow licked the calf of my thought into shape...

It therefore becomes evident that her extensive reading of different authors moulded her sensibility. Kamala Das's *My Story* thus appears as a document through which she endeavours to find a voice for herself that transcend her own experiences as the ones of every other Indian women who attempt to free themselves sexually and domestically, from the bondage imposed by the society.

When Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* was published, it shocked the mainstream Kerala for the descriptions of her encounters with men and her most intense personal experiences. The editor of the weekly in which her biography was published in serialised form was asked to be suspended by her father V.M. Nair. Her unconventional lifestyle and rebellious attitude seem to be the outcome of a demoralised and desolate woman,

who tries to relieve her frustration and anguish inflicted upon her by the situations and conditions corresponding to the tradition bound society she represents. The unpleasant circumstances have rendered her vision tragic for various reasons such as her upbringing by careless parents, her marriage to an egoistic and indifferent person, her disappointments in love, and her illicit love affairs with other men that she got involved in to remove her boredom and anxiety. Her autocrat father fixes her marriage against her wishes to a man who is much older than her and obsessed with sex. Her marriage proved to be an absolute failure because her husband treated her merely as a means of providing sexual gratification while giving her no love and affection. She has described her husband's unemotional and mechanical way of performing the sexual act with her, which undoubtedly satisfied her sexual urge but denied her the love and affection which every woman expects from her husband. After her marriage to an indifferent husband who is always preoccupied with sex and his job, all of Kamala Das's hopes and desires of a loving and caring husband shatter. At a point of time when she even thought of a divorce, which she could not initiate. She reasons about it as:

I could not admit to all that my marriage had flopped. I could not return home to the Nalapat House a divorcee, for there had been goodwill between our two families for three generations which I did not want to ruin. . . My parents and other relatives were obsessed with public opinion and bothered excessively with our society's reaction to any action of an individual's broken marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying as an attack of leprosy.

It shows that in an Indian society the institution of marriage rests on many things other than the bonding between two individuals. The communication gap with her husband, the loveless marriage confined only to lust, makes her life miserable and she leaps into a few relationships outside her marriage, for which she is criticised extensively by the society. Her straying thus becomes an escape for her from the unfulfilled desires of being loved.

On the other hand, her husband's heterosexual and homosexual relations with maids and his friend respectively leave her more devastated. Once, while she finds her husband and his friend becoming intimate in her presence, she expresses: I felt like revulsion for my womanliness. The weight of my breast seemed to be crushing me. My private part was only a wound, the souls wound showing through.... It shows her helplessness as well as the pride of an individual soul which forbids her from demanding any explanation from her husband. Such hostility of her husband towards her prompts her to search for love and companionship outside her marriage. She had a severe nervous breakdown for which her husband took her out of the town according to the doctor's advice. While remembering that period, she recalls:

During my nervous breakdown there developed between myself and my husband an intimacy which was purely physical....after bathing me in warm water and dressing me in men's clothes, my husband bade me sit on his lap, fondling me and calling me his little darling boy....I was by nature shy....but during my illness, I shed my shyness and for the first time in my life learned to surrender totally in bed with my pride intact and blazing.

Das is more or less iconoclastic in her straight discussion of sex, especially the lack of sexual fulfilment for Indian women trapped in rushed arranged marriages. She describes sex as "the principal phobia in Nair women" that claims that women are constantly indoctrinated with the idea of sex as illicit, brutal and above all physically unsatisfying. She illustrates her own wedding night as "rape" It shows that Kamala Das brings forth her experiences of womanhood, which the other Indian women do not discuss in reverence to social norms. She, in fact, constantly seems to refuse to remain silent and discusses her feelings of longing and loss at length.



*My Story* also throws light on the orthodoxy of traditional Nair families. The women in Nairs are models of neatness and simplicity particularly in their dress, food and living. Kamala Das's great grandmother's younger sister, who was a single, "had a passion for order .....was finicky about cleanliness and bathed thrice a day" She was a "deeply devout" woman, and her habit of taking three baths a day became the cause of her paralysis. Nair society is basically matrilineal, the members of which owned property jointly, including brothers and sisters. Perhaps this might be one of the reasons behind Kamala Das's daring attitude towards life, as she seems to have the conviction of being supported by her family at the time of crisis. Even history says, Nair women were autonomous, self-reliant, and enjoyed greater personal freedom than women in the rest of India. But, Kamala Das credits her awareness to be the product of her 'exposure to life'. Her conscious mind could not accept anything that came her way. The question arises whether the Nair women are endowed with the liberty they are supposed to possess? She witnesses many incidents of the Nair society, which reflects its true nature. For instance, in a typical Nair society, women wear heavy jewellery to show off the wealth of their husbands. Kamala Das in this regards mentions ...My grandfather liked to see woman glamorized with jewels, flowers.... On the other hand, her father imposed his Gandhian ideals over her mother. Das recounts:

After her wedding he made her remove all the gold ornaments from her person, all except the 'mangalsutra'. To her it must have seemed like taking to widow's weeds, but she did not protest. She was mortally afraid of the dark stranger who had come forward to take her out of the village and its security. She was afraid of her father and afraid of her uncle...

This shows how a woman had to submit to the will of her husband for the fear she had for men, be it her husband, father or uncle. In the same context she talks about Madhavi Amma, her granduncle's daughter, who lived a very secluded life. Earlier, she was

married to a scholar with whom she was very happy. But, her husband had to walk out of her life as he “fell out of favour” with her uncle. Kamala Das comments: The Nairs, particularly the males, were coarse when their ire was aroused....It shows how a woman’s happiness is overlooked just to feed a man’s ego.

Kamala Das’s autobiography is a loud protest of a married woman suppressed in a male dominated society. It illustrates that in a world dominated by man she tries to assert her individuality, to maintain her feminine identity. From this revolt rose all her troubles, psychological trauma and frustrations. It is a search for self through her feminine experience, especially her passionate relationship with different men. She seems to rise up against male supremacy and insensibility particularly in relation to marriage, love, sex and the freedom and individuality of women. In her own way she comes out with a forceful resistance to gender constraints. While playing her roles of a daughter, a lover, and a wife she fell into the rigid grip of a male centred world. Kamala Das has made hysterical attempts to revolt against the domination of “second sex”, as Simone De Beauvoir argues: The world is too strong and if a woman persists in her opposition, it breaks her.....Kamala Das too was on the verge of becoming insane out of the weight of her frustration. Fortunately, writing, which was a passion for her, helped her to lighten her soul and she sustained serious nervous breakdown.

A. N. Dwivedi writes about Kamala Das, Like Austen, Kamala Das also moves within her limited range with grace and skill. The advantage of this range is that it offers the reader only what the writer has personally felt and realized...It thus refers to the fact that through her personal experiences, she tried to reach the broader world. N. V. Raveendran notes about her that “the individual development in the area of women’s literature plays a vital role in shaping the sensibility of a writer”. Like Kamala Das, all who grew up in the dual worlds of

tradition and modernity, increasingly found themselves vulnerable and unprepared to face the world which is still controlled by patriarchal values. *My Story* gives important insights into the mind of an artist as well as the body of a woman affronting the strictures of a deeply patriarchal society. It was a liberating experience for her, one with which she “could depart when the time came with a scrubbed-conscience”, as mentioned in the preface. N. V. Raveendran further remarks: “woman’s sexual freedom has been the main topic of woman writers for about two hundred years. The tendency has been to demand freedom of self expression in all fields...”. The description of homosexuality in her autobiography infuriated the conservative Indian readers. For her, it seems, writing becomes a way to vent out to the trauma of a deeply unhappy marriage.

Kamala Das through her writing chose to convey her inner feelings. If we look into some of her poems closely, her intention becomes more explicit. In ‘The Freaks’ (Summer in Calcutta: 1965), Kamala Das’s resistance to social norms is projected where the persona declares that she is a freak. It expresses her negative attitude to the contemporary social reality. In another poem “A relationship” and in several other she brings to the fore her boldness and freedom in speaking aloud the secret longings and aspirations of womankind. Prof. Syd Harrex says: Kamala Das’s poems epitomise the dilemma of modern India woman who attempts to free herself, sexually and domestically, from the role of bondage sanctioned by the past.... In fact, if she would not have expressed herself, emptying her soul, she would become totally insane, as mentioned in *My Story*. Writing was the only machinery which kept her alive.

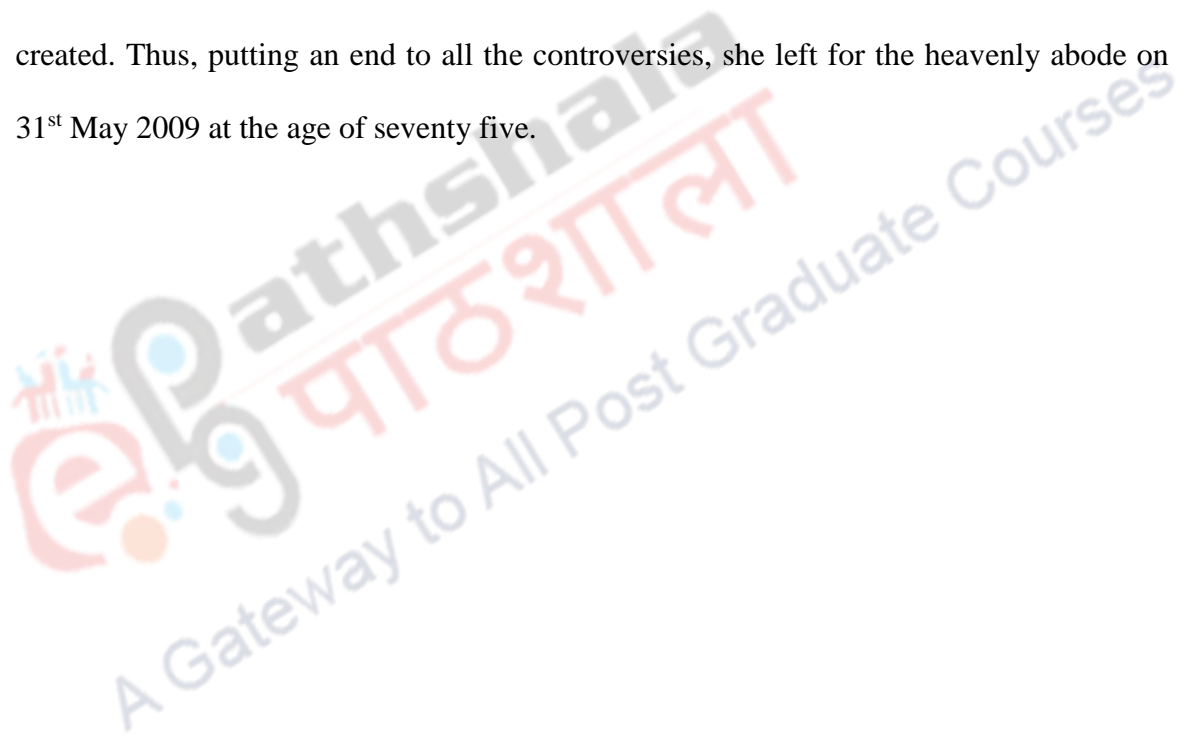
The Indian social norms and conventions are so strong and deep rooted in the psyche of a woman that she hardly dares to be as vocal about her private and personal feelings and experiences as Kamala Das. It is not that she was not affected by the criticism she had to

face as she mentions: Whenever a snatch of unjustified scandal concerning my emotional life reached me through well-meaning relatives, I wept like a wounded child for hours rolling on my bed and often took sedatives to put myself to sleep. She indulged herself in drinking too to retain her mental stability.

There is no doubt that Kamala Das is a woman of rare courage and strong conviction. She takes pride of being a woman, ignoring all sorts of hostility of the world towards a woman. She celebrates her sexuality, her womanhood, her body and cultivates her own notion of love, going against the conventional concepts. But, a strong sense of social concern reflects her description of Indian society in *My Story* as well as her other writings. She does not conform to all the established norms and freely expresses her disgust over such matters. She is generally seen in the fore front of such writers who fought for the rights of women. Indian society demands a woman to find fulfilment in domestic activities. But domestic slavery never fulfils her freedom. Das articulates the misery of a woman writer who does not have the financial support to sustain her creative endeavour. At time she would become frustrated as her domestic responsibility came in her way of writing, which she has mentioned in her narrative. It was difficult to maintain the balance. Her bouts of illness as well as of her children also left her devastated many a times. But she emerged as a woman who could direct her experiences, all good and bad, towards productivity. The adverse criticism she received all throughout her writing career could not prevent her from anything. After the demise of her husband, she got married to a person much younger to her age, which seems to be the outcome of her constant search for true love, the one that she visualised as “flowers in the hair...the yellow moon lighting up a familiar face and soft words whispered in the ear...”. She even converted to Islam at the age of sixty five and remained a Muslim till death confronting all the controversies that entailed it. She chose to convert as she wanted to marry the person whom she thought

loved her. But later she realised that she should not have done it when she says “I fell in love with a Muslim after my husband’s death. He was kind and generous in the beginning. But now I feel one shouldn’t change one’s religion. It is not worth it.” It seems her love life that she envisaged remained unfulfilled till the end of her life.

Kamala Das paved the way for later woman writers to be vocal about their feelings and experiences and break the stereotypical image of an Indian woman. She also encouraged women to write as she hold the view that it could be a strong medium of women empowerment. For her writing was a passion, with which she thought magic could be created. Thus, putting an end to all the controversies, she left for the heavenly abode on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2009 at the age of seventy five.





## Paper 14; Module 23; E Text

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Item	Description of module
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Module title	Untouchability: Mulk Raj Anand: <i>Untouchables</i>
Module ID	MODULE 23

## Module 23:

### Untouchability: Mulk Raj Anand: *Untouchable*

#### Introducing the Author

Mulk Raj Anand was one of the most prolific writers of the period who is best known as a social realist and a humanist. He was born in Peshawar in 1905 and received his early education in Khalsa College Amritsar. Later he went to England and got admitted to University College London as an undergraduate. He then attended Cambridge University and got his Ph.D. degree in 1929. There he had close acquaintance with the Bloomsbury Group and even spent some of his time in Geneva. Anand lived his life partly in London and India. During the period of India's Independence movement he showed his concern by writing propaganda on behalf of the Indian cause. He also worked as a journalist and supported freedom elsewhere in the world especially Spain during the Spanish Civil War. At the time of World War II he was a scriptwriter for the BBC in London and became one of George Orwell's good friends. In 1946, Anand came back to India and carried on his literary career as a writer. Most of his novels deal with the representation of the lives of the downtrodden people and used literature as a medium to highlight the exploitation of the impoverished section of the Indian conservative society.

Mulk Raj Anand's career as a writer was shaped much by his family tragedy especially the strictures of caste system that prevailed in the society. His first essay was written under the influence of the incident of his aunt's suicide following her excommunication by her family as she had shared meal with a Muslim lady. His first novel *Untouchable* published in 1935 was an indictment on the orthodox Indian society which discriminated people belonging to the lower strata. His vision of a humanist and a reformist is seen in this novel which gave him immense popularity. His other humanistic novels are *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves And A Bud* (1937), *The*



*Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* in 1945. Anand has also written seven collections of short stories – *The Child and other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkness and other stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and other stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). His other works include *Indian fairy Tales* (1961), *The Old woman and the Cow* (1960). It was followed by *The Road* (1963) and *The Death of Hero* (1964). *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face*, *The Confession of A Lover* and *The Bubble* are his autobiographical novels. He was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Morning Face* (1968).

Mulk Raj Anand was the founder of a literary magazine named *Marg* and also was a member of the International Progress Organisation. He had delivered a series of lectures on prominent Indian personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru highlighting their contribution towards India and their progressive views on humanism. Anand has also written many short stories about India's rich culture and tradition. His later works are regarded as an attempt to undertake a spiritual journey searching for one's higher level of self-awareness.

### **Introducing the Novel**

*Untouchable* is one of the most celebrated novels in Indian English literature for its realistic rendering of the life of a sweeper boy named Bakha who is an untouchable. E.M. Forster describes him in the Preface to the novel, "Bakha is a real individual, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. Even his physique is distinctive; we can recognize his broad intelligent face, graceful torso, and heavy buttocks as he does his nasty

job or steps out in artillery boots in hope of a pleasant walk through the city with a paper packet of cheap sweets in his hand.” This novel shows a realistic picture of all the oppressed section of the society during the pre-independence period of India. Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, is representative of all the downtrodden people of the country who faced discrimination and suppression due to their caste. Bakha and other characters in the novel suffer due to the fact that they belong to the lower caste. We get a bleak vision of their place of living as described in the beginning of the novel, “The outcastes’ colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society.” These sections of people suffer because they are by birth regarded as outcastes by others. Mulk Raj Anand has brought to lime light the artificiality and hypocrisy of the upper caste men especially men like Pandit KaliNath who preaches good things in life but is himself corrupted to the core.

*Untouchable* is the story of a single day in the life of Bakha and gives an account of the humiliation and struggle that he and other lower caste people had to go through. Bhaka was dissatisfied with his profession as a toilet cleaner and wanted to pursue a better life by educating himself. The lower caste people were restricted from drawing water from wells, enter temples or touch anything as it was believed that things would become polluted if they were touched by untouchables. Bakha was also subjected to mental and physical abuse mainly by the upper caste Hindus. Even his sister was sexually assaulted by Pandit Kalinath who called her to clean the courtyard of his house. He was attracted by Sohini’s youthful beauty and tried to touch her but when Sohini shouted the Pandit turned the situation by claiming that he was touched by an

untouchable and puts the blame entirely on Sohini. Bakha arrives at the place and sends Sohini back. Although he was furious with anger, he did not say anything and left the scene. He comes home and tells his father that people think they are dirty simply because they clean the dirt. He feels that it is a curse which he should destroy as soon as possible. That afternoon he attends the marriage of Ram Charan's sister whom he loved once but could not marry due to their class difference. Later in the evening Bakha goes to play hockey match at Havilder Charat Singh's place. In the midst of the game a little boy is wounded and Bakha tries to help him but he is rebuked by the boy's mother for having polluted her son. Bakha feels quite dejected as he faces humiliation all around him. However on one occasion Bhaka gets inspired after listening to Gandhi's thoughts about untouchability which he regarded as a malpractice and wanted people to get rid of it. The novelist provides three different alternatives to ensure a better life to the protagonist and the people of his community. Bakha was advised by Col. Hutchinson to convert to Christianity that is devoid of any caste system and he would never face discrimination in his life any more. Moreover Gandhi's views on untouchability and the education he imparted to these outcasts have enlightened people to a great deal. At the end of the novel, we find that Bhaka meets a poet named Iqbal Nath Sarshar who informs him about a new technique of cleaning faecal matter automatically, that is, toilet-flush machines. This would not require human effort to clean excreta and put an end to manually cleaning toilets. Bakha regards this to be a solution for his problem and feels that a transformation will surely take place to improve his condition of living.

### **Characterisation in the novel**

**Bakha**-He is the protagonist of the novel and introduced to the readers as a young man who has a strongly built body. He works as a sweeper and cleans public toilets. Bakha maintains cleanliness throughout his work and remains cautious so as not to spoil his sleeves while doing his job. The hard labour that he puts in his work is responsible for the making of his strong physique. Bakha is a representative of all the underdogs who suffer at the hands of the society for their low caste. Throughout the novel we see that Bakha struggles for the search of his own identity and tries to find the significance of his life.

**Lakha**-He is Bakha's father and a Jamedar of the sweepers of Bulandshahr. He is left with three children after his wife died. He accepts that he occupies an inferior status in the society and is submissive towards the upper caste Hindus.

**Rakha**-He is Bakha's younger brother who is not involved in cleaning and sweeping work and does not possess a good appearance as his brother's.

**Sohini**-She is Bakha's sister and is described as an attractive woman who has a sylph-like form and a slender waist. She is an important character in the novel as it is through her Anand exposes the corruption of the upper caste Hindus. She takes care of her family and manages the household chores. Pandit Kalinath's attempt of her molestation is a significant episode in the novel that highlights the hypocrisy and injustice done by the upper castes towards the down trodden people.

**Charat Singh**-He is a Havilder in the army and also a good hockey player who belongs to the 38<sup>th</sup> Dogra battalion. He is a kind hearted person and is free from any kind of caste prejudices. He treats Bakha affectionately and is seen as a contrast to the orthodox priests.

**Col. Hutchinson**-He is one of the English characters in the novel who dresses in a funny way mixing Western and Indian outfits. He is the person who advises Bakha to become a Christian.

**Iqbal Nath Sarshar**-He is a young poet with revolutionary ideas and a progressive outlook who is strongly against the practice of untouchability. He provides a solution to eradicate this curse of the society. According to him, the introduction of flush system in toilets will help to remove this evil.

### **Themes and Issues in the Novel**

#### *The Practice of Untouchability*

Mulk Raj Anand's purpose in writing *Untouchables* was to bring about a change in the perception that people had in their minds regarding the untouchables. He says in "Why I Write",

As a writer, I have tried to drink from the sources of love in people, especially poor people, and to give them my own exuberant passion...

My own personal gain has been that much inner happiness has come to me through the very act of creative writing, which has sustained me in the face of tragic events of our time, because in absorbing life one understands its disequilibriums. That is why I have always considered literature and art as the instruments of humanism.

*Untouchable* depicts the lives of the marginalized and the destitute people of an orthodox Indian society. The practice of untouchability is rampant as the author tells the story of Bakha, an untouchable sweeper boy. The novel is an indictment of the snobbery and hypocrisy seen in the upper caste section of a Hindu society. The untouchables referred to as the Panchamas are forced

to live the life of an outcast in a deplorable condition. E.M. Forster opines, “The sweeper is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he can’t escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them...”

The untouchables live an isolated life far away from the village. In the novel we are told that they cannot even draw water from the wells as it might be contaminated by their touch. One can refer to Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* where Velutha also faces a similar kind of discrimination. In *Untouchables*, the Panchamas wait for long hours in the hope that some people of an upper caste might come and be kind enough to draw water for them. Bakha’s sister, Sohini, also goes through the same situation and waits near a well for someone to come and pour water into her pot. After a long wait, Kalinath who is attracted by her beauty arrives and helps her but his intention was to take advantage of her by calling her to his house and molesting her. Bakha is outraged by the incident and complains to his father about this. His father, Lakha remains indifferent and does not react at all as he has compromised with his state of living. He readily accepts the Hindu system of untouchability and thus this practice is passed down to their next generations as there is no fight against it. The Panchamas are quite responsible for their own miseries.

We get the description of the uncongenial place where these untouchables live, “The absence of a drainage system had, through the rains of various seasons, made of the quarter a marsh which gave out the most offensive smell.” The people of the untouchable caste were washer men, grass cutters, water men, sweepers, barbers and others who lived in mud-walled cottages huddled with each other and are socially isolated from the rest of the village. One day

Bakha had accidentally touched an upper caste Hindu in a market place. That person was so infuriated that he abused Bakha by addressing him as a 'swine dog', 'dirty dog' and so on. Every one present in the situation saw him getting insulted but no one spoke a word against it. Bakha ashamed as he was fell down on his knees and silently listened to all the insults that were targeted to him. At last a Muslim tongawallah rescued him from the situation. Bakha was so shattered by the incident that he burst out into anger,

Why are we always abused? The sanitary inspector that day abused my father.

They always abuse us. Because we are sweepers. Because we touch dung.

They hate dung. I hate it too. That's why, I came here. I was tired of working on the latrines every day. That's why they don't touch us, the high caste.

Untouchability is one of the most evil practices of caste system in India which prevails even now in many of the socially and economically backward places. Great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar have spoken on this issue and its eradication from the society for the upliftment of the people. They have opined that no society can ever progress if its people are prejudiced against this kind of casteist mentality. In the novel we see that Gandhi appears on the scene where he delivers a lecture on untouchability which comforts and encourages Bakha and other people of his community,

The fact that we address God as purifier of the polluted souls makes it a sin to regard any one born in Hinduism as polluted – it is satanic to do so. I have never been tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I don't say that this thing is crystallized in me at the age of 12, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin.

### *Social Realism: Religion and Caste Discrimination*

Mulk Raj Anand has been truly regarded as a social realist for the themes and issues that he brings forward in his works. The social aspect of the novel that is the treatment of religion and caste discrimination has been delineated in a realistic manner. The novelist begins with a realistic description of the untouchables' colony,

The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men, the barbers, the water-carriers, the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with the crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it, the odour of the hides and skins of dead carcasses left to dry on its banks, the dung of donkeys, sheep, horses, cows and buffaloes heaped up to be made into fuel cakes...

The central character of the novel, Bakha, is ill-treated by the high-caste people throughout the novel. The novel comprises of events of a single day and from the morning itself we are given a glimpse of how Bakha is subjected to abuses and treated like an animal. A high caste Hindu throws away a packet of cigarette at him and when he is hungry he is given chapattis in a way as food is thrown to a dog. His experience with a Hindu at a market place is suggestive of how much the place was steeped in caste-discrimination,

Why don't you call, you swine, and announce your approach! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, cock-eyed son of a bowlegged scorpion!



Now I will have to go and take a bath to purify myself. And it was a new dhoti and shirt that I put on this morning!

Bakha is humiliated but helpless and remains silent at the situation. Later his frustration is seen when he says, "...All of them abused, abused, abused why are we always abused? ... Because we are sweepers... I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable I am an untouchable!"

Religion plays an important role in the novel for we see its influence upon the people of the society to a great extent. Col. Hutchinson urges Bakha to adopt Christianity to overcome his deplorable condition. However Bakha is skeptical about converting his own religion and is suspicious about the missionary's intention. Bakha thought, "If he (Lakha) saw him (Colonel) in the distance, saying that the old sahib had wanted to convert them to the religion of Yessuh Messih and to make them sahibs like himself, but that he had refused to leave the Hindu fold, saying that the religion which was good enough for his forefathers was good enough for him."

Anand captures the predicament of the untouchables and presents a harsh reality. We see that they are denied even the basic need of life that is water. We see how these people were prohibited to touch wells that would otherwise pollute them. The novelist is indeed quite powerful in his rendering of the plight of the untouchables with his acute observation and the regional language that he adopts and the use of abuses clearly shows the social realism with which he has presented the curse of untouchability. Anand has also criticized the followers of the Hindu religion who belong to the upper caste. People in the name of religion have suppressed lives of many innocents who are not given an equal status and opportunity to live in the society. Some religious scriptures have made a division or hierarchical order based on castes for smooth running of the society. But people seem to have misinterpreted and used it for their own ends. In

the novel the character of Kalinath presents the hypocrisy and corruption that some people are engaged in to exploit the ignorant and the downtrodden people. Although he is strongly against touching any untouchable and considers it to be a sin but the carnal desire in him for Bakha's sister, Sohini, speaks of how irreligious he was and the lack of any spiritual quality in him. He tries to molest her by inviting her to his house to clean the courtyard. Through this episode Anand tries to present a harsh reality that not all the preachers of religion are morally right at their heart and that we should not welcome blind beliefs and caste discrimination in the name of religion. His primary concern was to uplift this lot of people who were socially unaccepted and isolated. By bringing in the Mahatma Gandhi's episode, Anand has not only provided a solution for the plight of the untouchables in the novel but also enlightened his readers about such evil practices that need to be removed from the society. Gandhi comments that the predicament of the untouchables is both a moral and a religious issue. He says that untouchability is the "greatest blot on Hinduism" and regards it 'satanic' to think that anyone in Hinduism is born as an untouchable. Gandhi holds the view that untouchables have to "cultivate habits of cleanliness" and be free from unhealthy habits such as drinking liquor or gambling. He also says that they must "cease to accept leavings from the plates of high-caste Hindus, however clean they may be represented to be."

Gandhi regards all Indians as equal and expresses his desire to be reborn as an untouchable. He addresses them with a new name 'Harijan' and considers them to be the cleaners of Hindu religion. Although Gandhi's words instil a ray of hope in Bakha and other people but Bakha ".....began to move. His virtues lay in his close-knit sinews and in his long breath sense. He was thinking of everything that he had heard though he could not understand it

all. He was calm as he walked along, though the conflict in his soul was not over, though he was torn between his enthusiasm for Gandhi and the difficulties in his own awkward naive self.”

The closing of the novel appropriates Bakha’s inner conflicts between enthusiasm and naiveté. This is a consequence of what Bakha has experienced during the whole day and its indelible impact upon him due to which he situates himself within his own culture. Bakha’s interaction with the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar and his ideas about the flush toilet system also provided him some hope for the future. The novel ends with a hint that the situation of this exploited class will undergo a positive change as Bakha thinks, “Perhaps I can find the poet some day and ask him about his machine”

### **Narrative Style and Technique**

The novel is quite impressive due to its narrative style and technique. Anand employs the stream of consciousness technique which was a dominant characteristic in most of the writings of the period especially by Woolf, Joyce and others. The stream of consciousness method is used to delve deep into the mind of the central character, Bakha, who is tormented by the treatment of the society towards him and his fellow beings. It can be regarded as a psychological novel as well for it gives us a vivid account of Bakha’s thoughts and ponderings most of which are fragmentary in nature. The novel also has a dream sequence in which Bakha finds himself surrounded by a group of monkeys. The novelists purpose through this was to show Bakha’s views about the world which even in his subconscious mind haunts him and confines him within a bleak world. There are also a number of flashbacks used along with symbolic images and thoughts combined with an awareness of the reality that renders a modern touch to the novel. Anand uses a number of images that are recurrent in the novel, mostly the image of the sun and

the river. The sun is the symbol of creative and vital force of life and is seen as a contrast to the lives of the people,

As they sat or stood in the sun showing their dark hands and feet they had a curiously lackadaisical, lazy, lousy look about them. It seemed their insides were concentrated in the act of emergence of new birth, as it were, from the raw, bleak wintry feeling in their souls to the world of warmth. The great life-giver had cut the inscrutable knot that tied them up in themselves. It had melted the innermost parts of their being. And their souls stared at the wonder of it all, the mystery of it, the miracle of it.

The image of the river is symbolic of the anguish and grief of the people as it stands for the flow of existence which is past change. The novelist uses a number of words, idioms and phrases in English which reflect the Indian way of speaking. There are many words in Hindi and Punjabi that have not been translated into English like girja ghar, jalebi, babu, Harijan whereas some abusive words in Hindi have been translated into English like son of a pig, swine dog and others. The aim was to capture the flavor and colour of a particular village in Punjab during pre-independence times and give a realistic representation of it.

*Story-board*

### **Mulk Raj Anand: Life and Works**

- He was born in Peshawar in 1905 and received his early education in Khalsa College Amritsar.
- While he was doing his Ph.D. in Cambridge University he had close acquaintance with the Bloomsbury Group.

- His most famous novels include *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves And A Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* (1945).
- He was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award for *Morning Face* (1968).

### *Untouchable*

- This novel shows a realistic picture of all the oppressed section of the society during the pre-independence period of India.
- Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, is representative of all the downtrodden people of the country who faced discrimination and suppression due to their caste.
- He and other characters in the novel suffer due to the fact that they belong to the lower caste.

### *Themes and Issues in the novel:*

- *Untouchable* depicts the lives of the marginalized and the destitute people of an orthodox Indian society.
- The novel is an indictment of the snobbery and hypocrisy seen in the upper caste section of a Hindu society.
- In the novel we are told that the untouchables referred to as *panchamas* cannot even draw water from the wells as it might be contaminated by their touch.

- The social aspect of the novel that is the treatment of religion and caste discrimination has been delineated in a realistic manner.
- The central character of the novel, Bakha, is ill-treated by the high-caste people throughout the novel.
- In the novel the character of Kalinath who is a religious man, presents the hypocrisy and corruption that some people are engaged in to exploit the ignorant and the downtrodden people.

*Narrative Structure:*

- Anand employs the stream of consciousness technique in the novel.
- The stream of consciousness method is used to delve deep into the mind of the central character, Bakha, who is tormented by the treatment of the society towards him and his fellow beings.
- There are also a number of flashbacks used along with symbolic images and thoughts combined with an awareness of the reality that renders a modern touch to the novel.