
# INDIAN WRITINGS IN LITERATURE II

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## SYLLABUS

## Indian Writings in Literature II

**Objectives:**

- To enhance analytical skills of students
- To improve understanding of literature among students
- To develop interest among students about Indian writing in English

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| 1 | Arvind Adiga- The White Tiger- Introduction, Plot-Detailed study |
| 2 | ArvindAdiga-TheWhiteTiger-Theme,Characterisation,CriticalAppreciation |
| 3 | Prem Chand-Godan- Introduction, Detailed study, Plot construction |
| 4 | GirishKarnad-Nagamandala-Introduction,Detailedstudy,Plotconstruction,Theme |
| 5 | Mahesh Dattani- Final Solutions- Introduction, Detailed Study, Plot and character, Theme |

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# Unit 1: Aravind Adiga: the White Tiger—An Introduction

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss life and works of Aravind Adiga.
- Introduce the White Tiger.

## Introduction

Aravind Adiga is an Indian writer and journalist. His debut novel, The White Tiger, won the 2008 Man Booker Prize. Aravind Adiga was born in Madras (now Chennai) on 23 October 1974 to Dr. K. Madhava Adiga and Usha Adiga, both of whom hailed from Mangalore. His paternal grandfather was the late K. Suryanarayana Adiga, former chairman of Karnataka bank while his maternal great-grandfather, U. Rama Rao, was a popular medical practitioner and Congress politician from Madras. He grew up in Mangalore and studied at Canara High School, then at St. Aloysius High School, where he completed his SSLC in 1990. He secured first rank in the state in SSLC. Incidentally his elder brother Anand Adiga secured 2nd rank in SSLC and first rank in PUC in the state. After emigrating to Sydney, Australia, with his family, he studied at James Ruse Agricultural High School. He studied English literature at Columbia College, Columbia University in New York, where he studied with Simon Schama and graduated as salutatorian in 1997. He also studied at Magdalen College, Oxford, where one of his tutors was Hermione Lee.

Adiga began his journalistic career as a financial journalist, interning at the Financial Times. With pieces published in the Financial Times and Money, he covered the stock market and investment, interviewing, among others, Donald Trump. His review of previous Booker Prize winner Peter Carey's book, Oscar and Lucinda, appeared in The Second Circle, an online literary review. He was subsequently hired by TIME, where he remained a South Asia correspondent for three years before going freelance. During his freelance period, he wrote The White Tiger. He currently lives in Mumbai, India.

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, The White Tiger, won the 2008 Booker Prize. He is the fourth Indian-born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. (V. S. Naipaul, another winner, is of Indian origin, but was not born in India). The five other authors on

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the shortlist included one other Indian writer (Amitav Ghosh) and another first-time writer (Steve Toltz). The novel studies the contrast between India's rise as a modern global economy and the lead character, Balram, who comes from crushing rural poverty.

"At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society (Indian). That's what I'm trying to do—it is not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination."

He explained that "the criticism by writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens of the 19th century helped England and France become better societies".

Adiga's second book, Between the Assassinations, was released in India in November 2008 and in the US and UK in mid-2009. The book features 12 interlinked short stories. His second novel and third published book, Last Man in Tower, was published in the UK in 2011

## 1.1 Introduction to The White Tiger

***The White Tiger*** is the debut novel by Indian author Aravind Adiga. It was first published in 2008 and won the 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet-maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow."

The novel has been well-received, making the *New York Times* bestseller list in addition to winning the Man Booker Prize. Aravind Adiga, 33 at the time, was the second youngest writer as well as the fourth debut writer to win the prize in 2008. Adiga says his novel "attempt[s] to catch the voice of the men you meet as you travel through India — the voice of the colossal underclass." According to Adiga, the exigence for *The White Tiger* was to capture the unspoken voice of people from "the Darkness" – the impoverished areas of rural India, and he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually." Introducing a major literary talent, "The White Tiger" offers a story of coruscating wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most volatile, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen. Balram Halwai is a complicated man. Servant. Philosopher. Entrepreneur. Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells us the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life — having nothing but his own wits to help him along.

Born in the dark heart of India, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver for his village's wealthiest man, two house Pomeranians (Puddles and Cuddles), and the rich man's (very unlucky) son. From behind the wheel of their Honda City car, Balram's new world is a revelation. While his peers flip through the pages of "Murder Weekly" ("Love — Rape — Revenge!"), barter for girls, drink liquor (Thunderbolt), and perpetuate the Great Rooster Coop of Indian society, Balram watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor (single-malt whiskey), and play their own role in the Rooster Coop. Balram learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles (all but one). He also finds a way out of the Coop that no one else inside it can perceive.

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Balram's eyes penetrate India as few outsiders can: the cockroaches and the call centers; the prostitutes and the worshippers; the ancient and Internet cultures; the water buffalo and, trapped in so many kinds of cages that escape is (almost) impossible, the white tiger. And with a charisma as undeniable as it is unexpected, Balram teaches us that religion doesn't create virtue, and money doesn't solve every problem — but decency can still be found in a corrupt world, and you can get what you want out of life if you eavesdrop on the right conversations.

Sold in sixteen countries around the world, "The White Tiger" recalls "The Death of Vishnu" and "Bangkok 8" in ambition, scope, and narrative genius, with a mischief and personality all its own. Amoral, irreverent, deeply endearing, and utterly contemporary, this novel is an international publishing sensation — and a startling, provocative debut.

The White Tiger' tells the story of a poor Indian man, namely Balram Halwai, who wishes to leave the Darkness with its miseries and poverty so he could experience the life of the rich in the Light. His means of doing so turns out really bad, though. As a kid, Balram is taken out of school and starts working at an early age. He begins cleaning tables at tea shops, then works as a driver as well as a servant, and finally ends up being a successful entrepreneur. The whole novel (including the murder he commits and speaks about from the very first chapter) is told through letters in which he addresses some Chinese premier who wants to visit and know more about India. The first third of the novel was really brilliant. Balram's childhood, how he got his name, the Ganga swallowing his mother as her corpse was being burned (shivers ran down my spine when I read that part), his father's death on the hospital's floor, the corruption in India, the oppression and the rigged elections… these were all so moving and beautifully written. However, I felt that the narrative got slow and quite boring in the middle and towards the end. I would have liked it better if there had been some good character I could truly care for. This might sound naive, but I'm one of those readers who like to have two parties in a story: the good guys and the bad ones. 'The White Tiger' was quite disappointing in this regard. I couldn't grow emotionally attached to any of the main characters basically because they were all jerks in some way or another. Though mostly nice to his driver Balram, Mr Ashok bribed officials, was willing to send Balram to jail for a crime he never committed, and got morally corrupt soon after his wife left him. The protagonist, who I guess I was supposed to sympathize with (which I did at some point), was so selfish and didn't really care neither about little Bharam nor about his family as a whole. Nevertheless, such fatal flaws in the characters reflect a realistic aspect of the human nature Adiga was possibly trying to show: purely good guys are not there. Generally, the author has a smooth style of writing and the book is worthy of being read. Got a lot of information about India, its people and culture while reading it… significance of the title " The White Tiger"describe the evolution Of Balram's opinion of his master and their relationship.

## Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Aravind Adiga is an Indian writer and journalist. His debut novel, The White Tiger, won the 2008 ..... .

(*ii*) Adiga's second book, ....., was released in India in November 2008 and in the US and UK in mid-2009.

(*iii*) His second novel and third published book, ....., was published in the UK in 2011.

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## 1.2 Summary

- ***The White Tiger*** is the debut novel by Indian author Aravind Adiga. It was first published in 2008 and won the 40th Man Booker Prize in the same year. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet-maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow."
- The novel has been well-received, making the *New York Times* bestseller list in addition to winning the Man Booker Prize. Aravind Adiga, 33 at the time, was the second youngest writer as well as the fourth debut writer to win the prize in 2008.Adiga says his novel "attempt[s] to catch the voice of the men you meet as you travel through India — the voice of the colossal underclass." According to Adiga, the exigence for *The White Tiger* was to capture the unspoken voice of people from "the Darkness" – the impoverished areas of rural India, and he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually." Introducing a major literary talent, "The White Tiger" offers a story of coruscating wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most volatile, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen.
- The White Tiger' tells the story of a poor Indian man, namely Balram Halwai, who wishes to leave the Darkness with its miseries and poverty so he could experience the life of the rich in the Light. His means of doing so turns out really bad, though. As a kid, Balram is taken out of school and starts working at an early age. He begins cleaning tables at tea shops, then works as a driver as well as a servant, and finally ends up being a successful entrepreneur. The whole novel (including the murder he commits and speaks about from the very first chapter) is told through letters in which he addresses some Chinese premier who wants to visit and know more about India.

## 1.3 Key-Words

1. Assassinations : An assassination is a murder of an individual, who is usually a famous celebrity, politician, religious figure or royal
2. Transfixing story : Cause (someone) to become motionless with horror, wonder, or astonishment.

## 1.4 Review Questions

1. Describe the life and works of Aravind Adiga.
2. Write a short note on the novel the White Tiger.
3. Balram variously describes himself as "a man of action and change," "a thinking man," "an entrepreneur," "a man who sees tomorrow," and a "murderer." Is any one of these labels the most fitting, or is he too complex for only one? How would you describe him?
4. Balram blames the culture of servitude in India for the stark contrasts between the Light and the Darkness and the antiquated mind set that slows change. Discuss his rooster coop analogy and the role of religion, the political system, and family life in perpetuating this culture. What do you make of the couplet Balram repeats to himself: "I was looking for the key for years / but the door was always open"?

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### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Man Booker Prize (*ii*) Between the Assassinations
   (*iii*) Last Man in Tower

## 1.5 Further Readings



1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 2: Aravind Adiga: The White Tiger—Plot

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss plot of the novel The White Tiger.

## Introduction

Aravind Adiga's debut novel, The White Tiger, won the Booker prize this week. But its unflattering portrait of India as a society racked by corruption and servitude has caused a storm in his homeland. He tells Stuart Jeffries why he wants to expose the country's dark side.

It's the morning after Adiga, 33, won the £50,000 Man Booker award with his debut novel The White Tiger, which reportedly blew the socks off Michael Portillo, the chair of judges, and, more importantly, is already causing offence in Adiga's homeland for its defiantly unglamorous portrait of India's economic miracle. For a western reader, too, Adiga's novel is bracing: there is an unremitting realism usually airbrushed from Indian films and novels. It makes Salman Rushdie's Booker-winning chronicle of post-Raj India, Midnight's Children (a book that Adiga recognises as a powerful influence on his work), seem positively twee. The Indian tourist board must be livid.

Adiga, sipping tea in a central London boardroom, is upset by my question. Or as affronted as a man who has been exhausted by the demands of the unexpected win and the subsequent media hoopla can be. Guarded about his private life, he looks at me with tired eyes and says: "I don't think a novelist should just write about his own experiences. Yes, I am the son of a doctor, yes, I had a rigorous formal education, but for me the challenge of a novelist is to write about people who aren't anything like me." On a shortlist that included several books written by people very much like their central characters (Philip Hensher, for example, writing about South Yorkshire suburbanites during the miners' strike, or Linda Grant writing about a London writer exploring her Jewish heritage), the desire not to navel-gaze is surprising, even refreshing.

But isn't there a problem: Adiga might come across as a literary tourist ventriloquising others' suffering and stealing their miserable stories to fulfill his literary ambitions? "Well, this is the reality for a lot of Indian people and it's important that it gets written about, rather than just hearing about the 5% of people in my country who are doing well. In somewhere like Bihar there will be no doctors in the hospital. In northern India politics is so corrupt that it makes a mockery of democracy. This is a country where the poor fear tuberculosis, which kills 1,000 Indians a day,

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but people like me - middle-class people with access to health services that are probably better than England's - don't fear it at all. It's an unglamorous disease, like so much of the things that the poor of India endure.

"At a time when India is going through great changes and, with China, is likely to inherit the world from the west, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustices of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do - it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination."

That, though, makes Adiga's novel sound like funless didacticism. Thankfully - for all its failings (comparisons with the accomplished sentences of Sebastian Barry's shortlisted The Secret Scripture could only be unfavourable) - The White Tiger is nothing like that. Instead, it has an engaging, gobby, megalomaniac, boss-killer of a narrator who reflects on his extraordinary rise from village teashop waiter to success as an entrepreneur in the alienated, post-industrial, call-centre hub of Bangalore.

Balram Halwai narrates his story through letters he writes, but doesn't send, to the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. Wen is poised to visit India to learn why it is so good at producing entrepreneurs, so Balram presumes to tell him how to win power and influence people in the modern India. Balram's story, though, is a tale of bribery, corruption, skullduggery, toxic traffic jams, theft and murder. Whether communist China can import this business model is questionable. In any event, Balram tells his reader that the yellow and the brown men will take over the world from the white man, who has become (and this is where Balram's analysis gets shaky) effete through toleration of homosexuality, too slim and physically weakened by overexposure to mobile phones.

Halwai has come from what Adiga calls the Darkness - the heart of rural India - and manages to escape his family and poverty by becoming chauffeur to a landlord from his village, who goes to Delhi to bribe government officials. Why did he make Halwai a chauffeur? "Because of the whole active-passive thing. The chauffeur is the servant but he is, at least while he's driving, in charge, so the whole relationship is subverted." Disappointingly, Adiga only knows of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic from reading Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. But that dialectic is the spine of his novel: the servant kills his master to achieve his freedom.

The White Tiger teems with indignities masquerading as employee duties. Such, Adiga maintains, is India - even as Delhi rises like a more eastern Dubai, call-centres suck young people from villages and India experiences the pangs of urbanisation that racked the west two centuries ago. "Friends who came to India would always say to me it was a surprise that there was so little crime and that made me wonder why." Balram supplies an answer: servitude. "A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9% - as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way - to exist in perpetual servitude." What Balram calls the trustworthiness of servants is the basis of the entire Indian economy; unlike China, he reflects, India doesn't need a dictatorship or secret police to keep its people grimly achieving economic goals.

"If we were in India now, there would be servants standing in the corners of this room and I wouldn't notice them," says Adiga. "That is what my society is like, that is what the divide is like." Adiga conceived the novel when he was travelling in India and writing for Time magazine. "I spent a lot of time hanging around stations and talking to rickshaw pullers." What struck him was the physical difference between the poor and the rich: "In India, it's the rich who have problems with obesity. And the poor are darker-skinned because they work outside and often work without their tops on so you can see their ribs. But also their intelligence impressed me. What rickshaw pullers, especially, reminded me of was black Americans, in the sense that they are witty, acerbic, verbally skilled and utterly without illusions about their rulers."

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It is not surprising then that the greatest literary influences on the book were three great African-American 20th-century novelists - Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and Richard Wright. "They all wrote about race and class, while later black writers focus on just class. Ellison's Invisible Man was extremely important to me. That book was disliked by white and blacks. My book too will cause widespread offence. Balram is my invisible man, made visible. This white tiger will break out of his cage."

For Indian readers, one of the most upsetting parts of that break-out is that Halwai casts off his family. "This is a shameful and dislocating thing for an Indian to do," says Adiga. "In India, there has never been strong central political control, which is probably why the family is still so important. If you're rude to your mother in India, it's a crime as bad as stealing would be here. But the family ties get broken or at least stretched when anonymous, un-Indian cities like Bangalore draw people from the villages. These really are the new tensions of India, but Indians don't think about them. The middle- classes, especially, think of themselves still as victims of colonial rule. But there is no point any more in someone like me thinking of myself as a victim of you [Adiga has cast me, not for the first time, as a colonial oppressor]. India and China are too powerful to be controlled by the west any more.

"We've got to get beyond that as Indians and take responsibility for what is holding us back." What is holding India back? "The corruption, lack of health services for the poor and the presumption that the family is always the repository of good."

Our time is nearly over. Adiga doesn't know how he will spend his prize money, isn't even sure if there's a safe bank in which to deposit it. Doesn't he fear attacks at home for his portrayal of India? After all, the greatest living Indian painter, M F Husain, lives in exile. "I'm in a different position from Husain. Fortunately, the political class doesn't read. He lives in exile because his messages got through, but mine probably won't."

Adiga, who says he has written his second novel but won't talk about it ("It might be complete crap, so there's no point"), flies home to Mumbai today to resume his bachelor life. His most pressing problem is that Mumbai landlords don't let flats to single men. Why? "They think we're more likely to be terrorists. I'd just like to say, through your pages, that I am not. In fact, if you check the biographies of Indian terrorists you'll find they are mostly family men who are well-off. It's a trend that needs to be investigated."

## 2.1 The White Tiger—Analysis

The White Tiger, Aravind Adiga's introduction novel that won the 2008 Man Booker Prize as well as received a great deal of critical commendation. This novel is an innovative and persuasive story about modern India. The book interesting from the perspective that how Adiga intertwines such a broad gamut of aspects of life in India—from local democracy to caste to religion to family duty to the rising technology centers and culture of entrepreneurism. The novel contains massive amount without being an extensive epic or losing its firm focus. The White Tiger is a moving story and an eye-opening picture of Indian society.

*Did u know?* The White Tiger tells the story of a young entrepreneur in India whose childhood nickname was the white tiger.

Towards the end of this debut novel, its voluble, digressive, murderous protagonist makes a prediction: "White men will be finished in my lifetime," he tells us. "In 20 years time it will just be

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us brown and yellow men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the world." He's talking about the phenomenon at the heart of this dazzling narrative: the emergence of that much-heralded economic powerhouse, the "new India".

You have, no doubt, read about it. In fact, you may have done so courtesy of Aravind Adiga, who is Time magazine's Asia correspondent. But with The White Tiger, Adiga sets out to show us a part of this emerging country that we hear about infrequently: its underbelly. We see through the eyes of Balram, who was born into the "darkness" of rural India, but entered the light that is Delhi via a job as driver to Mr Ashok, the son of a rich landlord. Now, though, Balram has escaped servitude and is himself a rich businessman. What's more, his unlikely journey involved a murder.

The result is an Indian novel that explodes the clichés – ornamental prose, the scent of saffron – associated with that phrase. Welcome, instead, to an India where Microsoft call-centre workers tread the same pavement as beggars who burn street rubbish for warmth.

Adiga's whimsical conceit is to give us Balram's story via seven letters to the Chinese prime minister, who, Balram has decided, must be told the truth about India before a forthcoming state visit. So Balram begins: he tells of Delhi's servants, who live in rotting basements below the glass apartment blocks that are home to their employers. He tells of how Ashok's family bribe government ministers, and how national elections are rigged. Ashok, trendy and liberal, is forever expressing guilt over Balram's treatment, but his fine words never come to anything.

It's a thrilling ride through a rising global power; a place where, we learn, the brutality of the modern city is compounded by that of age-old tradition. "In the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India," says Balram. "These days there are two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies." Soon enough, of course, Balram must tell us just how, exactly, he grew a Big Belly himself. Tired of a life of servitude, he takes the violent action that secures his place among Delhi's rich. Adiga's plot is somewhat predictable – the murder that is committed is the one that readers will expect throughout – but The White Tiger suffers little for this fault. Caught up in Balram's world – and his wonderful turn of phrase – the pages turn themselves. Brimming with idiosyncrasy, sarcastic, cunning, and often hilarious, Balram is reminiscent of the endless talkers that populate the novels of the great Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal. Inventing such a character is no small feat for a first-time novelist.

Arch-defenders of India's claim to be truly democratic, even-handedly prosperous and corruption-free (and these must be few outside of the Indian cabinet) might balk at The White Tiger. Everyone else, surely, will be seduced by it.

## 2.2 Plot—The White Tiger

The White Tiger takes place in modern day India. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai is born in Laxmangarh, Bihar, a rural village in "the Darkness". Balram narrates the novel as a letter, which he wrote in seven consecutive nights and addressed to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. In his letter, Balram explains how he, the son of rickshaw puller, escaped a life of servitude to become a successful businessman, describing himself as a successful entrepreneur. Balram begins the novel by describing his life in Laxmangarh. There he lived with his grandmother, parents and brother and extended family. He is a smart child; however, he is forced to quit school in order to help pay for his cousin sister's dowry. He begins to work in a teashop with his brother in Dhanbad. While working in the teashop he begins to learn about India's government and economy from the customers' conversations. Balram describes himself as a bad servant and decides that he wants to become a driver.

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Balram learns how to drive and gets a job driving Ashok, the son of the Stork, the local landlord. During a trip back to his village Balram disrespects his grandmother and tells the reader and the Chinese Premier that in the next eight months he intends to kill his boss. Balram moves to New Delhi with Ashok and his wife Ms Pinky Madam. Throughout their time in New Delhi, Balram is exposed to the extensive corruption of India's society, including the government. In New Delhi the separation between poor and wealthy becomes even more evident by the juxtaposition of the wealthy with poor city dwellers.

One night Pinky decides to drive the car by herself and hits something. She is worried that it was a child and the family eventually decides to frame Balram for the hit and run. The police, however, corrupt and lazy, tell them that no one reported a child missing so that luckily no further inquiry is done. Ashok becomes increasingly involved with the corrupt government itself. Balram then decides that the only way that he will be able to escape India's "Rooster Coop" will be by killing and robbing Ashok. One raining day he murders Ashok by bludgeoning him with a broken liquor bottle. He then manages to flee to Bangalore with his young nephew. There he bribes the police in order to help start his own driving service. When one of his drivers kills a bike messenger Balram pays off the family and police. Balram explains that his family was almost certainly killed by the Stork as retribution for Ashok's murder. At the end of the novel Balram rationalizes his actions by saying that his freedom is worth the lives of Ashok and his family and the monetary success of his new taxi company.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Adiga conceived the novel when he was travelling in India and writing for ..... .

(*ii*) Balram is my invisible man, made visible. This white tiger will break out of his ..... ."

(*iii*) Adiga, sipping ..... in a central London boardroom, is upset by my question.

## 2.3 Summary

- The White Tiger tells the story of a young entrepreneur in India whose childhood nickname was the white tiger. This novel is an innovative and persuasive story about modern India. The book interesting from the perspective that how Adiga intertwines such a broad gamut of aspects of life in India—from local democracy to caste to religion to family duty to the rising technology centers and culture of entrepreneurism.
- The novel contains massive amount without being an extensive epic or losing its firm focus. The White Tiger is a moving story and an eye-opening picture of Indian society.
- The White Tiger takes place in modern day India. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai is born in Laxmangarh, Bihar, a rural village in "the Darkness". Balram narrates the novel as a letter, which he wrote in seven consecutive nights and addressed to the Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao. In his letter, Balram explains how he, the son of rickshaw puller, escaped a life of servitude to become a successful businessman, describing himself as a successful entrepreneur. Balram begins the novel by describing his life in Laxmangarh. There he lived with his grandmother, parents and brother and extended family. He is a smart child; however, he is forced to quit school in order to help pay for his cousin sister's dowry.

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## 2.4 Key-Words

1. Grimly achieving : In a grim implacable manner
2. Chauffeur : A chauffeur is a person employed to drive a passenger motor vehicle, especially a luxury vehicle such as a large sedan or limousine
3. Skullduggery : Crafty deception or trickery or an instance of it.

## 2.5 Review Questions

1. Briefly explain the Novel The White Tiger by Aravinda Adiga.
2. What is the plot in the White Tiger? Discuss?

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Time magazine (*ii*) Cage
   (*iii*) Tea

## 2.6 Further Readings



1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 3: Aravind Adiga: The White Tiger—Detailed Study

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss about the novel The White Tiger.

## Introduction

Introducing a major literary talent, The White Tiger offers a story of coruscating wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most volatile, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen.

Balram Halwai is a complicated man, Servant, Philosopher, Entrepreneur, Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells us the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life—having nothing but his own wits to help him along.

Born in the dark heart of India, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver for his village's wealthiest man, two house Pomeranians (Puddles and Cuddles), and the rich man's (very unlucky) son. From behind the wheel of their Honda City car, Balram's new world is a revelation. While his peers flip through the pages of Murder Weekly ("Love—Rape—Revenge!"), barter for girls, drink liquor (Thunderbolt), and perpetuate the Great Rooster Coop of Indian society, Balram watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor (single-malt whiskey), and play their own role in the Rooster Coop. Balram learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles (all but one). He also finds a way out of the Coop that no one else inside it can perceive.

Balram's eyes penetrate India as few outsiders can: the cockroaches and the call centers; the prostitutes and the worshippers; the ancient and Internet cultures; the water buffalo and, trapped in so many kinds of cages that escape is (almost) impossible, the white tiger. And with a charisma as undeniable as it is unexpected, Balram teaches us that religion doesn't create virtue, and money doesn't solve every problem—but decency can still be found in a corrupt world, and you can get what you want out of life if you eavesdrop on the right conversations.

Sold in sixteen countries around the world, The White Tiger recalls The Death of Vishnu and Bangkok 8 in ambition, scope, and narrative genius, with a mischief and personality all its own. Amoral, irreverent, deeply endearing, and utterly contemporary, this novel is an international publishing sensation—and a startling, provocative debut.

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## 3.1 Detailed Study—The White Tiger

The Book "The White Tiger" from Aravind Adiga is about a men who writes a letter to the premier of China, Wen Jiabao. The name of the man is Balram Halwai. He lives in Bangalore, India. In his letter he wants to ask the premier, if it's true that he wants to come to India and talk to Indian entrepreneurs, like Balram hear to on the All India Radio before. He also hears that the premier wants to know the truth about Bangalore and Balram knows, that he can tell him the real truth about Bangalore. He shows the premier the truth while talking about his life. For example what happen when he visit Bangalore for the first time. "See when you come to Bangalore and stop at a traffic light, some boy will run up to your car and knock on your window, while holding up a bootlegged copy of an American business book, wrapped carefully in cellophane."

Balram begins to tell him a story about a day in his life, when he was driving in a car with his ex-employer Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. Mr Ashok tells Balram to drive on the side of the street and then he was starting to ask him some questions. After he give his best to answer the questions. Mr. Ashok was wondering what Balram said. He tells his wife that Balram is just half-baked and haven't finish the schooling.

Then Balram tells the Premier how he got his name. At the first day of school, the teacher changes his name from "Munna" into "Balram". After that he give him a information about India and his dark an light sides. The Darkness comes from the River Ganges. He had a bad experience when Balram carry his dead mother to the ganges and his granny made the zeremony of death. His mother was wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth. Then he saw his mother burning on an wooden platform and then he fainted.

After that he tells something about an Indian village laxmangarh. He talk about this place where he lived. He mentions a water buffalo, which was important from his family in this time. He shows the premier the every day life with his family together.

There is a tea shop in the central of Laxmangarh where his father works as a rickshaw -puller. In front of the tea shop stops a car and somebody comes out. Another person is sitting in the car. It's the Buffalo, one of the four landlords in Laxmangarh.

He is one of the chiefs in the lands around Laxmangarh. If someone wants to work for them, they have to ask these landlords for work. Balram know, that his father don't want to work with these landlords together, so he gets trouble with them. Balram's brother Kishan wants, that Balram works in the tea shop of his father to earn more money, but this father said, that he have to finish the school. But Balram doesn't want to visit the school anymore, because he get mobbed by his classmates. One day some of his classmates put a lizard in his face.

When Balram told him this story, his father wasn't angry. His father Vikram and Balram visit the school and were killing the lizard. After narrating this event Balram writes that he soon has to end writing tonight, because it is almost two and he checks for other information on the poster. After looking for informations, he tells the premier about an inspection in the school, when he was a child. The inspectors prove the kids by reading a sentence form the board. The Inspectors is impressed about Balram in the way he reads the sentences. He asks Balram some more questions, for example which deals about the rarest animals that comes along only once in a generation. Balram answers this question with the white tiger.

The people there work very hard and do their job well. While working in the tea shop Balram starts spying other people's conversations. In his mind a good way to learn more to hear new, different things. Sometimes the miners come to the tea shop and tell exciting stories. Firstly Balram wants to become a miner, but when he finds out, what a taxi driver earns a month, he changed his opinion.

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Balram's granny recommends to keep the job in the tea shop. But Balram starts to search for a taxi driver, who should train him how to drive. In his letter he also describes the job situation in India, that many people are unemployed as they have not received any education, never had a change to find a proper job.

Balram and Kishan go to a house, where many taxi drivers live. After several failures he finds a driver willing to teach him, but in return he needs to repair the taxi driver's car. After he finished has training he asked the Landlord Thakur Ramder for a job. This man tests Balram's skills.

The First Night Balram writes an email to the Chinese Prime-minster Mr. Jiabao who wants to visit Bangalore to get to know the truth about living in it. He tells about his life and describes his village Laxmangarh which is in the district of the rural Gaya. It's famous for the national history because some people say Buddha walked through it and close by it he got his enlightenment.

Balram calls himself half-baked because he never completed school and is half-educated. Therefore his ideas are half formed, half digested and half correct and he even gets his name by his teacher due to the fact that his parents just named him "munna", which means boy. The teacher backs him up and calls him "The white tiger" considering that the white tiger is the rarest animal in the jungle and appears only once in a generation.

His home hasn't got electricity or a water tap but a buffalo which is better fed by the women than the men. Balram talks about his dad who is a hard working rickshaw-puller and his mom who died and was set on fire by a priest on Mother Ganges. Later on his brother Kishan fetches him to go to the tea shop and since this day schooling is finished for him and he has to work in the shop. Through the chapter there are parts of a poster which describe Balram as a suspect because he has killed his master Mr. Ashok.

During the second night Balram thinks about his working for Mr. Ashok. After his father died of tuberculosis his brother Kishan takes care of him and marries one month later. Nevertheless Balram and Kishan pack off to Dhanbad with their cousin Dilip. They all get work in a teashop but Balram is fired because of spying on every customer in the shop. Therefore he is interested in becoming a car-driver. Moreover he would earn much money but he isn't able to pay for the driving lessons. Kishan and Dilip hand down good news to him because his grandmother, who asks for remembering her if he gets rich, agrees to invest in the lessons. Besides Balram has to send every rupee he earns back. His teacher is very strict and slaps him each time Balram makes a mistake nevertheless he is satisfied with him in the end and he takes him to a firework as reward.

After Balram has finished his lessons he searches for a household which needs a driver. Although he was not as successful as he has expected he keeps trying and is accepted finally after he tells his new masters Mr. Ashok, the Stork and Mukesh Sir he's from Laxmangarh. He makes a driving test in a Maruti Suzuki with them. Balram doesn't want any money from his masters but they want him to accept it. In the household of Mr. Ashok, Mukesh Sir and the Stork he is treated very well. There is always enough food, he gets a uniform and he shares a room with another servant, called Ram Parsad. In contrast to Ram who has a bed to sleep Balram has to lay on the floor, but for him it is much better than sleeping on the road.

Ram is the number one driver but if he is busy Balram is allowed to drive his masters instead of making tea or sweeping the floor. Because the masters like to drink whiskey Ram and Balram have to buy the most expensive one in the English liquor shop, 'Jackpot'. One morning Mr. Ashok's wife Pinky Madam, who actually plays badminton with her husband, knocks on Balram's door and likes to play with him but in contrast to Ram he's very bad in it.

Mr. Ashok wants his servants to move in another room, a better one with two separated beds and more privacy. He even tells Balram he was also born in Laxmangarh and orders to drive him and his wife to his birthplace. Pinky Madam thinks about a return date in New York because she

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wants to go back to America. After they have eaten at the Stork's mansion Balram's family arrives and takes a look at "his" car, the Honda City, with pride.

Later at home his grandmother wants him to marry even though he isn't ready yet. He imagines they are eating his brother, therefore he runs out to a hill desperately. When he comes down the hill Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam wait for him at the car at the Stork's mansion because they had wondered where he has been. Pinky Madam asks about New York again but regarding India's development and the servants who are part of the family already, Mr. Ashok would rather stay in India.

**The Fourth Morning:** The chapter starts with Balram's explanation how he got his date of birth. An uniformed man came to school for the up coming election to write down the pupils ages. Due to the fact that Balram does not know his age the man says he is eighteen and able to vote from now on and this day is his birthday. Another day Balram watches a deal between the opponents of the great socialist party and the communists which has to do with the politics in Laxmangarh. During his work in the tea-shop he eavesdrops a dialogue saying a man was killed who was disturbing the official celebration of the socilialist election-win. After it Balram talks about the visit of the great socialist and Vijay Laxmangarh's new deputy who is the former bus conducter. At his master's - Mr. Ashok - home Balram finds out that the other driver Ram, who his servant number one, is a Muslim. The Storks disapproves of this religion and thinks that Ram is a Hindu, Balram threatens Ram. Finally Ram is afraid to be discovered and leaves Mr. Ashok's home. Balram becomes the servant number one.

**The Fourth Night:** The fourth chapter opens with Balram continuing his story by mentioning how weird and confusing Delhi is. He explains that the names and numbers of the several streets do not follow any system of logic, which serves as a transition to his duties as a driver. Whilst driving Mr. Ashok, Mukesh Sir and Pinky Madam around the city to drop them off at a mall, Balram gets constantly mocked by Mukesh Sir for getting lost all the time and immediately protected by Mr. Ashok who feels pity for him.

Since Balram can't enter the mall like all servants he waits among the other drivers in front of the mall. He notices a magazine called "Murder Weekly" that features violent stories about fictional murders in detail that seem to fascinate most of the servants. After driving his masters home, further mockery from Mukesh Sir and cleaning the car Balram returns to the servants' quarter in the basement of the building his masters are living in. There he gets mocked and abused by the other servants until he decides to move in a little room where he can be alone even though it is in horrible shape and full of roaches. The next day Balram gets to drive Mr. Ashok and Mukesh Sir to the headquarters of the Congress Party where he has to wait for two hours after dropping them off. While he suspects his masters to be bribing some politician he is impressed by his surroundings, such as the Presidents house, and feels a strong need to belong to the upper part of the city. Whilst continuing his duties Balram suspects a crisis in the relationship of Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam and has to face further abuse from Mukesh Sir until he has to drop him off at the railway one day leaving Ashok as his only master. Throughout the time he gets yelled by Pinky Madam for his low hygiene Balram feels a strange attraction towards her which he suppresses since the tension between her and Mr. Ashok seems to be growing. They bond once again over mocking Balram together on another trip to the mall where Balram rejoins the other drivers waiting in front of it. While the other drivers are busy reading the newest edition of "Murder Weekly" Balram notices that servants are being kept out of the mall and that the bouncers are identifying them by their clothing. Therefore he figures that he has to buy proper clothing in order to get into the mall himself, which he does later on after having bought new shoes, clothes and toothpaste. Apart of this exciting new experience Balram has to face further humiliation by Pinky Madam and Mr. Ashok who make him dress up as a maharaja for their own amusement and having him drive them to a party where he has to wait with the other drivers once again. On the way back an

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intoxicated Pinky Madam buys a little Buddha statue for Balram and then insists to drive the vehicle herself, leaving Balram alone on the road. This turns out to be another mockery since Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam pretend to run over Balram and then pick him up again to continue driving home.

During the tour they commit a hit-and-run on a poor child and force Balram to cover it up by cleaning the car several times. In response Mukesh Sir returns on the next day who treats Balram really nice for the first time while Mr. Ashok is still busy comforting Pinky Madam who suffered a severe shock. It turns out the behavioural change of Mukesh Sir towards Balram only served the purpose to ease him in into taking the blame for the whole incident, thus Balram is supposed to go to jail instead of them.

**The Fifth Night:** In the beginning of the fifth chapter, Balram describes the principle of the Rooster Coop. In a Rooster Coop, all chickens are stuffed together tightly. They are so busy trying to find a breathing space in order to keep alive that they don't even think about breaking out of the Coop. In Balram's opinion, 99.9 % of the Indians, the servants, are imprisoned in such a Rooster Coop by the rich. Although these men have the same abilities as the rich, they were taught to be slaves so well that they don't make any attempt to break out of the Coop. Furthermore, they know that their families will be as good as dead if they should try to betray their masters.

When Balram is supposed to go to jail for the hit-and-run committed by Pinky Madam, he feels like being trapped in this Coop and not able to break out of it. He is so terrified that he doesn't even think about running away. Fortunately, nobody has reported the accident and Balram doesn't have to go to prison. The one who delivers this message to Balram is Pinky Madam – she is the only one in the family who actually seems to feel guilty about the death of the unknown child. Balram realises that the atmosphere in the family is not the best. Pinky Madam appears quite upset, and some days later she commands him to drive her to the airport at two in the morning. When Mr. Ashok realises that his wife has left him for good, he turns his anger on Balram, until the latter kicks him in the chest to stop him. Mr. Ashok doesn't know how to deal with the situation. He spends much time being drunk and being driven around through Delhi aimlessly. It melts Balram's heart to see his master so lost and powerless and he gives his best trying to distract him and care for him. He thinks that it is his duty to be like a wife to Mr. Ashok now that Pinky Madam is gone. The master-servant-relationship becomes quite close. Still, Balram can't tell where his sincere concern for his master ends and his self-interest begins – without Mr. Ashok he wouldn't have any job and money. The beginning intimacy between the two of them comes to a sudden end when the Mongoose arrives from Dhanbad and Mr. Ashok tells him that he is glad to have 'someone real' by his side again. The Mongoose has a letter from Balram's grandmother and reads it aloud for him – although Balram can red: she wants him to send more money and to come home in order to marry. The next morning, Balram finds Mr. Ashok massaging his feet himself. Immediately, the servant bred into him grabs the feet of his master, which really upsets Mr. Ashok and makes him shout 'How stupid can you people get?'.

Reflecting this situation, the thought of murder crosses Balram's mind for the first time ('I had a vision of a pale stiff foot pushing trough a fire. "No," I said.'). He does some yoga to push the evil feelings away, until he is interrupted by the other drivers who notice that something is going on. Balram is observed by them and as long as he is, he can't break out of the Coop, which is obviously guarded from the inside.

**The Sixth Morning:** Balram comes to describing how he changed from an innocent village boy to a corrupted man. He claims that these changes just happened in him because they first happened in his master. Having been alone for some time, Mr. Ashok starts going to discos. In the small car, Balram can feel that his master is horny as if they would share the same body. While waiting in front of a hotel, the driver with the diseased lips tells Balram that the best-case scenario for a driver is to have a house in a slum and a child in college. When Mr. Ashok leaves the hotel, he is

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accompanied by a Nepalese looking girl. The fact that his still married master betrays his wife drives Balram furious. As he waits for the two of them to come out of a cinema, he talks to a book seller, who is sure that the Naxals are planning some kind of revolutionary civil war. After driving Mr. Ashok and the girl home, he takes the car for a ride on his own, listening to loud music, and spits on the seats afterwards.

As he eavesdrops on his master the next morning, he realises that the girl – Uma – is Mr. Ashok's old lover. He feels guilty for having condemned his master and punishes himself by pinching his palm. Mr. Ashok tells Uma that she can trust Balram because he is 'stupid as hell, but honest'. Balram's master spends the evening with a political assistant whose minister he bribes. After the meeting, the assistant persuades Mr. Ashok to spend the evening with him and to have some fun. The assistant, too, talks about a possible civil war, because he has seen lawyers beating down a judge whose order they didn't like. The two passengers drink whisky in the car and then go to pick up a blond whore from Ukraine who looks like the famous actress Kim Basinger. Mr. Ashok says that he sees someone and doesn't need a whore, but he can't get out of the situation. Balram wants to give him advice, but he is just the driver. When Mr. Ashok follows the assistant and the whore inside a hotel, he looks like a guilty little boy. Balram swears to defend his master's honour because the latter couldn't defend him against being corrupted by others.

Having driven Mr. Ashok home, Balram drives back to the hotel, wishing to see the blond girl again. He is sent away by the guards, but finds a strand of golden hair on the seat which he keeps around his wrist. As he drives through Delhi, he feels as if the city would understand him. The Sixth Night While Mr. Ashok is jogging around the block Balram suddenly asks Vitiligo-Lips for a golden-haired prostitute. Vitiligo-Lips wants to arrange something for him.

Balram says there are four ways for a servant to betray his master to get extra cash: 1st He can sell petrol from the car. 2nd He can go to a corrupt mechanic and inflate the price that is to pay and keep the rest for himself. 3rd He can sell the empty whisky bottles. 4th He can use the car as a freelance taxi. He never had cheated his master before but he starts to do that for a couple of weeks and even feels rage instead of guilt while doing it. Later he will be ashamed of his behavior. "The more I stole from him, the more I realize how much he had stolen from me."

The moment he has enough money he goes to Vitiligo-Lips again and asks for the prostitute -not for his master Mr. Ashok but for himself. Although she is golden-haired she isn't as pretty as the women Mr. Ashok has met. Nevertheless things start to happen and suddenly Balram jumps out of the bed because he has discovered something he is not able to stand. The hair has been dyed only. He leaves and in consequence he had spent all his money for nothing.

Balram arrives at his room and discovers a surprise there. Mr. Ashok is sitting on his bed and says he would know where Balram has been. The shocking moment passes fast because Mr. Ashok was told that he has been at the temple. Without any indication Mr. Ashok names his dissatisfaction with his life. He thinks everything seems to be wrong. In his opinion actually Balram's life is more livable. Therefore Mr. Ashok wants Balram to show him his life. He has dinner with him. Balram can't understand this because he wants to be like Mr. Ashok.

Mukesh comes to town again. He persuades Mr. Ashok to marry again. But as Mr. Ashok is able to convince him to leave some time to find a woman by himself. Mukesh gives him a red bag with lots of money inside. He has to bring it to the minister again.

As they are waiting in a traffic jam some beggars come along the road. Without thinking about it Balram gives them one rupee. The Mongoose gets really angry and shouts at him. Watching Balram he keeps his eyes on the rearview mirror the whole drive. Later in their apartment the Mongoose checks the breath of Balram because he thinks he was drinking and sends him away

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angrily.

When Mukesh leaves some days later Balram dances around the platform at the train station the moment the train disappears. As Mr. Ashok is on the phone again Balram has to bring the red bag full of money downstairs to the car. Mr. Ashok would follow in a minute. As Balram is standing in front of the elevator he suddenly turns around as if he is on the run and runs fast down the stairs. The reader is left in one moment of uncertainty. However some time later Balram is waiting for his master in the car with the red bag and all his untouched money on the backseat. As he is talking to the city while he is driving Mr. Ashok to the minister again Delhi tells him that the money truly belongs to Balram and no one else. "In your heart you've already taken it."

Balram is in a really bad conflict with his conscience. On the one hand he is aware of Mr. Ashok as a good and gracious master. If he fulfills his plan his family will be in danger and he would disappoint his father who wanted him to be an honest man. On the other hand his father wanted him to be a man and his family is for a long time far away from him. Moreover Mr. Ashok gave Balram the blame for the car accident and the child's death.

Fulfilled with these thoughts he goes to the train station secretly and without any obvious reason. "So this is what it will be like." He thinks for himself as if he is practicing his escape. Balram gets a free day telling his master he would go to the temple although it is a lie. He wants to go to the famous "red-light-district" in Delhi. Though he changes his mind seeing the women behind the glasses looked like animals.

So he goes straight on to an older part of the city. Balram gets to a secondhand market where books are sold. It's really impressive for him. Therefore he names it "wonder of the world". There he meets an old bookseller. This man tells him a lot about poetry and poets. This point is really important for Balram.

On the way home an image of a buffalo appears in front of his eyes. On a carriage are a lot of buffalo skulls. The buffalo says to Balram that he has brought a lot of shame to his family and all of them will die. Moved by this happening the servant awakes again and he wants to tell Mr. Ashok about his secret, but his master doesn't listen. In contrast he thinks Balram wants to marry and gives him money for the festivity.

The next day Balram goes unintentionally to the slums of Delhi. He throws all the rupees he got from his master away for the non-existing wedding. As he comes home he is in a real rage but immediately stopped by a boy. This boy is Dharam, his nephew, who is sent to Balram. He should help and find something to work for him. Partly relieved Balram realizes that the boy has stopped him from a murder. One night a lizard is on the mosquito net of Balram who is totally shocked. Dharam has to kill it and gives his uncle the feeling that he won't have to worry about Dharam destroying his plan because he won't recognize he was planning something as he has seen Balram this frightened.

The new woman in Mr. Ashok's life doesn't really like Balram and makes plans for a replacement driver. Mr. Ashok and her stop talking about it as Mr. Ashok gets to know that his party hasn't the majority anymore. Therefore he is in big trouble and all the money seems to be wasted. Trying to save something he lends his car, including Balram, to two politicians. They let Balram drive around the whole night and drink all the whisky that was in the car. After Balram has brought them to their hotel again he grabs the empty bottle to get some money for it. At a moment's notice he smashes the whisky bottle right on the floor. He picks the biggest part up again keeping and hiding it in the car as a weapon and tidies everything, so nobody will notice something.

The next day Balram sees Mr. Ashok making a deal with another servant. Balram wonders if it is

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a new replacement driver. He asks for a moment off and goes together with his nephew to the zoo. Seeing the white tiger Balram is so overwhelmed that he faints.

"The moment you recognize the beautiful in the world, you stop being a slave." Afterwards he wants Dharam to write to his Grandma about the day. He also explains what a person in the zoo has been saying: Fainting is a sign for saying goodbye to the grandmother as the fainting person is beware of the fact that he would die. Just one day after that Mr. Ashok wants to be brought to all the banks again. When the red bag was well filled Balram drives to a part of the city which is out of civilization. No one is there but the two of them. Balram stops and tells his master a wheel has to be broken. The road is all empty, so everything is perfect for Balram.

Balram asks his master for help and gets him out of the car this way. Mr. Ashok kneels down. Balram gives him a last hint saying, "It's been giving problems ever since that night we went to the hotel in Jangpura." . Without any hesitation Balram hits his master Mr. Ashok with the broken bottle and kills him by breaking his neck like it's done with chickens. Balram breaks out of the Rooster Coop. Leaving the dead body behind he drives to the railway station but before he leaves he thinks of his nephew he has left alone. Nevertheless it's a big risk for him he decides to go back and catches up Dharam.

**The Seventh Night:** After committing the murder Balram plans how he can get to Bangalore. He decides to travel by train, zigzagging the country together with his nephew Dharam who considers the journey as holidays.

In one train he recognizes a police poster with a photo of himself. While talking to an illiterate man he gets the proof that the photo looks like a stereotypical Indian. He makes up the false story that the man on the poster has caught two terrorists. The other man remarks that the searched man looks like him. The first four weeks in Bangalore Balram needs to calm his nerves and to forget about the murder. Dharam and he stay together at a hotel which offers good food. Balram also remarks that Bangalore is full of strangers and outsiders.

Balram notices that everyone drinks coffee and of course he wants to try out but he doesn't know how to drink it at first. After watching other people he gets to know everyone drinks it differently. As well Balram has doubts whether Bangalore is the right city to live in. Still he rents a flat and he wonders how to fit into the city. Like he has heard the voice of Delhi he tries to notice the voice of Bangalore.

According to this he discovers the most important business aspect which is outsourcing. He realizes the people are working at night because their masters live in America, so he asks himself how – especially the girls – come home again. There isn't a train system like in other cities, therefore he develops the idea of a taxi service. First he hasn't got a chance to start with his business because every company already had an organisation like that. But then he tries to think about what Mr Ashok would do. Finally he goes to the police and bribes the inspector with more than ten thousand rupees. Even the wanted poster of Balram is in the station, but he has success. That is why two days later a company calls because they want to have a taxi service.

Little by little this "start- up" grows into a big business. Balram owns twenty- six vehicles and sixteen drivers. From now on Balram is the master instead of the servant. He even calls himself Ashok Sharma and offers an own website in English. Instead of treating his drivers badly like every other master in the town he looks after them nicely.

He is of the opinion that he has learned his real education from the road and the pavement. By listening to some men on the streets he obtains courage that one day there will be a revolution in India which will destroy the "Rooster Coop". He observes that only four men in history have led a successful revolution: Alexander the Great, Abraham Lincoln, Mao and maybe Hitler.

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Balram also changes his previous mind of golden- coloured hair girls like they always are in the shampoo advertisement. He doesn't trust the TV and the posters anymore and thinks it's not healthy. Also he believes that the Nepali and Indian girls are the best prostitutes.

After hearing mobile phones cause cancer in the brain and testicles he throws it away because his brain is too important for him. The novel ends with the statement of Balram in which he declares that the yellow and brown men will reign the world in about twenty years.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Balram learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell ..... .

(*ii*) Balram Halwai is a ..... man.

(*iii*) Balram watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor (single-malt whiskey), and play their own role in the ..... .

## 3.2 Summary

- The Book "The White Tiger" from Aravind Adiga is about a men who writes a letter to the premier of China, Wen Jiabao. The name of the man is Balram Halwai. He lives in Bangalore, India. In his letter he wants to ask the premier, if it's true that he wants to come to India and talk to Indian entrepreneurs, like Balram hear to on the All India Radio before. He also hears that the premier wants to know the truth about Bangalore and Balram knows, that he can tell him the real truth about Bangalore. He shows the premier the truth while talking about his life. For example what happen when he visit Bangalore for the first time. "See when you come to Bangalore and stop at a traffic light, some boy will run up to your car and knock on your window, while holding up a bootlegged copy of an American business book, wrapped carefully in cellophane."
- Balram begins to tell him a story about a day in his life, when he was driving in a car with his ex-employer Mr. Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam. Mr Ashok tells Balram to drive on the side of the street and then he was starting to ask him some questions.
- There is a tea shop in the central of Laxmangarh where his father works as a rickshaw - puller. In front of the tea shop stops a car and somebody comes out. Another person is sitting in the car. It's the Buffalo, one of the four landlords in Laxmangarh.
- He is one of the chiefs in the lands around Laxmangarh. If someone wants to work for them, they have to ask these landlords for work. Balram know, that his father don't want to work with these landlords together, so he gets trouble with them.
- Balram's granny recommends to keep the job in the tea shop. But Balram starts to search for a taxi driver, who should train him how to drive. In his letter he also describes the job situation in India, that many people are unemployed as they have not received any education, never had a change to find a proper job.
- Balram calls himself half-baked because he never completed school and is half-educated. Therefore his ideas are half formed, half digested and half correct and he even gets his name by his teacher due to the fact that his parents just named him "munna", which means boy. The teacher backs him up and calls him "The white tiger" considering that the white tiger is the rarest animal in the jungle and appears only once in a generation.

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## 3.3 Key-Words

1. Single-malt whiskey : Single malt whisky is a whisky made at one particular distillery from a mash that uses only malted grain, ordinarily barley
2. Coruscating : To emit flashes of light; sparkle

## 3.4 Review Questions

1. Discuss the Balram Halwai as a complicated man.
2. Who is the Protagonist in this Novel? Explain.
3. Discuss the Novel entitled as the White Tiger.
4. Discuss Balram's opinion of his master and how it and their relationship evolve. Balram says "where my genuine concern for him ended and where my self-interest began, I could not tell". Where do you think his self-interest begins?
5. Compare Ashok and his family's actions after Pinky Madam hits a child to Balram's response when his driver does. Were you surprised at the actions of either? How does Ashok and his family's morality compare to Balram's in respect to the accidents, and to other circumstances?

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles (*ii*) Complicated
   (*iii*) Rooster Coop

## 3.5 Further Readings


1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 4: Aravind Adiga: The White Tiger—Theme

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss about the novel The White Tiger.
- Understand the various themes of the novel.

## Introduction

The White Tiger provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world as told through a retrospective narration from Balram Halwai, a village boy. In detailing Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a chauffeur to a rich landlord, and then to Bangalore, the place to which he flees after killing his master and stealing his money, the novel examines issues of religion, caste, loyalty, corruption and poverty in India. Ultimately, Balram transcends his sweet-maker caste and becomes a successful entrepreneur, establishing his own taxi service. In a nation proudly shedding a history of poverty and underdevelopment, he represents, as he himself says, "tomorrow."

The novel has been well-received, making the New York Times bestseller list in addition to winning the Man Booker Prize and holds the rating of 4.5 stars out of 5 . Aravind Adiga, 33 at the time, was the second youngest writer as well as the fourth debut writer to win the prize in 2008. Adiga says his novel "attempt[s] to catch the voice of the men you meet as you travel through India - the voice of the colossal underclass." According to Adiga, the exigence for The White Tiger was to capture the unspoken voice of people from "the Darkness" - the impoverished areas of rural India, and he "wanted to do so without sentimentality or portraying them as mirthless humorless weaklings as they are usually.

I found it ironic that Balram goes through such trouble to break out of the coop (which is something he claims only a White Tiger can do) but in actuality all he was doing was moving from the group of people associated with the darkness to the group of people associated with the light.

He goes through many names in the novel and finally once he "breaks out of the coop" he ends up using the name Ashok. Ashok was the man so wrapped up in the coop he had no idea he was even in it and that was Balram very reason for killing him. Balram never actually breaks OUT of the coop, to me it seemed as if he had dug himself further into it, and taking on this name symbolized that.

So Personally I saw that the theme was more: "don't play into societies views, remain an individual" (the white tiger, rare, his true alias, the only name that fits the main character throughout the novel, ace in a generation).

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## 4.1 Themes

### Globalization

The White Tiger takes place in the modern day world where increased technology has led to world globalization, and India is no exception. In the past decade, India has had one of the fastest booming economies. Specifically Americanization in India has played its role in the plot, since it provides an outlet for Balram to alter his caste. To satisfy Pinky's want for American culture, Ashok, Pinky, and Balram simply move to Gurgaon instead of back to America. Globalization has assisted in the creation of an American atmosphere in India. Ashok justifies this move by explaining "Today it's the modernist suburb of Delhi. American Express, Microsoft, all the big American companies have offices there. The main road is full of shopping malls—each mall has a cinema inside! So if Pinky Madam missed America, this was the best place to bring her". By blackmailing Ram Parsad, the other driver, Balram is promoted and drives Ashok and Pinky to their new home.

Ashok is even convinced India is surpassing the USA, "There are so many more things I could do here than in New York now...The way things are changing in India now, this place is going to be like America in ten years". Balram is noticing the rapid growth as well. From the beginning of his story he knows that in order to rise above his caste he should become an entrepreneur. Although his taxi service is not an international business, Balram plans to keep up with the pace of globalization and change his trade when need be. "I'm always a man who sees 'tomorrow' when others see 'today.'" Balram's recognition of the increasing competition resulting from globalization contributes to his corruption.

### Individualism

A white tiger symbolizes power and majesty in East Asian cultures, such as in China and Japan. It is also a symbol for individualism and uniqueness. Balram is seen as different from those he grew up with. He is the one who got out of the "Darkness" and found his way into the "Light".


Throughout the book, there are references to how Balram is very different from those back in his home environment. He is referred to as the "white tiger" (which also happens to be the title of the book).

### Freedom

In an interview with Aravind Adiga, he talked about how "The White Tiger" was a book about a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the protagonist in the novel, worked his way out of his low social caste (often referred to as "the Darkness") and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past. Climbing up the social ladder, Balram sheds the weights and limits of his past and overcomes the social obstacles that keep him from living life to the fullest that he can. In the book, Balram talks about how he was in a rooster coop and how he broke free from his coop. The novel is somewhat of a memoir of his journey to finding his freedom in India's modern day capitalist society. Towards the beginning of the novel, Balram cites a poem from the Muslim poet Iqbal where he talks about slaves and says "They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world." Balram sees himself embodying the poem and being the one who sees the world and takes it as he rises through the ranks of society, and in doing so finding his freedom.

### Immoral corruption

Balram is from a low caste in India where he grew up with barely anything. As a child, Balram was seen as an intelligent and honest fellow in a crowd of thugs. He was a pure soul and was

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untainted. However, growing up, he was exposed into a lot of corruption and immoral behavior, such as the time with the doctors just let his father die. His childhood ultimately set Balram up for a lifetime of immoral and corrupt behavior as he moved up his social ladder and into the higher castes. To work his way up, Balram ends up cheating, stealing, and even murdering in order to have his way. Balram becomes very selfish, evident by his many immoral actions, due to the entrepreneur/businessman side of him. This can be seen as both an immoral and moral, depending on how you look at it. If one looks at it in a more business lens, business is all about doing everything one can to beat out whoever one are competing against. Finding ways to ensure the competition does not succeed, finding ways to get ahead of everyone else, and coming out on top are all a big part of the business world. It can be seen as being moral because of competitive nature of our globalized capitalist economic system. In a capitalist economy, any way one can get ahead is fair game. However, if one is looking at this from a non-business standpoint, the actions Balram does are very immoral. He cheats people to put himself in a position to gain for himself. Balram does everything in his power for personal gain, even killing his boss.

### Social class/caste

The book shows a modern day, capitalist Indian society with free market and free business. It also shows how it can create economic division. In India there are not social classes, there are social castes. The novel portrays India's society as very negative towards the lower social caste. Balram refers to it as the "Darkness". When Balram was asked which caste he was from, he knew that it could ultimately cause a biased stance in his employer and determine the future of his employment. There is definitely a big difference seen in Balram's lower caste from back home and his current higher caste in their life-styles, habits, and standards of living. This novel is showing how our economic system today creates socioeconomic gaps that create a big division in society. It limits opportunity, social mobility, health, and other rights and pleasures that should be given to all. There is a big difference in the amount of money spread around in society today and this book is alluding to that fact.

### Marriage in India

To save their reputation and the marriage, the family has to take out a loan from the Stork. Balram is forced to drop out of school and work in a teashop to help raise money to pay back the debt – triggering the events of the rest of the story.

His cousin's wedding is not the only marriage that disrupts Balram's life. When Pinky Madam leaves for New York, Mr. Ashok sinks into depression. In addition to drinking and womanizing, he finally accepts his family's dirty business, ferrying bribes for The Stork. Balram joins in his boss' decline – eventually murdering Mr. Ashok to pocket the bribe himself.


Marriage plays a key role in Indian society as well as the novel. When Balram's cousin becomes engaged, his family "gets screwed" with a large dowry they cannot afford.

### The Indian Family

In an interview with *The Guardian,* Adiga emphasizes the importance of family in Indian society. "If you're rude to your mother in India, it's a crime as bad as stealing would be here," he explains. For Balram to abandon his family, then, is perhaps his greatest crime. "This is a shameful and dislocating thing for an Indian to do," Adiga remarks of his protagonist.

Balram also understands the severity of his actions. Fear for his family is the largest obstacle he must overcome to carry out Mr. Ashok's murder. In the days before, he has visions – imagining a

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buffalo in the street blaming him for the deaths of his family. Even after he becomes a businessman in Bangalore, he goes to the temple to pray for their spirits.

### China's Relationship to India

At the beginning of the novel, Balram mentions to the Premier that China is the only nation he admires besides Afghanistan and Abyssinia. Why? Because he read in a book called *Exciting Tales of the Exotic East* that these are the only 3 countries never to be ruled by outsiders. He dubs China the "freedom-loving nation," a place that has never been subject to a master-slave relationship with the West. But although he hears on All India Radio that "you Chinese are far ahead of us in every respect," Balram observes that China does not have entrepreneurs – hence the Premier's visit to Bangalore.

China, then, becomes a foil to India, which he describes as a nation with "no drinking water, electricity, sewage, public transportation …" but chock full of entrepreneurs. For this reason, Balram tells the Premier his story, believing that China and India are destined to become the next great superpowers. "In 20 years' time, it will just be us brown and yellow men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world."

### Lightness and Darkness

Perhaps Balram's favorite motif is the duality of "Light" and "Dark." From the very beginning, he attempts to navigate from his hometown in "The Darkness" to become a member of urban society. Light, then, becomes a multifaceted symbol of time (the future), wealth (lots of it), location (Bangalore), and obligation (none) – while Darkness represents the past, poverty, rural India – and most importantly – loyalty to family and master.

These themes battle each other throughout the novel. Even after he has established himself in Bangalore, he continues to seek ways to differentiate himself from the "Darkness." When 1 of his White Tiger drivers runs over a boy, he visits the family and offers their surviving son a job. He realizes this decision may make him appear weak, but he argues he has no choice. "I can't live the way the Wild Boar and the Buffalo and the River lived, and probably *still* live, back in Laxmangarh. I am in the Light Now."

### Self Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Balram Halwai, a ..... boy.

(*ii*) Pinky Madam hits a ..... to Balram's response

(*iii*) Balram's journey first to Delhi, where he works as a ..... to a rich landlord

## 4.2 Summary

- The White Tiger takes place in the modern day world where increased technology has led to world globalization, and India is no exception. In the past decade, India has had one of the fastest booming economies. Specifically Americanization in India has played its role in the plot, since it provides an outlet for Balram to alter his caste. To satisfy Pinky's want for American culture, Ashok, Pinky, and Balram simply move to Gurgaon instead of back to America.
- Throughout the book, there are references to how Balram is very different from those back in his home environment. He is referred to as the "white tiger" (which also happens to be the title of the book). A white tiger symbolizes power and majesty in East Asian cultures, such as in China and Japan. It is also a symbol for individualism and uniqueness.
- In an interview with Aravind Adiga, he talked about how "The White Tiger" was a book about a man's quest for freedom. Balram, the protagonist in the novel, worked his way out

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of his low social caste (often referred to as "the Darkness") and overcame the social obstacles that limited his family in the past.

- Balram is from a low caste in India where he grew up with barely anything. As a child, Balram was seen as an intelligent and honest fellow in a crowd of thugs. He was a pure soul and was untainted.
- The book shows a modern day, capitalist Indian society with free market and free business. It also shows how it can create economic division. In India there are not social classes, there are social castes. The novel portrays India's society as very negative towards the lower social caste. Balram refers to it as the "Darkness".
- Marriage plays a key role in Indian society as well as the novel. When Balram's cousin becomes engaged, his family "gets screwed" with a large dowry they cannot afford.
- At the beginning of the novel, Balram mentions to the Premier that China is the only nation he admires besides Afghanistan and Abyssinia. Why? Because he read in a book called *Exciting Tales of the Exotic East* that these are the only 3 countries never to be ruled by outsiders.

## 4.3 Key-Words

1. Retrospective : Looking back on or dealing with past events or situations
2. Wrapped up : Deeply devoted to; "bound up in her teaching"; "is wrapped up in his family

## 4.4 Review Questions

1. The novel offers a window into the rapidly changing economic situation in India. What do we learn about entrepreneurship and Balram's definition of it?
2. The novel reveals an India that is as unforgiving as it is promising. Do you think of the novel, ultimately, as a cautionary tale or a hopeful one?
3. Discuss the themes of the Novel The White Tiger.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Village (*ii*) Child
   (*iii*) Chauffeur

## 4.5 Further Readings


1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 5: Aravind Adiga: The White Tiger—Characterisation

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Explain the role of Balram Halwai.
- Discuss important characters.

## Introduction

Balram Halwai murdered his master, got away with it and is now free. But is he? In the aftermath of the crime, Balram has become a slave to India's economic system. He spends his days sleeping and his nights slogging away at building his start-up taxi company. As the story opens, he recalls, over seven nights, how he transformed from a young boy, born into a caste of lowly sweet-makers, into one of the most wanted men in India.

Adiga explores Indian economics, culture and politics with this darkly satirical take on contemporary Indian life. He takes us from small town Laxmangarh, to the capital of Delhi, and finally, to Bangalore, the city which best represents where India's economics, politics and culture are headed. He does this through the eyes of the charismatic, egotistical Balram Halwai, as he writes to the premiere of China, Wen Jiabao, who is coming to visit India.

## 5.1 Text—The Write Tiger

Introducing a major literary talent, *The White Tiger* offers a story of coruscating wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most volatile, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen. Balram Halwai is a complicated man. Servant. Philosopher. Entrepreneur. Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells us the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life — having nothing but his own wits to help him along. Born in the dark heart of India, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver for his village's wealthiest man, two house Pomeranians (Puddles and Cuddles), and the rich man's (very unlucky) son. From behind the wheel of their Honda City car, Balram's new world is a revelation. While his peers flip through the pages of Murder Weekly ("Love — Rape — Revenge!"), barter for girls, drink liquor (Thunderbolt), and perpetuate the Great Rooster Coop of Indian society, Balram watches his employers bribe foreign ministers for tax breaks, barter for girls, drink liquor (single-malt whiskey), and play their own role in the Rooster Coop. Balram learns how to siphon gas, deal with corrupt mechanics, and refill and resell Johnnie Walker Black Label bottles (all but one). He also finds a way out of the Coop that no one else inside it can perceive. Balram's eyes penetrate India as few outsiders can: the cockroaches and the call centers; the prostitutes and the worshippers; the ancient and Internet

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cultures; the water buffalo and, trapped in so many kinds of cages that escape is (almost) impossible, the white tiger. And with a charisma as undeniable as it is unexpected, Balram teaches us that religion doesn't create virtue, and money doesn't solve every problem — but decency can still be found in a corrupt world, and you can get what you want out of life if you eavesdrop on the right conversations.

Balram begins by explaining that he is not just any murderer. Should the Premier wish to know more. Balram reminisces about his job as a driver for the Stork's family. After his father dies of tuberculosis, the family sends his brother Kishan to work in the city of Dhanbad. Balram and his cousin, Dilip, come along, and the 3 get work in a local teashop. Balram furthers his education by eavesdropping on the customers. He overhears a conversation about how much money drivers earn and decides he wants to be a chauffeur. Granny Kusum and the family agree to pay for driving classes on the condition that Balram send his earnings home every month. Balram's driving teacher is an old, fat, hookah-puffing taxi driver. For every hour Balram spends learning to drive, he spends several under the cars doing free repairs. When his training is complete, his teacher takes him out for a final lesson: he brings Balram to a whorehouse and lets him choose a prostitute. The hard work has only begun. Balram goes door-to-door asking for work, but he is rejected for weeks. One day he sees a lone figure walking the grounds of a mansion. He decides, "*This is the master for me*." He begs the guard at the front gate to let him speak to the master with no success. Balram continues to argue loudly. An older gentleman appears on the terrace. It is the Stork. Balram yells that he is from the Stork's village. He falls at the Stork's feet and begs for work, showering him with compliments. After a test drive, Balram is hired. Balram spends his days cooking, cleaning, and washing two spoiled Pomeranians named Puddles and Cuddles. Since he is the 2nd driver, he only drives when the 1st driver, Ram Parsad, is busy. Once every week, Ram Parsad and Balram are sent to the "Jackpot" English Liquor Store to purchase expensive American whiskey. This is the only time they work as a team. Otherwise they never speak a word to each other even though they share a room. At night, Balram massages the Stork's feet, listening to conversations between the Stork and his two sons: Mukesh Sir (aka "the Mongoose") and Mr. Ashok. One day, Mr. Ashok asks Balram to drive him to the village of Laxmangarh. He was born there and wants to see the village again. The ride to Laxmangarh is tense. Mr. Ashok and his American wife, Pinky Madam, argue. Pinky Madam demands to know when they will return to New York. Mr. Ashok dodges the question, and Pinky Madam accuses him of lying to her. When they arrive in Laxmangarh, Balram's family comes to see him. They are in awe of his khaki uniform and the fancy Honda City car. But Balram is in trouble because he hasn't sent any money home for months. Granny Kusum threatens to marry him off to keep him in line. Balram does not want to be married. They argue and he stomps out of the house. When Balram drives Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam home, his family gathers at the side of the road to say goodbye. Balram speeds right past them out of town. He decides to cut ties with his family and never return to Laxmangarh. During the drive home, Mr. Ashok and Pinky Madam continue to argue about returning to America. Mr. Ashok says he prefers India. He feels he can accomplish more in India and he likes having servants. Further down the road, trucks are blocking the way home. A group of men in red headbands is shouting at a group of men in green headbands. Madam Pinky is alarmed. Balram promises to continue his story – but first he will have to explain about Democracy. This will have to wait for the following night because it's time for him to go back to work. It is 2:44 in the morning, "the hour of degenerates, drug addicts and Bangalore-based entrepreneurs."

## 5.2 Characterisation

### Balram Halwai

The narrator Balram Halwai grew up in the fictive village Laxmangarh in India. Like most families in this region his family is very poor. Furthermore he lost his parents very early. His family neither gave him a name nor a date of birth. They just called him "Munna" meaning "boy". His father always wanted him to go to school to learn how to write and to read in reason to give him better possibilities. At the school he got the name "Balram" by his teacher. One of the most important facts is that the school inspector named him "The white Tiger "the rarest animal in the jungle

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because he is the cleverest child in Laxmangarh. Because of debts at the landowner "Stork "Balram's family takes him out of school to earn money in the tea house. His further education he gets by eavesdropping conversations of the tea house guests. After the death of his parents his grandmother Kusum decides about his future. As he wants to become a driver Kusum pays his introduction in condition that Balram supports his family when he is a driver. Against all expectations he gets a job as driver and servant at the "Storks" house. In the eyes of "Mr. Ashok" his young master he is the perfect servant. Balram identifies with his master and he's really fortunate to have a boss like that. He worries about him and his image: "On Mr. Ashok's privacy I allowed no one to infringe". Furthermore he stops chewing paan because Pinky Madam points out that his teeth were disgusting. More and more he starts casting off his role as a local jerk. When he is forced to take his responsibility for an accident caused by Pinky Madam he begins to mistrust and to doubt the loyalty of his master.

There are early signs for the murder of Mr. Ashok. First he can't overcome his thoughts to murder his good-natured master but at the end it's a cold-blooded and well planned deed. Therefore he risks his families well-being but he doesn't feel responsible for them anymore. After Balram's flight he founds a driver company with the stolen money of Mr. Ashok. This underlines his spirit, shrewdness and intelligence. When one of his drivers caused an accident he behaves loyal and supports his driver. His action shows the difference between him and Mr. Ashok during an accident. While Mr. Ashok wallows in self-pity Balram feels sorry for his driver and the victim.

The positive features of Balram aren't curious because he is the narrator of the story. Balram presents himself as an above-average and smart boy who grows with his experiences and changed from a naive, poor child to a hardened, rich metropolitan. He looks with a cynical attitude, a moral indignation at the conditions in India and at his own life. But at the end Balram is a lonely people. He is lonely because of his living condition. But he is also lonely because he is dissociated from his comrades. He even keeps his nephews away from himself. Between them stands the deed which changed everything: "One day, I know, Dharam, this boy who is drinking my milk and eating my ice cream in big bowls, will ask me….And then I'll have to come up with an answer- or kill him, I suppose."

His master's murder will follow Balram every time. Even if he hopes to find the way back in community.

### Balram's family

The family of Balram is poor but very traditional. Men and woman sleep in different corners of their house and all members of the family adore and carry for the water buffalo, which is fed by the woman still before they make the meal for their husbands. The water buffalo is a fat, glossy skinned creature and gets top priority. Every member of the family works hard for the well-being of their relatives.

### Vikram Halwai

Vikram Halwai is the father of Kishan and his younger brother Balram who is the first person narrator.

Vikram is a poor man nevertheless he is a man of honour and courage.

He earns money for his family as a rickshaw-puller in Laxmangarh. Laymangarh is a little village in northern India.

Also he is a patient and quite person. He never crouched while waiting for passengers. He only stands there alone, drinking tea and thinking.

Vikram Halwai is a man who has a plan. His son Balram is his plan. For him it is very important that his son Balram goes to school. That is why he doesn't accept that Balram works in the tea shop. His son should be able to read and to write for having a better future.

Certainly he doesn't feel happy about the fact that his son is afraid of a lizard but he is a thoughtful father and so he goes with his son to school and kills the lizard. "My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine - at least one - should live like a man." His whole

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life he worked very hard to nourish his family and now the only thing he wants is that his son has a better life as his life was.

Finally he contracts with tuberculosis. Balram and Kishna bring him to the Lohia Universal Free Hospital on the other side of the river but there wasn't a doctor. After a life with hard work he died of his illness.

### Balram's mother

Balram's mother is dead and considered as crazy by Balram's grandmother, that's why Grandmother Kusum is glad that Balram's mother isn't alive anymore and can't influence the family.

### Kusum

Balram's grandmother is called Kusum and the oldest member of the family. She has her own opinion of the future of her grandsons and barges in the parenting of her son, the father of Balram and his brother, f.e. "That night she told my father: 'He just stood there gaping at the fort - just the way his mother used to. He is going to come to nothing good in life, I'll tell you that right now.'" Another example is that she persuades his son to let Balram and his brother work in the teashop. After the death of Balram's parents she decides about his future. All in all she only wants the best for her grandsons, although she calls Balram a "coward" because of his fright against lizards.

### Kishan

Kishan is Balram's older brother and works in the teashop for the stork as well. He began to work there after the wedding of his cousin Meera to earn money for the family because the dowry tears a hole in their budge and that's why he hasn't finished school. After the wedding of the second cousin Reena, he retrieves his brother out of school to work in the teashop, too. Kishan is in pursuance of the owner of the tea-shop an assiduous and dependable worker.

After the death of their father Kishan marries his wife and two weeks after the wedding he leaves his home and travels to Dhanbad to work there. Balram and their cousin Dilip attend him.

He's a typical older brother and cares for his younger brother Balram.

### Dharam

Dharam is Balram's nephew. Balram takes this little boy along to Bangalore and Dharam considers this journey as his first holidays. He had never left his home for holidays before. It seems like Balram is a kind of archetype for his nephew, because Dharam trusts him blindly. Furthermore Dharam is very observing and notices instantly that his uncle is thoughtful and not really happy ("One morning Dharam said: 'Uncle, you look so depressed'"). With his barefaced and childish character he whips up a smile at Balram's face. In the end of the story Dharam is the residue of Balram's family ("Dharam, last of my family, and me.").

### Cousins

- Dilip attends Balram and Kishan to Dhanbad.
- Meera is married and the dowry therefore is the reason why Kishan had to leave school and begin to work.
- Reena is married with a boy from the next village and they celebrate a traditional wedding. Because of the dowry for the family of the husband also Balram has to leave school and work in the tea-shop.

### Uncles

Balram's uncles do backbreaking work to provide for the family.

### Aunts

Balram's aunts work with his cousins and his grandmother every day "in the courtyard". Every woman has her own exercise to do and to care for the families well-being.

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### The rooster coop

The author frequently mentions the rooster coop when describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India and he also defends himself for murdering his master with it. The author first describes how the rooster coop looks like in the market in Old Delhi, in order to give the visualization to the target audience: "Hundreds of pale hens and brightly coloured roosters stuffed tightly into wire-mesh cages, packed as tightly as worms in a belly, pecking each other and sitting on each other, jostling just for breathing space; the whole cage giving off a horrible stench…The roosters in the coop smell the blood from above. They see the organs of their brothers lying around them."

However, the chickens are not trying to escape from the poor-constructed cage. Hence, the author compares those chickens living in a miserable condition with the poor class in India. "The very same thing is done with human beings in this country" From his analysis of the structure of the inequality in the country, the author comes to believe that liability for the suffering of the servant also lies with the mentality of the servant class, which he refers as "perpetual servitude". This ideology is so strong that "you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands and he will throw it back at you with a curse".

According to his philosophy, individual action is the key to break out of the rooster coop and the servants are self-trapping. He validates his evil actions to his master by saying, "I think the Rooster Coop needs people like me to break out of it. It needs masters like Mr. Ashok – who, for all his numerous virtues, was not much of a master – to be weeded out, and exceptional servants like me to replace them.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Choose the correct options:**

(*i*) Dilip attends Balram and Kishan to ..... .

(*a*) Patna (*b*) Dhanbad (*c*) Old Delhi (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) Reena is married with a boy from the next village and they celebrate a ..... wedding.

(*a*) Modern (*b*) Ancient (*c*) Traditional (*d*) Both (*a*) and (*b*)

(*iii*) Dharam is Balram's ..... .

(*a*) Son (*b*) Nephew (*c*) Grand son (*d*) None of these

(*iv*) Balram's grandmother is called Kusum and the oldest member of the family.

(*a*) Kishan (*b*) Kusum (*c*) Laxman bai (*d*) None of these

## 5.3 Summary

- Introducing a major literary talent, *The White Tiger* offers a story of coruscating wit, blistering suspense, and questionable morality, told by the most volatile, captivating, and utterly inimitable narrator that this millennium has yet seen. Balram Halwai is a complicated man, Servant, Philosopher, Entrepreneur, Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells us the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life — having nothing but his own wits to help him along. Born in the dark heart of India, Balram gets a break when he is hired as a driver for his village's wealthiest man, two house Pomeranians (Puddles and Cuddles), and the rich man's (very unlucky) son.
- Balram begins by explaining that he is not just any murderer. Should the Premier wish to know more. Balram reminisces about his job as a driver for the Stork's family. After his father dies of tuberculosis, the family sends his brother Kishan to work in the city of Dhanbad. Balram and his cousin, Dilip, come along, and the 3 get work in a local teashop.
- The narrator Balram Halwai grew up in the fictive village Laxmangarh in India. Like most families in this region his family is very poor. Furthermore he lost his parents very early. His family neither gave him a name nor a date of birth.

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- The family of Balram is poor but very traditional. Men and woman sleep in different corners of their house (p. 17) and all members of the family adore and carry for the water buffalo, which is fed by the woman still before they make the meal for their husbands.
- Vikram Halwai is the father of Kishan and his younger brother Balram who is the first person narrator.
- Vikram is a poor man nevertheless he is a man of honour and courage (p.23).
- He earns money for his family as a rickshaw-puller in Laxmangarh. Laymangarh is a little village in northern India.
- Balram's grandmother is called Kusum and the oldest member of the family. She has her own opinion of the future of her grandsons and barges in the parenting of her son, the father of Balram and his brother, f.e. "That night she told my father.
- Kishan is Balram's older brother (p.37) and works in the teashop for the stork as well (p. 32). He began to work there after the wedding of his cousin Meera to earn money for the family because the dowry tears a hole in their budge and that's why he hasn't finished school.
- Dharam is Balram's nephew. Balram takes this little boy along to Bangalore and Dharam considers this journey as his first holidays. He had never left his home for holidays before.
- The author frequently mentions the rooster coop when describing the situation or characteristics of the servant class in India and he also defends himself for murdering his master with it. The author first describes how the rooster coop looks like in the market in Old Delhi, in order to give the visualization to the target audience

## 5.4 Key-Words

1. Charismatic : The term charisma has two senses: 1) compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others, 2) a divinely conferred power or talent.
2. Nourish : To provide with food or other substances necessary for life and growth; feed, to foster the development of.

## 5.5 Review Questions

1. In what ways did Balram's character transform from the beginning of his story to the end in The White Tiger?
2. Were Balram's actions a consequence of his character or circumstances?
3. Why is The White Tiger structured as a letter to Premier Jiabao?
4. How did Balram justify the murder of his master, knowing he was putting his entire family in danger, in The White Tiger by Adiga?

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*b*) (*ii*) (*c*) (*iii*) (*b*) (*iv*) (*b*)

## 5.6 Further Readings


1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 6: Aravind Adiga: The White Tiger—Critical Appreciation

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Understand the novel White Tiger.
- Make a critical analysis of the novel.

## Introduction

*The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga's debut novel, won the 2008 Man Booker Prize and has received much critical acclaim. *The White Tiger* tells the story of a young entrepreneur in India whose childhood nickname was the white tiger. This novel is an original and compelling story about modern India.

*The White Tiger* won critical praise for its author, first time novelist Aravind Adiga, who won the 2008 Man Booker Prize for his novel. *The White Tiger* tells the story of a young man, Balram Halwai, who grows up in "the Darkness" of rural India and moves to Delhi as an adult, working as the chauffeur for a wealthy man from his village. The novel is structured as a letter Balram is writing to the Premier of China, explaining how he came to be an entrepreneur in Bangalore.

One remarkable aspect of *The White Tiger* is how Adiga weaves such a broad spectrum of aspects of life in India—from local democracy to caste to religion to family duty to the rising technology centers and culture of entrepreneurism. The novel contains multitudes without being a sprawling epic or losing its tight focus. *The White Tiger* is a moving story and an eye-opening portrait of Indian society.

*The White Tiger* is presented as an epistolary novel, a series of letters written over the period of seven nights. It's just an excuse, of course, for the narrator, Balram Halwai, to tell his story — a supposedly creative approach that, at least initially certainly gets the reader's attention. The person Balram is writing to is the premier of China, Wen Jiabao, due to visit the city Balram is living in — Bangalore, India — in a week's time. What, one wonders, could possess an Indian entrepreneur living in Bangalore to write at such length to the premier of China ? Balram does have a story to tell, but unfortunately the connection to his ostensible audience (the Chinese premier) is barely made. Sure, Balram explains that he can tell the premier all about Indian entrepreneurship — something he hears China is missing — and he makes the occasional comparisons between India and China, but it ultimately proves to be a feeble excuse for him to unburden himself, and because the premise is so poorly utilised undermines much of the novel.

## 6.1 The White Tiger—Critical Appreciation

**Notes**

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga, has once again drawn the attention of thousands of Indian readers not only for winning the Man Booker Prize 2008 but primarily for its realistic and graphic picture of some of the most canny truths about India. It is perhaps the most drastic and bitter facts that have impressed the judges, who have got a revealing inside into India. Hence the book, as a whole, presents the crude, dark and naked facts about India, and that has added all the merits for the award of the coveted Man Booker Prize.

The entire plot of the novel pivots round the protagonist Balram Halwai, a young man born and brought up in a remote village of Bihar, who narrates his story of life in the form of a letter to a foreign dignitary, the Chinese Prime-Minister who is on his visit to Bangalore on an official assignment. In his talk Halwai begins to tell the Chinese Premier the story of his life. We are introduced to the poverty of rural Bihar, and the evil of the feudal landlords.

Halwai's voice sounds like a curious mix of an American teen and a middle-aged Indian essayist.

While unfolding his life of adventure and struggle, he is mainly concerned with painting a realistic picture of his village, his people, the feudal Zamindars of India and particularly all those entrepreneurs who have arisen from dubious position to the great heights of business magnets. But it is the graphic picture of the country and the portrayal of the characters that really matter in the novel. To begin with we have the portrayal of a school teacher who is thus painted by the narrator.

The teacher turned aside and spat - a jet of red paan splashed the ground of the classroom. He licked his lips.

While describing about India to the foreign Prime-Minister, he explains and immediately depicts the great river of India called

Ganga which flows through his village. That black river am I talking of - which is river of Death, whose banks are full of rich, dark, sticky mud whose grip traps everything that is planted in it, suffocating and choking and stunting it? Why, I am talking of Mother Ganga, daughter of the Vedas, river of illumination, protector of us all, breaker of the chain of birth and rebirth. Everywhere this river flows, that area is the Darkness. Please understand, Your Excellency, that India is two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. The ocean brings light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India - the black river. And then he gives a vivid picture of the buffalo that always stands in front of his house as a member of the family: The water buffalo. She was the fattest thing in our family; this was true in every house in the village. All day long, the women fed her and fed her fresh grass; feeding her was the main thing in their lives. All their hopes were concentrated in her fatness, sir. If she gave enough milk, the women could sell some of it, and there might be a little more money at the end of the day. She was a fat, glossy-skinned creature, with a vein the size of a boy's penis sticking out over her hairy snout, and long thick pearly spittle suspended from the edge of her mouth; she sat all day in her own stupendous crap. She was the dictator of our house! And finally completes the picture of his village home with an account of women quarreling with each other: Every now and then they stop their work, because it is time to fight. This means throwing metal vessels at one another, or pulling each other's hair, and then making up, by putting kisses on their palms and pressing them to the other's cheeks. At night they sleep together, their legs falling one over the other, like one creature, a millipede. The novel opens with such shocking but vivid account of India's village people, landscape and, above all, a devastating account of haves and haves-not during the narration of the personal life of the protagonist Balram Halwai who, while serving his rich master as a driver, learns the art of entrepreneurship and himself becomes a great entrepreneur by killing his own master after robbing him of all his money. Hence neither the plot nor character analysis nor the novel itself appears to be worthy for

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any of its artistic features or narrative style. All that matters is the graphic account of the sordid, sinking and dark and debased picture of different aspects of India, the land of what be calls the "half baked men" and "human spider". Hence it is the description of various faces of India that is said to have any merit. Thus while describing the tea shops on the bank of Ganga, he looks at the men working in the tea shop - "men, I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still 'boys'. But that is your fate if you do your job well - with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt." Similarly to him there are two kinds of Indian: 'Indian' liquor men and 'English' liquor men. 'Indian' liquor was for village boys like me-"toddy, arrack, country hooch. 'English' liquor, naturally, is for the rich. Rum, whisky, beer, gin-anything the English left behind." Close to this he comes to give an interesting history of the poor and rich which is full of bitter irony: The history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand year war of brains between the rich and the poor. Each side is eternally trying to hoodwink the other side: and it has been this way since the start of time. The poor win a few battles (the peeing in the potted plants, the kicking of the pet dogs, etc.) but of course the rich have won the war for ten thousand years. That's why, one day, some wise men, out of compassion for the poor, left them signs and symbols in poems, which appear to be about roses and pretty girls and things like that, but when understood correctly, spill out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old brain-war on terms favourable to himself. The irony becomes all the more pungent when he says : See, the poor dream all their lives of getting enough to eat and looking like the rich. And what do the rich dream of ? Losing weight and looking like the poor. Similarly the dogs of the rich people are different from the dogs of the poor. The dogs of the rich are treated as more than servants of the rich houses because: The rich expect their dogs to be treated like human, you see - they expect their dogs to be pampered, and walked, and petted, and even washed! And guess who had to do the washing? I got down on my knees and began scrubbing the dogs, and then lathering them, and foaming them, and then washing them down, and taking a blow dryer and drying their skin. Then I took them around the compound on a chain while the king of Nepal sat in a corner and shouted, 'Don't pull the chain so hard! They're worth more than you are! Talking of his upbringing, he demonstrates how every successful entrepreneur in India is incomplete: Fully formed fellow, after twelve years of school and three years of university, wear nice suits, join companies, and take orders from other men for the rest of their lives. Entrepreneurs are made half-baked clay. To him politics to Indians is a game played through media and All India Radio. The health minister announces to eliminate malaria, the chief minister announces to eradicate malnutrition, and the finance minister announces especial budget for the entire electrification of India. The author however, comments. This is the kind of news they feed us on All India Radio, night after night: and tomorrow at dawn it'll be in the papers too. People just swallow this crap. Night after night, morning after morning. Amazing, isn't it?

His accounts of the cities of India are full of bitter ironical remarks that reveal the real condition of the people living here. Talking of the city of Delhi, he comments: And all the roads look the same, all of them go around and around grassy circles in which men are sleeping or eating or playing cards, and then four roads shoot off from that grassy circle, and then you go down one road, and you hit another grassy circle where men are sleeping our playing cards, and then four more roads go off from it. So you just keep getting lost, and lost, and lost in Delhi. Thousands of people live on the sides of the road in Delhi. They have come from the darkness too- you can tell by their thin bodies, filthy faces, by the animal-like way they live under the huge bridges and overpasses, making fires and washing and taking lice out of their hair while the cars roar past them. And about the jails of Delhi, he says:

The jails of Delhi are full of drivers who are there behind bars because they are taking the blame for their good, solid middle-class masters. We have left the villages, but the masters still own us, body, soul and …

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But it is the account of the Bangalore city which is all the more interesting:

When I drive down Hosoor Main Road, when I turn into Electronics City Phase I and see the companies go past, I can't tell you how exciting it is to me. General Electric, Dell, Siemens - they're all here in Bangalore. And so many more are on their way. There is construction everywhere. Piles of mud everywhere. Piles of stones' Piles of bricks. The entire city is masked in smoke, smog, powder, cement, dust. It is under a veil. When the veil is lifted, what will Bangalore be like? His account of the working people of Bangalore is quite revealing: Outsourcing which meant doing things in India for Americans over the phone. Everything flowed from it - real estate, wealth, power, sex. So I would have to join this out-sourcing thing, one way or the other. One of the devices of portraying the land lords of village lies in his use of animal characters which appears close to the art of Orwell in his novel Animal Farm. Thus he calls the four rich landlords as 'the Buffalo', 'the Stork', 'the Wild Boar' and 'the Ravan', revealing thereafter the animal traits that these persons possess. Take for example the character of the Wild Boar who owned all the good agricultural land around Laxmangarh. If you wanted to work on those lands, you had to bow down to his feet, and touch the dust under his slippers, and agree to swallow his day wages. When he passed by women, his car would stop; the windows would roll down to reveal his grin; two of his teeth, on either side of his nose, were long, and curved, like little tusks.

It is, however, the author's use of satire that gives a shocking insight into the Indian politician, minister, and ruler. Ironically he calls the Indian public man as the Great socialist who uses his own mechanism of exploitation. He explains these in his own way :

Now, imagine that I'm a doctor. I beg and borrow the money and give it to the great Socialist, while touching his feet. He gives me the job. I take an oath to God and the Constitution of India and then I put my boots up on my desk in the state capital.' He raised his feet on to an imaginary table. 'Next, I call all the junior government doctors, whom I'm supposed to supervise, into my office. I take out my big government ledger. I shout out, "Dr. Ram Pandey." He pointed a finger at me; I assumed my role in the play. I saluted him: 'Yes, sir!' He held out his palm to me. 'Now, you - Dr. Ram Pandey-will kindly put one-third of your salary in my palm. Good boy. In return, I do this.' He made a tick on the imaginary ledger. 'You can keep the rest of your government salary and go work in some private hospital for the rest of the week. Forget the village. Because according to this ledger you've been there. You've treated my wounded leg. You've healed that girl's jaundice.'

Although the author makes use of symbols, but each symbol has a shallow significance. The little rectangle mirror inside the car is one such symbol that at moments strips both the driver and the master completely because every now and then; When master and driver find each other's eyes in this mirror, it swings open like a door into a changing room, and the two of them have suddenly caught each other naked?

Similarly the title of the novel The White Tiger attempts to suggest a good deal of symbolical values in the book. The White Tiger is associated with many experiences of the Protagonist. First it was the school inspector who spotted Balram Halwai as the brightest boy in the school for having answered all his questions and he called him the white tiger. All his close friends and associates always addressed him as the white tiger, particularly at moments of great crisis in life. When rejected in the selection of training for driving, he fell back in dejections, but was lifted by his cousins Kishan, and Dilip who addressed him as 'white tiger' and finally when he visited the Delhi zoo and fainted under the impact of the white tiger in the cage. The entire significance of the novel revolves round the white tiger in a cage, for Balram Halwai, always feels to have been chained bound in his country like a white tiger in a cage. Hence in his letter to his granny, he writes 'I can't live the rest of my life in a cage, Granny. I'm so sorry.' He falls down fainted, and the term is used here as opposite of the paper tiger, metaphorically suggesting an India human being who finds himself completely bound and chained like the white tiger; everywhere they are like Balram, his village people, his driver friend and above all, even the educated young Indians, who

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appear half baked men,' human spiders in 'half baked cities In fact it is this concept of human beings bound in the cage that brings out the central theme of the novel revealing the situation wherein the poor people of India are like rooster in a basket. Nothing could be more bitter and ironical than the following remark: Indians are the world's most honest people, like the prime minister's booklet will inform you? No. It's because 66.6 per cent of us are caught in the Rooster Coop just like those poor guys in the poultry market.

And further he adds; Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent - as strong, as talented as intelligent in every way - to exist in perpetual servitude; a servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hands, he will throw it back at you with a curse.

This dominating theme of the novel is all that the author aims at conveying to the readers, projecting India, the poor down-trodden people of India and the Indian landscape which he calls darkness as against the rich palaces of affluent people which are termed as light. The entire merit of the novel lies solely in its attempts at exposing the dark sides of India. Often critics like to appreciate what we usually term as the realistic picture, the naked truth and the sordid reality that novelists, authors or artists try to record in their literary works. Aravind Adiga, too, makes all out attempt to show India with all its darkness. It is true that 'the black' has its own beauty, but the appeal and value of the black entirely depends on its complete veracity, authenticity and of course in the perfection of its expression. Analyzed from this angle, we find that apart from its sheer dark pictures of India, the novel lacks in its authenticity, complete and absolute truth as well as artistic mode and stylistic feature. Looking through its dark canvas against which the entire plot of the novel has been drawn, one is immediately reminded of V.S. Naipaul and his novel like An Area of Darkness and many other novels on India, wherein he too paints the dark side of India. But great differences emerge between the two novelists. Although Naipaul's account appears as one of outsider's views on India, while Adiga's accounts becomes that of an insider's view on India, both the artists differ in their approach, treatment and stylistic expression of the subject. While Naipaul is an excellent artist par excellence both in his expression and narrative style, Adaga's expression is dull, drab and bereft of any stylistic features. Although both the writers may be charged for lacking in authenticity, whereas Naipaul possesses the art of sweeping off the readers by his power of stylistic features, Adiga's weakness is clearly exposed through lack of a polished and perfect mode of expression. Similarly while Naipaul's experiences of India are expressed through a global lens, Adiga looks at things purely from the Indian angle. Thus the difference that surfaces quite is perceptive between both. A close examination of the form of the novel also reveals a lack of consistency in his use of the form of the novel. The novel begins in the epistolary form as the author writes letter to the Chinese Prime Minister, but after a few chapters, he gives up this form and lapses into free expression. In the same way, sometimes the author appears erratic as he imitates the style of the picaresque novel, particularly like the novel Tom Jones, he makes the truth stand on its head, a mode of expression that appears quite suitable to the central theme of the novel, but this mode appears only at moments to disappear later without making any lasting effect on the mind of the reader. It seems the author has little sense of the art of characterization; for there are very few characters in the novel, and even these have little flesh or blood. Commenting on his art of characterization, Amitav Kumar rightly observes: I found Adiga's villains utterly cartoonist, like the characters in a bad Bollywood melodrama. However, it was his presentation of ordinary people that I found not trite but also offensive.

Further commenting on the authenticity of the novel, the reviewer says: But even at such moments, the novel reveals its great weakness. Who is looking here? Let's remember that the village to which the car is returning is not only the employer's village but also Halwai's - he is returning to the place where he was born and grew up and has only recently left. Yet does it appear to be the

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account of a man who is returning home? He recognizes no landmark or person, he has no emotion, he has no relationship to the land or the people.

*Did u know?* India, a land of people with empty bellies, deceitful ways and always their hairs stretched out for Western goods of any kind.

Finally, he exposes the bad intention of the novelist as he observes: This is at the heart of the book's bad faith. The first - person narration disguises a cynical anthropology. Because his words are addressed to an outsider, the Chinese Premier, Halwai was at freedom to present little anthropological mini-essays on all matters Indian. It is "India for Dummies" that proves quite adept at finding the vilest impulse in nearly every human being it represents. I don't only mean every member of a corrupt and venal ruling class, but also of the victim class itself, portrayed in the novel's pages as desperate and brazenly cannibalistic.

Above all, Adiga forgets and perhaps deliberately overlooks the fact that the India he presents is not the whole of India nor the real India. All the rich people, all the entrepreneurs, all the politicians and, of course, all the rulers and ministers are cheats, dishonest, murderer and upstarts as painted by Adiga. But there are some good persons, good soul and well - meaning rulers who have a good deal of humanity to uphold faith, truth and honesty. Hence the review of the book by the Economist describing as giving "glimpses of Real India" does not bring out the whole of India. It may be Adiga's India, but it is certainly not everybody's India. The novel, as a whole, is not that great or successful, as it had been held, because a reader with an alert and sensitive mind feels rather disappointed and depressed for not finding what one usually expects from a work of art with all the artistic values and mature and universal vision. Certainly it is not the whole of Indian nor the real Indian. It is, at best, a work that holds up only one of the many aspects of India, i.e. its poverty, darkness and the low slum picture of India. Commenting on the novel, a well known Tamil literary critic, B. Jayamohan observes : A perfect example of literature becoming extended journalism is The White Tiger. Reading it, I felt Aravind Adiga was the byline for a cover story in some big news paper! It's perfectly told and edited, but it's one lifeless sketch that looked more based on the usual news stock It's highly intelligible to the regular English reader, because he anyway gets to read similar narration every day. Adiga thus faces no linguistic challenges of depicting various kinds of people with different cultural and social conditions of this vast country. He gladly glides through the repeatedly polished language of our popular media. So, it is natural for a screenplay writer also to pick stories from the Indian media and then pay a short visit to, say, the Mumbai slums. Result; a film like Slumdog Millionaire. It's always a safe theme because for more than 300 years the West has been trained to believe this one kind or 'reality' about India. This last issue opens up a whole debate on the subject on which many literary works can be discussed. In fact, the whole crux of the matter pivots round what Amitav Bachan said in his comment regarding selling poverty in the world market. The issue takes us to a series of works written on the dark side of Indian. Take for example V.S. Naipaul's An Area of Darkness published in 1964 that depicted India, a land of people with empty bellies, deceitful ways and always their hairs stretched out for Western goods of any kind. Later this was followed by his book A Million Mutinies Now, which depicts the same kind of squalid and filth that the author found all over the country. In such work Naipaul paints an unpleasant and most unpalatable image of India that appeared to please mostly the Western readers. Needless to say foreign writers have long held up such dark mirror of India for their readers. For example Mahatma Gandhi dismissed Katherine Mayo's book Mother India as a "drain inspector's report." But apart from foreigners, Indian writers and artists from film industry continued to depict the destitute Indian life with all its slums and

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dingy huts that became quite attractive and saleable. When Satyajit Ray's films starting from Pather Panchali (1955) to others began to make waves in Europe, there were murmurings that he summed to be promoting a persistent image of poverty and deprivation. But it is pertinent to note here that Satyajit Ray's motive was not to expose the sheer filth and darkness of India, nor did he ever aim at making a commercial film. Obviously the picture was depicted by a writer of India origin, but steeped in foreign culture and spirit who looked at Indian not through the green lens of the West, and never visualized or processed to show India in poor light; for his chief aim was to tell stories about a land and people he loved, and for whom he deeply felt and passionately thought. This brings us to the much talked of successful film Slumdag Millionaire which, like the White Tiger tells a moving story about the poor. Like many of the earlier stories, it depicts the dark and naked picture of India, of course, in altogether a different setting and necessary love and genuine feelings for the motherland and that too by pleasing the western eyes. The well-known novelist and screen play writer T.N. Murari in his article 'The Love to See us Poor'. (The New Indian Express, January 25, 2009) makes pertinent comment on the success of White Tiger and Slumdog Millionaire.

Their international success reassures the world which views us through the grim prism of our poverty, that India has not changed - much. India Shining,' 'Incredible India,' 'India Inc,' unsettles the western nations. They need the poor as long as they're at a safe distance, stuck in India. Our poverty gives them a sense of superiority and they feel threatened with whatever little success we have had. We still have the poor, the vast slum, farmer suicides, to reassure them that the India they know and bold at arm's length, is still with them. Recently a friend in London forwarded me an email from two of her friends travelling in India. They had been in Delhi and did not even notice our lutyen's Delhi, the glittering shopping malls, the Meres cruising the roads, but wrote at length about the dirt, the poor and the crippled. I do have other friends abroad who have no wish to visit India - our image of poverty frightens them. India still elicits the opposite extremes of emotion - love and hate. History has not been kind to us. Two centuries of British colonialism did impoverish India in the 1600s, India produced 22.5 percent of the world's GDP and Britain a mere 1.8 per cent. By 1870, we were reduced to a poor third world country while Britain produce 9.1 per cent of the world GDP. Today, we're the Horaitus Alger of nations. Similarly commenting on the final impact of the film the famous art critic Bardwaj Rangan in his article in Indian Express (January 25, 2009) observes:

The problem isn't one of plausibility that this slumdog's life was built around the exact kind of episodes that would, one day make him a millionaire - because that is the very stuff of fairy tales whether from the Brother's Grimm or Bollywood.

The problem is when something this ridiculous begin to be taken as real, as representation of a nation's reality more than a mere movie.

Because a movie - a shrewdly constructed artifice that explodes joyously on the big screen - is all the Slumdog Millionaire is meant to be. Let's embrace the heartbreaking moment such as the one where Jamal and his brother as children nod off on top of a train and link their hands in each other's to keep from plummeting into the countryside hurtling past beneath. Let's lose ourselves in the long distance romance underscored by the exquisite ache of AR Rahaman's love theme. Let's cheer our throats hoarse at the end when the impossible is rendered not just possible but inevitable. But let's not whip ourselves into a lather about it - for a few images of picture postcard squalor cannot begin to highlight the complex realties of our country.

Finally another art critic comments in his thoughtful article with a relevant question:

Poverty sells. Will the world then see us differently if we had no poor? I doubt it. They love our poverty too much to believe we've banished it. Forever. (Murari) Murari arrives at a true evaluation of Indian writers in English depicting India for what the western people believe, like and appreciate.

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This is confirmed by no one but by the objective perception of Francis Gauteir in his article on "Religion, Marxism and Slum dog"

(The New Indian Express, March 16, 2009) We Westerners continue to suffer from a superiority complex over the so called Third World in general and India in particular. Sitting in front of our television sets during prime time news with a hefty steak on our table, we love to feel sorry for the misery of others, it secretly flatters our ego, and makes us proud of our so-called achievements.' That is why books such as The City of Joy by Dominique Lapierre, which gives the impression that India is a vast slum, or a film like Slumdog Millionaire, have such an impact.

In the film, India's foes have joined hands. Today, billions of dollars that innocent Westerners give to charity are used to convert the poorest of India with the help of enticements such as free medical aid, schooling and loans. If you see the Tamil Nadu coast post tsunami, there is a church every 500 meters. Once converted, these new Christians are taught that it is a sin to enter a temple, do puja, or even put tilak on one's head, thus creating an imbalance in the Indian psyche Francois Gautier, too, like Murai ends his article with question?

When will West learn to look with less prejudice at India, a country that will supplant China in this century as the main Asian Power? But this will require a new generation of Ideologists, more sincere, less attached to their outdated Christian values, and Indians more proud of their own culture and less subservient to the West.

Considering all the factors and taking into account the motive behind these writings we may conclude that whether it be Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children or Adiga's White Tiger, the basic quest of their creators is the same: India-baiting. Their India is an odd country that has lost its natural master: Only that it sometimes comes as a subtext. Like, in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things, which depicts Western value system as the saviour of all India evils. Finally we agree with what B. Jayamohan opinion on the matter:

Indian English writing and crossover films are a particular genre of creative works popular in India and abroad now.

But they can be never addressed as Indian works. The India they narrate is the India in the wishful thinking of the average westerner. The real India is in the native Indian writings - we'll discover it one day.

## Self -Assessment

**1. Choose the correct options:**

(*i*) Satyajit Ray's films starts from ..... .

(*a*) The City of Joy (*b*) Pather Panchali

(*c*) Slumdog Millionaires (*d*) None of these.

(*ii*) Midnight's Children is written by ..... .

(*a*) Salman Rushdie’s (*b*) Shakespeare

(*c*) Aravind Adiga (*d*) None of these.

(*iii*) V.S. Naipaul's An Area of Darkness was published in ..... .

(*a*) 1951 (*b*) 1960

(*c*) 1964 (*d*) None of these.

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## 6.2 Summary

- "As Balram's education expands, he grows more corrupt. Yet the reader's sympathy for the former teaboy never flags. In creating a character who is both witty and psychopathic, Mr Adiga has produced a hero almost as memorable as Pip, proving himself the Charles Dickens of the call-centre generation."
- "Balram's violent bid for freedom is shocking. What, we're left to ask, does it make him — just another thug in India's urban jungle or a revolutionary and idealist ? It's a sign of this book's quality, as well as of its moral seriousness, that it keeps you guessing to the final page and beyond."
- "With strong, sympathetic characters, a swell of political unrest and an entertaining plot, the book rattles along at top speed under Balram's chirpy navigation."
- "Aravind Adiga's first novel is couched as a cocksure confession from a deceitful, murderous philosopher runt who has the brass neck to question his lowly place in the order of things. His disrespect for his elders and betters is shocking — even Mahatma Gandhi gets the lash of his scornful tongue. (…) Balram has the voice of what may, or may not, be a new India: quick-witted, half-baked, self-mocking, and awesomely quick to seize an advantage. (…) There is much to commend in this novel, a witty parable of India's changing society, yet there is also much to ponder. (…) My hunch is that this is fundamentally an outsider's view and a superficial one. There are so many other alternative Indians out there, uncontacted and unheard. Aravind Adiga is an interesting talent and I hope he will immerse himself deeper into that astonishing country, then go on to greater things."
- "As a debut, it marks the arrival of a storyteller who strikes a fine balance between the sociology of the wretched place he has chosen as home and the twisted humanism of the outcast. With detached, scatological precision, he surveys the grey remoteness of an India where the dispossessed and the privileged are not steeped in the stereotypes of struggle and domination. The ruthlessness of power and survival assumes a million moral ambiguities in this novel powered by an India where Bangalore is built on Bihar."
- "Aravind Adiga's riveting, razor-sharp debut novel explores with wit and insight the realities of these two Indians, and reveals what happens when the inhabitants of one collude and then collide with those of the other. (…) The pace, superbly controlled in the opening and middle sections, begins to flag a bit towards the end. But this is a minor quibble: Adiga has been gutsy in tackling a complex and urgent subject. His is a novel that has come not a moment too soon."
- "It's a thrilling ride through a rising global power (.....) Adiga's plot is somewhat predictable — the murder that is committed is the one that readers will expect throughout — but *The White Tiger* suffers little for this fault. Caught up in Balram's world — and his wonderful turn of phrase — the pages turn themselves. Brimming with idiosyncrasy, sarcastic, cunning, and often hilarious, Balram is reminiscent of the endless talkers that populate the novels of the great Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal."
- "We can't hear Balram Halwai's voice here, because the author seems to have no access to it. The novel has its share of anger at the injustices of the new, globalised India, and it's good to hear this among the growing chorus of celebratory voices. But its central character comes across as a cardboard cut-out. The paradox is that for many of this novel's readers, this lack of verisimilitude will not matter because for them India is and will remain an exotic place. This book adds another brick to the patronising edifice it wants to tear down."
- "The novel's framing as a seven-part letter to the Chinese prime minister turns out to be an unexpectedly flexible instrument in Adiga's hands, accommodating everything from the

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helpful explanatory aside to digressions into political polemic. (…) One might note the distinctive narrative voice, rich with the disconcerting smell of coarse authenticity. It is simultaneously able to convey the seemingly congenital servility of the language of the rural poor as well as its potential for knowing subversion. It sends up the neo-Thatcherite vocabulary of the new rich, their absurd extravagance and gaudy taste, but manages to do it tenderly and with understanding. (…) Adiga's style calls to mind the work of Munshi Premchand, that great Hindi prose stylist and chronicler of the nationalist movement"

- "Adiga's message isn't subtle or novel, but Balram's appealingly sardonic voice and acute observations of the social order are both winning and unsettling."
- "At once a fascinating glimpse beneath the surface of an Indian economic "miracle," a heart-stopping psychological tale of a premeditated murder and its aftermath, and a meticulously conceived allegory of the creative destruction that's driving globalization. (...) That may sound like a lot to take in, but *The White Tiger* is unpretentious and compulsively readable to boot."
- "In bare, unsentimental prose, he strips away the sheen of a self-congratulatory nation and reveals instead a country where the social compact is being stretched to the breaking point. There is much talk in this novel of revolution and insurrection: Balram even justifies his employer's murder as an act of class warfare. *The White Tiger* is a penetrating piece of social commentary, attuned to the inequalities that persist despite India's new prosperity. It correctly identifies — and deflates — middle-class India's collective euphoria. But Adiga, a former correspondent for Time magazine who lives in Mumbai, is less successful as a novelist."
- "His voice is engaging — caustic and funny, describing the many injustices of modern Indian society with well-balanced humour and fury. But there's little new here — the blurbs claim it's redressing the misguided and romantic Western view of India — but I suspect there are few to whom India's corruption will come as a surprise. As social commentary, it's disappointing, although as a novel it's good fun."
- "I found the book a tedious, unfunny slog (.....) The tone of the writing is breezy-absurd, which means we can't hold the writer accountable for anything that happens in the book. (...) There's no accountability in the breezy-absurd school of literature ! Everything goes ! Nothing is real ! Lie back and open wide. (...) Echoes of the Indo-Internationalist club of literature can be heard throughout."
- "Adiga's training as a journalist lends the immediacy of breaking news to his writing, but it is his richly detailed storytelling that will captivate his audience. (...) *The White Tiger* contains passages of startling beauty (...). Adiga never lets the precision of his language overshadow the realities at hand: No matter how potent his language one never loses sight of the men and women fighting impossible odds to survive. (...) *The White Tiger* succeeds as a book that carefully balances fable and pure observation."
- "Extraordinary and brilliant (….) Talk of "lessons" should not be taken to suggest that *The White Tiger* is a didactic exercise in "issues", like a newspaper column. For Adiga is a real writer — that is to say, someone who forges an original voice and vision."
- "What Adiga lifts the lid on is also inexorably true: not a single detail in this novel rings false or feels confected. *The White Tiger* is an excoriating piece of work, stripping away the veneer of 'India Rising'. That it also manages to be suffused with mordant wit, modulating to clear-eyed pathos, means Adiga is going places as a writer."
- "It is certain of its mission, and pursues it with an undeviating determination you wouldn't expect in a first novel. It reads at a tremendous clip. Its caricatures are sharply and confidently

drawn. It is full of barbed wit, if not — and not trying to be, so far as I can tell — actually funny. It won't win any prizes for subtlety. But it hasn't been nominated for one of those."

- "Balram's cynical, gleeful voice captures modern India: no nostalgic lyricism here, only exuberant reality."
- "*The White Tiger* resembles the stories in *Murder Weekly*. It is quick, entertaining and full of vividly drawn types: the scheming servant, the corrupt businessman, the spoilt wife. Its lack of subtlety can be wearying, as can its cynicism. But it is a useful counter to optimistic tales of India's roaring economy."
- "Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is one of the most powerful books I've read in decades. No hyperbole. This debut novel from an Indian journalist living in Mumbai hit me like a kick to the head (.....) This is an amazing and angry novel about injustice and power"
- "Does *The White Tiger* live up to its own ambitions ? Sort of. There comes a moment in this book where the narrative has a real chance to leave behind the pop and fluff of *The Nanny Diaries* irony and achieve a deep Orwellian insight. (...) Yes, it's fresh, funny, different, and it will please those looking for insights into contemporary India, but *The White Tiger* offers something less than it might have achieved."
- Sold in sixteen countries around the world, The White Tiger recalls *The Death of Vishnu* and *Bangkok 8* in ambition, scope, and narrative genius, with a mischief and personality all its own. Amoral, irreverent, deeply endearing, and utterly contemporary, this novel is an international publishing sensation — and a startling, provocative debut.
- In total, the book maps the bundle of contradictions that make India what it is - an ancient land coming to terms with democracy and globalization.

## 6.3 Key-Words

1. Emancipation : Freeing someone from the control of another; especially a parent's relinquishing authority and control over a minor child.
2. Depicts : Show or represent by a drawing, painting, or other art form, portray in words; describe.

## 6.4 Review Questions

1. What view of India could Pinky Madam give with regards to gender, cultural differences to the West and differences in society?
2. The author chose to tell the story from the provocative point of view of an exceedingly charming, egotistical admitted murderer. Do Balram's ambition and charisma make his vision clearer? More vivid? Did he win you over?
3. Why does Balram choose to address the Premier? What motivates him to tell his story? What similarities does he see between himself and the Premier?
4. Because of his lack of education, Ashok calls Balram "half-baked." What does he mean by this? How does Balram go about educating himself? What does he learn?
5. What's is the significance of the quote?
6. Describe Adiga's writing style in The White Tiger.
7. Which symbols support one of the central themes in The White Tiger? Why/how?

**Notes**

8. Discuss Balram's reasons for the murder: fulfilling his father's wish that his son "live like a man," taking back what Ashok had stolen from him, and breaking out of the rooster coop, among them. Which ring true to you and which do not? Did you feel Balram was justified in killing Ashok? Discuss the paradox inherent in the fact that in order to live fully as a man, Balram took a man's life.
9. Balram's thoughts of his family initially hold him back from killing Ashok. What changes his mind? Why do you think he goes back to retrieve Dharam at the end of the novel? Does his decision absolve him in any way?

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*b*) (*ii*) (*a*) (*iii*) (*c*)

## 6.5 Further Readings


1. Aravind Adiga, 2008. The White Tiger. New Delhi. Harper Collins, Publishers India.
2. V.S. Naipaul, 1964. An Area of Darkness. London. Andre Deutsch.
3. V.S. Naipaul, 1990. Million Mutinies Now. London. Minerva Paperback.
4. 2008. Articles from The Hindu Delhi, Literary Review, Nov 2.
5. 2008. Articles from The New Indian Express, Sunday, 9 November.

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# Unit 7: Premchand: Godan—Introduction to the Text

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know the life and works of Premchand.
- Discuss the introduction to Godan.

## Introduction

Premchand was the pen name adopted by the Hindi writer Dhanpatrai who was born on 31 July 1880 at Lamati near Varanasi. His early education was in a madarasa under a Maulavi, where he learnt Urdu. When he was studying in the ninth class he was married, much against his wishes. He was then fifteen. In 1919, while he was a teacher at Gorakhpur, he passed his B.A., with English, Persian and History. He had a second marriage with Shivarani Devi, a child-widow, who wrote a book on him, 'Premchand Gharmein' after his death.

Premchand's literary career started as a freelancer in Urdu. In his early short stories he depicted the patriotic upsurge that was sweeping the land in the first decade of the present century. Soz-e-Watan, a collection of such stories published by Premchand in 1907, attracted the attention of the British government. In 1914, when Premchand switched over to Hindi, he had already established his reputation as a fiction writer in Urdu. Premchand was the first Hindi author to introduce realism in his writings. He pioneered the new art form - fiction with a social purpose. He wrote of the life around him and made his readers aware of the problems of the urban middle-class and the country's villages and their problems. He supplemented Gandhiji's work in the political and social fields by adopting his revolutionary ideas as themes for his literary writings.

Premchand was a prolific writer. He has left behind a dozen novels and nearly 250 short stories. Sevasadan was his first novel. He believes in the principle: 'hate the sin and not the sinner.' His best known novels are Sevasadan, Rangamanch, Ghaban, Nirmala and Godan. Three of his novels have been made into films.

Besides being a great novelist, Premchand was also a social reformer and thinker. His greatness lies in the fact that his writings embody social purpose and social criticism rather than mere entertainment. Literature according to him is a powerful means of educating public opinion. He believed in social evolution and his ideal was equal opportunities for all.

Premchand died in 1936 and has since been studied both in India and abroad as one of the greatest writers of the century.

## 7.1 Text—Godan

**Notes**

Premchand, the veteran Hindustani writer, raised his voice and cautioned us, as early as 1904 against the tide of Western civilisation which, foolishly imitated by the intelligentsia of the land, was tending the deterioration of moral standards in Indian social life, and leading to a lamentable hybridisation of culture. The position of woman in the family and in society early attracted his attention and forms the central theme of all his novels that appeared before 1920 and Ghaban and Nirmala later. As an important secondary thread, it exists in almost all the others. His attitude, as reflected in his books and which was in line with the ancient Indian ideal of self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-control-ideals which placed woman on a higher pedestal than man-remained consistent throughout his life; there was no appreciable modification. That way Premchand was a conservative writer. But in his last novel, Godan, his views on the various aspects of this problem were crystallised and are brought out with great artistry.

Miss Malati, an England-returned doctor, is a social butterfly. She is vociferous and demands equality with man in regard to votes and the right of courtship. Chance brings her info contact with the philosopher Professor Mehta, who may be said to be the mouthpiece of Premchand, and to express the author's views. She falls in love with him and ultimately forgets all about her ideals. But Mehta does not love her; his outlook on life is different; he envies Mr. Khanna, an industrialist and banker who sucks the blood of the poor labourers another prototype of John Sewak in Rangabhumi, because of Mrs. Govindi Khanna, who is ten times more sensible and practical and honest than her greedy husband. She is the ideal woman of Premchand's conception and has few faults, although for these qualities she has once to leave her house, the real cause being Malati whom Khanna loves, in spite of the fact that she merely flirts with him.

But Malati, or Mehta, or Khanna, or Rai Sahib form only the second important theme of the novel: they all belong to the middle classes, which formed the central theme of Premchand's pre-1920 novels, that is, till the time Gandhiji came on to the Indian stage and Premchand resigned his job to participate in the Non-cooperation Movement of 1921. From now onwards the central theme of all his novels was, primarily, the peasant. Premasram, Rangabhumi, Kayakalp, Karmabhumi and Godan are all agrarian novels, wherein everything else revolves round the life of the peasant. In Premasram or in Gosha-i-Afiat (Urdu), it is his struggle against the Taluqdar or the hereditary landlord; in Rangabhumi or in Chaugan-i-Hasti (Urdu), the struggle is against the pseudo-nationalist industrialists; in Karmabhumi or in Maidan-I-Amal (Urdu), it also envelops the Harijans and the labour class in the fight for the vindication of their rights. The shame-faced and ruthless exploitation of the peasant by the moneylender is the theme of Godan.

The last of his agrarian epics, Godan, is also the last of Premchand's novels, published in the year of his death, 1936. And it is his best. For its characters are more Chiseled, polished and realistic, the plot more coherent, although herein, as in most of his novels, the two main themes run parallel to each other and touch only at a few points and that too only at the surface. The ideas are more systematically arranged and the dull monotony of long speeches and harangues is broken by the periodic criticisms and interruptions by Pandit Onkar Nath, the editor of the Bijli, and in the speech of Mr. Mehta on women's demand for equality with man. Premchand's art is seen here at its best. Unlike far too many of his novels, wherein the characters die unnatural deaths, by epidemics, suicide, murder or drowning and far too many improbable happenings and coincidences take place, in Godan, these defects cannot be pointed out.

Besides, the language herein used is unparalled in homeliness, vivacious simplicity, spontaneity and suggestion. There is the excellence of style and narration. The novel is quick with the rhythm of life. Those messages wherein the author expresses his own philosophical or metaphysical reflections are superb, because, although they are polished and finished to a great degree, the language used is very simple. Rural and homely words come to him without the least effort.

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In all his novels that preceded it, idealism almost always swayed him. Herein realism and its twin-brother, pessimism, are predominant. In all his novels before Godan, he created idealist heroes, Premshankar in Premasram, Sur Das in Rangabhumi, Chakradhar in Kayakalp and Amarkant in Karmabhumi, all of whom bear the indelible imprint of Gandhi and Tolstoy. Valiant fighters against tyranny, inspired by the highest and noblest ideals of love and service of the down-trodden masses whom they organie for mass-scale satyagraha, they always pursue, undeterred by the sacrifices they are called upon to make, the path of Truth.

Perhaps the only idealist character in Godan is Prof. Mehta, who is sagacious, but verges on eccentricity, and he figures only in a minor theme in the story. Save one very isolated strike in Mr. Khanna's mill, there are no strikes, let alone mass movements. One wonders if Premchand, in his last days, lost faith in the efficacy of non-violent struggle. And if he did not lose his faith, he at least came to entertain some doubts about the same.

Unlike all other agrarian novels, Godan does not end in a compromise, in the triumph of the peasant. As a matter of fact, herein Premchand refrains from suggesting any solution to any problem, an idea so dear to his heart. He had absolutely no faith in votes for the peasant, in Councils, in elections and in popular ministries (they had not come into existence then, and Premchand had before him only the 1919 experiment.) They could not ameliorate the lot of the peasant. He makes Tanakha say that democracy is the rule by the big bankers and traders. The futility of rural reconstructions, a fad started in those days, is reflected in what Malati, after her conversion and dedication to a life of service, achieves. She analyses the problem of rural indebtedness as being due to fragmentation of land and the extravagance of the peasant on social functions; But she suggests no real solution. She merely employs Gobar as a mali and gives him a rather privileged position in her family; it is more or less by way of charity.

When we first meet Gobar, we find him a rebellious soul. We hope that, like all other characters of Premchand, which are dynamic and never static, changing with the changing environments and always developing the traits talent in them. Gobar would grow into, perhaps, a Socialist leader and would organise people for a struggle against moneylenders and the system which grinds down the peasant into a paste. Our hopes are, however, belied. Gobar becomes a part of the system which victimises the peasants and against which Gobar was to raise voice. Instead, he now hates the village and prefers to be a poor servile labourer in the town where, in the first instance, he carves out a place for himself. He earns some money and lends it to others at exorbitant rates, which, if the moneylender charged from Hori, perturbed Gobar. In a way he becomes a cog in the machine which is responsible for Hori's ruination and ends in his death. But could Gobar help it? Perhaps not, for, as Premchand says, in the society as it is constituted today, either one is an exploiter or is exploited. There can be no third alternative. The only solution of the problem, Premchand said, was a thorough shake-up of the present system. And till that comes the peasant's fate would be the fate of Hori.

Hori's is the most realistic characterisation in Premchand's works. It is indigenous to the Indian soil. Hori is not merely an individual; he is the representative of a class, whose virtues and failings he shares. If you know Hori intimately, as you actually do from Godan, you know almost everything important about the peasant in India, for the U. P. peasant is not much different from, say, the peasant from South India, as also about the class or stratum he comes from. Indeed, Hori is the class.

It is significant that Godan is a romance in ugly names. Hori, Gobar, Jheengur, Dhaniya, Paniya, Jhuniya, Nokhe Ram, Magru Shah and Chuhiya-all bring to our mind their proximity with the soil.

To Hori, ideas count for little. For him feelings and instinct are the only real things. Realism is the backbone of his life. He does not believe in Gobar's reasoning, which may all be very sound, but cannot be put into practice, because Hori's ancestors did not act that way.

**Notes**

Gobar resents Hori's kowtowing before the Rai Sahib, when he enjoys no concession and pays almost the same taxes as others do. But Hori knows that his mere visits to the Rai Sahib raise him in the estimation his fellow-peasants. Indeed, without any teachings of Dale Carnegie, he is the master of the engineering of the human mind. He is clever that way; he sympathises with Bhola, in the latter's difficulties in re-marrying, and promises to help him-all this because he has an eye on one of Bhola's cows, an objective wherein he ultimately succeeds. By speaking highly of middle-aged Dhaniya, he tickles her vanity, so that she may give hay free of charge to Bhola without any fuss. All this is instinctive.

Gobar says that God has made every one of us equal. Hori differs. He believes that all those who are born poor would not have earned good by their actions in their previous life while those who were born rich must have.

The Past is Hori's only argument; it is his only sheet-anchor. He is a slave to custom. He believes in things, he acts, he behaves exactly in the same way as did his forefathers and does so because they did so. He does not have anything, not even a rupee, to offer at the altar of the idol at the annual "Katha" and feels remorseful, not because he is poor but because he could not offer anything, his mite at the altar of God, whom he truly fears.

The brahmin is another agency which the peasant can never defy Pandit Data Din is a moneylender with all the privileges that a high-caste birth has given him, for as Hori says: "The last pie that is the Brahmins due shall break through our very bones."

Hori knows, and Dhaniya has an argument with him, that the Council of Five may be wrong. Nevertheless, its orders must be obeyed: "In Council of Five resides God." And he obeys its orders because its orders had always had the seal of sanctity which was respected by his forefathers. And if he disobeyed, the family's izzat was at stake. So when the Council actually fines him Rs. 100, almost his entire produce of the season, for giving shelter to Jhuniya, a widow whose hand had been accepted by Gobar in camera, and who had no other place to go to with her five months old burden, knowing that he is already under heavy debt, he borrows money to pay the fine. Besides, his children are starving. And he also knows that those who have fined him are fornicators themselves. Still, Hori cannot, must not, defy the Council. It had the seal of sanctity and custom.

Hori shares the vices of his class, too. He beats his wife, whenever he feels like it. Nevertheless, he is faithful to her, although he would not loose an opportunity to cut a few vulgar jokes with Dulari Sahuyayin, a woman moneylender, whom he jestingly addresses as "Bhabi" or sister-in-law.

Hard-pressed by circumstances, he "sells" away his daughter, Rupa, to an aged widower. His house is already mortgaged; Data Din demands his money back, while Hori has none. His land, which is more than peasant's life, is in danger of being taken away. Although Gobar says there is nothing basically wrong so long as the money taken from the son-in-law is returned, Hori feels remorseful and this event hastens his end.

The policeman to Hori is death incarnate. His very sight freezes Hori's blood. But he is not a coward. When he sees that his landlord life is in danger and is sure of the latter's implicit approval, he simply jumps at the "Pathan," jeopardising his own life.

The supreme ambition of Hori is a cow. And he does bring one although it proves to be his undoing. When the entire village comes to see it and admires it and only Hira does not come to see the cow, Hora is pained. He is even restless and sends an emissary for him to come and have a look at it little knowing that Hira is jealous and harbours sinister designs on the animal. He poisons the cow and, because of the crime, leaves home. By doing this, however, he has sealed the fate of Hori, for the death of the cow is only the signal for calamites after calamities. Hori has seen Hira approaching the cow in the dark with his own eyes. He does not report to the police, and when police does come he swears by his son that he has not seen Hira near the cow. To his already heavy debts he adds more by borrowing more money to bribe the police, so that they may not

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search the house of Hira, because Hira's izzat is his own izzat. During Hira's absence, Hori first tills and cultivates Hira's fields and then is own, for he asks who else would help Paniya if he did not. As a result whereas there is plenty in Paniya's house, Hori's own children starve.

Hira is the real cause of all Hori's difficulties. When, however, he comes back, a day before Hori's death, there is absolutely no difference in Hori's love for Hira. Hori does not see in him the source of all his troubles, but only as a child as when left by their parents. The intervening 30 years melt away. He says: "Why weep. To err is human. Where have you been all the time?"

But all these good and noble qualities are of no avail. In spite of them, indeed because of them, Hori is subjected to a system which provides him with scarcely enough for a bare living. He works harder and ever harder. At the opening of the book, we find his tender-aged children working at midday in the hottest month of the year. He lives under conditions of forced and convict labour. Life for him is no feast; it is not work even. It is a dull heavy tiresome burden. It is a battle which he never wins. And yet he works, because he must work, because the peasant has always worked. He is a true "Karma Yogi."

On the one hand, he is buffeted by the inclement forces of Nature. On the other, there is the system which reduces him to a blind mechanical force, gradually exhausting itself out. He sweats and toils, so that the fruit of his sweat and toil may be enjoyed by others. He fights others' battles, others who would stop at nothing short of devouring him. There is not one agency, but there are many which grind him down. The bureaucracy, the aristocracy and the guardians of religion all conspire "to eat him up," his exploitation being their common bond.

First, there is the landlord, Rai Sahib. He is a friend. He has retained all the faults of the East and has grafted on those of the West. During the Congress movement of Civil Disobedience, he courted imprisonment. He puts on khaddar and claims to be a nationalist. He has literary gifts too and writes occasional skits. At heart, he says, he is a Socialist, believing in the nobility of manual labour and recognising the inherent injustice of the present system. But that is theory; in practice he is not a whit different from other brutish landlords. When the labourers refuse to give "begar," he is wild with rage. When the mercenary editor of the Bijli voices the grievances of the peasants, he shuts the editor's mouth with subscription for a hundred copies. He raises 500 rupees from the poor peasants to be spent on drinks, though the party is in connection with "Dhanush Yagy." Again, when Hori is fined by the Council of Five he feels that injustice has been done to Hori. He asks the Council to disgorge the money but….the money goes not to Hori but to the exchequer of Rai Sahib!

There are also the petty officials and the pseudo-nationalist industrialists who suck the peasant's blood. But, in cruelty, the moneylender is supreme. He is shrewd and clever and would never see the peasant die, or give up work, or even the village, for if the peasant goes, the moneylender loses the hen that lays the golden egg. He just keeps him alive.

Hori says there are over half a dozen moneylenders to every one peasant. There is patwari Pateshwari Shah, there is Jhinguri Shah; there is Nokhe Ram; there is Magru Shah; there is Dulari Sahuyayin, with her mask of feminine kindness; and there is Data Din, with the sanction of religion behind him. There are so many of them, for, as Premchand says, money lending is by far the easiest and the most profitable business.

The system works this way:

Hori took 30 rupees from Dulari. After three years it became 100 rupees. Then a promissory note was written. After another two years it became 150 rupees. From Magru Shah he borrowed 60 rupees; this has been twice paid over, and yet the loan stands at the same figure.

How cruel the system is shown vividly in a farcical drama staged by the villagers. The peasant comes, falls at the feet of the Thakur and weeps. The Thakur, after much hesitation, consents to

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lend him ten rupees. The promissory note is written and it is signed by the peasant. The Thakur then gives him five rupees. The peasant is taken aback. He says: "But they are only five, master."

"They are not five; they are ten. Go home and count them again"

"No, master, they are actually five."

"One rupee as your nazrana," says the moneylender.

"Yes, master."

"One rupee for the draft."

"Yes, master."

"One rupee for the 'Government paper."

"Yes, master."

"One rupee as the dasturi?"

"Yes, master."

"And five cash. Does it make ten or not?"

"Then, master, keep these five, too, with you for me," says the peasant.

"What a fool you are."

"No, master. One rupee as nazar to the Senior Thakurani; one rupee for her pan beeda. One rupee as nazar to the Junior Thakurani and another for her pan-beeda. The balance, one rupee, for your last rites."

Premchand was so moved by the suffering of the peasant that in his last days he lost his faith in the existence of God, for to believe in God also implies the belief in His kindliness and fatherliness.

Premchand portrays another, perhaps more hideous and sinister picture of this system. Mr. Khanna has established a Sugar Mill near Hori's village. The entire produce of the village, therefore, is sent to it. There is a sort of fraternity between the moneylenders and Mr. Khanna's agents. Jhunguri Shah looks to the transactions "so that his clients may not be cheated." When Hori's turn for receiving the money comes, it is Jhinguri shah who receives the money and, out of the 120 rupees that he receives, he deducts 95 and pays him 25, which also is snatched away by Nokhe Ram, who accosts Hori as soon as he goes out of the premises. As a result, Hori comes home empty-handed, where is abject poverty. Premchand's description of poverty brings tears to the readers' eyes.

On the way home, Hori meets Giridhar who is tipsy with toddy. He says to Hori: "Jhinguria has taken all, Hori Kaka. He hasn't left a piece with me-the brute. I wept, I entreated, but that tyrant would have no pity."

Sobha put in: "But you are drunk with toddy and still you say that he has not left you anything."

Giridhar replies, pointing to his stomach; "it is evening now. Honestly, not a drop of water has gone down my throat. I hid a one-anna pice in my mouth, which I spent on today. I said to myself: 'Man, you have sweated the whole year through. Have the fun of toddy one day.' But, to tell you the truth, I am not drunk. How could one be drunk with a stuff worth one anna...It is so very good, Kaka, the account is cleared. I borrowed 20 and have paid 160. Is there a limit?"

Indeed there is none. Listen to what Gobar finds, when he returns from the city:

One portion of the house was about to collapse. On Hori's doorstep there was only one bullock and this one too was half dead. Hori's wasn't an individual case. The entire village had the same sorry tale to tell….There was not one man whose condition was above pity. It looked as if in their bodies there was not life, but grief making them dance like puppets. They went about, they worked, they were ground down only because they were fated to be so. There was no hope for

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them in life; they had no ambition. It was as if the very source of their life had dried up; all its verdure was gone. It was the harvesting season, but there was no corn. Unhappiness was writ large upon every face. A major portion of the produce had been sold away, while it had not yet gone beyond the winnowing place, to the moneylenders and the petty officials. That which was left belonged to others....The future of the peasant is dark; he sees no way out; all his senses are dead and dulled; before his house, there are heaps of refuse and waste which stinks, but his sense of smell is dead. His eyes are without a beam. At dusk, jackals roam about his house. None, however, takes notice of it, or feels sorry about it...Whatsoever is placed before them, and howsoever, they eat-just as the engine eats coal. What a shame that even their oxen do not put their mouth into the manger, unless there is gram flour. But they have just to fill the stomach. Taste is immaterial. Indeed, their palates do not know what taste is. They, these peasants, therefore, would be dishonest for half a pice, strike anybody for a handful of grain. And so deep is their degeneration that they cannot differentiate between self-respect and shame.*

One is led to ask what is the peasant's ambition. When Sobha asks Hori if ever they will be free from the moneylenders clutches, Hori says:

There is no hope in this life. We ask neither for a kingdom nor for a throne, not even for comfort. We want to have coarse meals and coarse clothes, and to live with honour intact. But even that is denied to us.

For Hori, his life is a living death. Premchand says:

After a struggle lasting for thirty years, to-day Hori has lost his battle. His defeat is final. He has been, as it were, made to stand at the city gates. Whosoever enters it, spits at his face and he cries out to them: 'Brethren, I deserve your pity. I never knew what the June heat or what the winter chill or rain was. Dissect this body and see if there is life in it. See how hard it has been kicked to pieces and trampled under foot. Ask it: 'Have you ever known what comfort is? Have you ever enjoyed shade?"

And in spite of all this, what he gets is mere insults. Still he lives-impotent man, greedy, mean...

Horis end comes soon, sooner than one could have expected. He is heavily under debt. To earn his bread and to pay the interest on the loans, he has been forced by circumstances to take loans and these are ever piling up, he makes ropes by night and works on double shift as a labourer on the road, for now only that is left to him. After days of semi- starvation, one day he collapses on the roadside, to be brought home to die. There is no money in the house to send for the doctor. And now again, the moneylender comes this time in the shape of the heartless brahmin, with the sanction and authority of religion and custom behind him. Pandit Data Din says: "The end is come. Let Hori give away a cow with his dying hand to seek his salvation." But there is no cow in the house, nor is there money for it. There are only 20 annas in the house, the previous night's earnings. Dhaniya brings it, puts it into the hand of the brahmin and says: "Maharaj, there is no cow in the house, not even a she-calf. And there is neither money, save these 20 annas, which is all that is left in the house. This is his gaudan." She faints: Hori dies. The curtain drops: The novel ends.

## Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Premchand died in ..... and has since been studied both in India and abroad as one of the greatest writers of the century.

(*ii*) Premchand was the pen name adopted by the Hindi writer ..... who was born on 31 July 1880 at Lamati near Varanasi.

(*iii*) He leads an inconsistent life with his wife ....., and his three children.

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## 7.2 Summary

- Godan, a story of stark realism, is Premchand's most outstanding work. It is his last completed novel which brings out the realistic interpretation of Indian village society. This is a story of people, hungry and semi starved, yet hopeful and optimistic in the truest spirit of the age it represent. The dominating shadow of the original concept looms over the English. The Hindi word, or rather the concept, Godan, is so culture specific that there is really no English equivalent to it: daan is not just charity, nor donation. Neither can it be translated merely as "gift". The English title passes off because the original Hindi title immediately registers with the reader. But then, why would a reader who knows Hindi go to this translated text. Hopefully, the original title on the cover may intrigue even a non-Hindi reader who would then wish to comprehend the concept!
- Both, Vasudha Dalmia and Roadarmel present the literary and the social context of the novel in their introductions. Dalmia offers a critique of what she calls the two major narrative frames of the novel, the economic and social codes of Awadh on the one hand and the colonial and the nationalist politics on the other, through which different characters live the story of unremitting suffering. While Dalmia perceives the novel as "eminently political" and progressive, Roadarmel discusses Premchand`s depiction of "changes of heart" as the most potent force for change in society. Quoting Premchand himself, Roadarmel pinpoints the interface of the didactic intentions with the author`s literary sensibility: "Idealism has to be there," says Premchand in 1934 "even though it should not militate against realism and naturalness."
- With the protagonist Hori in the centre, the novel Godan tells the epic story of a wide range of characters situated in a complex social reality, rural as well as urban, filtered through a progressive consciousness and yet committed to an authentic portrayal. It is rightly said that a classic literary work gains in meanings and relevance as time passes. This is amply demonstrated by the new Introduction to the novel. Vasudha Dalmia makes a very pertinent point when she discerns how Premchand presented in his fiction an understanding of the social reality decades before academic scholarship could "squarely face it." She suggests the use of some essays from the volumes of Subaltern Studies published in the early eighties for a greater comprehension of Godan through a political and social history of Awadh. Similarly, the Bakhtinian term "parodic stylization" applied to some of Premchand`s masterly strokes in the novel gives added meaning to the double-edged tone of the author in describing the so-called authority figures in the society, such as Pandit Nokharam, Jhinguri Singh or Brahmin Datadin.
- The 2002 Introduction indicates the complexity of thematic issues emerging through the narrative of Godan, thanks perhaps to the sophisticated and advanced critical tools and knowledge accessible to the contemporary reader. Dalmia identifies the immense tension between the dharma of Hori and the social and political pulls away from it, and describes the rebellion (vidroh) of Gobar and Dhania as progressive strains within the novel. She shows how the novel unravels both, helplessness of major characters in the face of social practice and notions of piety upheld by most people around.
- Roadarmel`s Introduction of 1968 addresses the readers of the West in establishing the significance of the novel in Hindi literature. "Novels in English dealing with India" he says "usually spell out the unfamiliar cultural details for the Western reader"… this statement can indeed be contested today in the light of any significant Indian novel written in English after Rushdie`s Midnight`s Children. But Roadarmel demonstrates extraordinary postcolonial sensitivity when he says "One of the attractions of novels written first in an Indian language is that one can explore the situation from within the local context, not feeling that the author

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is catering to the English readers, that he is dealing not with the curious or the exotic but with matters of concern to those within the culture." To the translator of Godaan then, thankfully, the distinct cultural specificity of the text is important. He does not give any explanatory notes in the text, nor does he give any footnotes. He does all this consciously and deliberately, so that he may not intrude or disturb. Exercising his choices as translator, he works out his own strategies and does well in involving the reader in the reasons for the choices he makes.

- Roadarmel has done some fiction editing in the process of translating the novel if only, as he declares, to take care of the "chronological and other inconsistencies" in the novel. Since the objective of the translation is to make the same joy available to the English reader as that of the Hindi reader, generally Roadarmel has attempted to remain as close to orginal text as he could. But he does point out the cause for deviations and the problems of idiom and style in having to move from Hindi to English. Dalmia speaks of the languages of heteroglossia intersecting each other in Godan which is what makes the novel difficult to translate. In fact she gives examples of how Roadarmel could not escape some of the pitfalls created thus for the translators, even though there is no denying the durability of his translation of the novel.
- The acid test for the success of a translated text is its readability which, I believe, depends on how autonomous it is. It has to become another original without compromising the spirit. The Gift of a Cow is not parasitic on Godan, nor is it merely its shadow; the spirit of Godan vibrates in the form of The Gift of a Cow.
- Premchand's "Godan" produces the rustic, simplistic and heart-rending lives of the peasants. Far, from exaggeration, "Godan" is "a novel of stark reality". It deals with the dreams, despairs and day-to day events of Hori, the protagonist of the novel, and his family. Through the peasants, Premchand has portrayed the pathetic life of the rural arena. Hori is an embodiment of peasant-virtue, simplicity and truth. He leads an inconsistent life with his wife Dhania, and his three children. Their unstable financial situation always tends to lend them frustration and despair. A tension-free life is not theirs. If they spend a quarter of their lives in starvation, they spend the rest paying unwarranted loans. The money-lenders take full advantage of their poverty ad therefore take unreasonable interest from them. Premchand writes:" A loan was an unwelcome guest, once in the house, dug himself into permanent fixture." The money-lenders also exploit the ignorance and gullibility of the peasants. The village-folk in the higher strata of society, who are financially sounder, take advantage of the village-peasants. In the novel, we find, we find how Dulari mounts a small amount of money into a hundred rupees within a small fraction of time.
- The zamindars are no exception in this regard. They make maximum use of the tenants and extract manual labour from them. Hori, already old, and fatigued from poverty has to do strenuous work in order to make both ends meet. The cow he eventually gets hold of is mercilessly killed by his cruel brother Heera.
- Their ambitions and dreams are also made apparent by the novelist. While some of them love their soil, the younger generation opts for city life. For them, material prospects hold more water than sentimental values. Hori therefore does not approve with Gobar to shift to the city. For Gobar, material prospects hold more water than sentimental values. Therefore Hori does not embrace the idea of moving to the city. A typical peasant, his land is everything to him.. He regards the cattle also as a member of the family. Isolated life does not appeal to them and they long to thrive and integrate with the community. This becomes apparent when Hori is willing to pay the fine imposed by the village for admitting Jhunia. Hori does not want to be treated as an outcaste. He tells Dhania that he wants to live with society and not outside society.

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- The lack of education of the peasants can be considered a major factor in their backwardness. Superstitions are prevalent. We have a humorous account of how news spreads in the village of Dhania's over-powering the inspector. After the incident, people flock around Hori's hut to have a Darshan of Dhania. They undergo all the rites , to protect the newly arrived cow from the evil eye. They cannot fling away their false pride even in the face of dire poverty. Even though, Sona's bridegroom does not demand any dowry, they pay it as it a matter of prestige in society. Again, the caste-system very much exists . We find Heera admonishing Punia for quarrelling with a low caste man.
- Women are not portrayed as equal to men. We find Damri exclaiming to Hori how his son ran away leaving his wife with another woman. Subsequently, his wife gets married to another man. Damri gets revolted only with the infidelity of women and not men thereby practicing double standards. The husbands ill treat their wives after drinking. Dhania talks of Hori's ill-treatment and quips how it would have been if it were the other way around. Heera also abuses his wife. Though Gobar is affectionate towards his wife in the beginning , gradually their relationship deteriorates. "Early married life throbs with love and desire; like the dawn the span of life is suffused with a roseate glow. The afternoon of life dissolves illusion into its stinging rays, but brings face to face with reality."
- Some of the scenes will always be memorable. Like, for instance, when Rupa sucks on a raw mango in starvation. The handing over of the child-like Rupa to the elderly man in marriage. The deserting of the aged parents by Jhunia and Gobar, who bore all pains and social stigma for them. The economical system came as a blessing, but Jhenguri Singh makes maximum use of it to manipulate people. The most heart-rending scene is the death of Hori or more precisely his last moments. His being religious and magnanimous, the family does not possess the adequate means even to complete his final rites. The novel thus ends in a tragedy.

## 7.3 Key-Words

1. Superstitions : Superstition is a belief in supernatural causality: that one event leads to the cause of another without any physical process linking the two events, such as astrology, omens, witchcraft, etc., that contradicts natural science
2. Manipulate : To manage or influence skillfully, especially in an unfair manner

## 7.4 Review Questions

1. Describe the Life of a poor farmer Hori and his struggle to keep alive in the milieu of British Raj.
2. Give a brief introduction to the Novel Godan.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1936 (*ii*) Dhanpatrai (*iii*) Dhania.

## 7.5 Further Readings


1. Premchand Rachnavali (collected works of Premchand) Vol. 20, Delhi, Janwani Prakashan 1996: 377–425.
2. Godan (The Gift of a Cow) (1936) English Translation by Gordon c. Roadarmel (2007, 1968, New Delhi).

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# Unit 8: Premchand: Godan: Detailed Study of the Text

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about Premchand who is a renowned writer of Hindi Literature.
- Discuss Godan.

## Introduction

Premchand was a renowned Indian writer of Hindi literature. He was born at Lamhi near Benaras on July 31 in 1880. His real name was Dhanpat Rai and Premchand was his penname. Premchand has received a great deal of critical attention since his death. Only a few of the books published are, however, critical in a real sense. A large number were originally written as M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations. They present a mass of evidence to substantiate the writer's thesis but usually shy away from analysis and comment. Of the others, even the best confine themselves to a discussion of his political and social ideas, basing it on the axiomatic truth that he was a "progressive" thinker.

Premchand was keenly interested in the social and political questions of his time and it is not possible to do justice to his work without viewing it in its social context. Premchand's heroes, in their existential quest, are looking for some kind of order and coherence which can give meaning to life. In spite of his involvement with contemporary affairs and trends of thought, the concept of this meaning is derived from the age-old Indian tradition. And the quest for meaning makes Premchand not merely an artist but also a moralist. Premchand avoided the use of highly Sanskritized Hindi and rather wrote in a dialect understood by the common people. Some of his famous works include short stories such as Shatranj Ke Khiladi, Panch Parmeshwar, Nashaa and Atmraran. And his famous novels were Gaban, Godan and Pratigya.

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Premchand's utopian dreams are merely a manifestation of his strong faith in man. He was doing the same thing that philosophers and sages like Gandhi were doing all around the world at that time, using his creative imagination to project the vision of a perfect society in which men, transcending their selfishness and greed and forgetting the distinctions of caste and creed, could live like brothers and sisters. He was no armchair philosopher or an ideal dreamer. Poverty and want were living realities to him because he was nurtured in their midst and had experienced them himself. But his faith in men led him to strive ceaselessly to impress on his upper-class countrymen and criminality of the economic and social system which they upheld. He did bring into existence the Hindu- Urdu social-political novel, molding the attitudes of younger writers who acknowledged their indebtedness to him and some of whom chose to call themselves progressive.

Literature for him implied a vigorous involvement with ideas and issues, rather than an escapist withdrawal into the realms of fantasy and romantic love. He evolved a style which is simple, lucid and subtle, a finely tempered instrument which can with equal ease capture the raciness and vigor of the villager's idiom and the urbanity and elegance of that of the elite. The recurrent figure in Premchand's novels is the idealistic young man who is called upon to choose between his own self advancement and the claims of the community and the nation. Some of these young men turn out to be lifeless and wooden like the virtuous heroes of other great novelist's like Tolstoy and George Elliot. Such fictional heroes from his works include Amrit Rai, Pratap Chandra, Vinaya Singh, Prem Shankar and Shankhdar. Premchand also composed some outstanding works which are masterpieces in their own right and include such heroes- stories like Boori Kaki, Qafan and Shtranj Ke Khiladi, and novels like Seva Sadan, Rangabhumi and Godan. But to form a true estimate of his genius it is necessary to consider the totality of his output, which constitutes one of the most varied, rich, and comprehensive renderings of live ever achieved by a writer of fiction.

Premchand was keenly aware of the indifferent status of the creative writer in the Indian society. There was not likely to be much confusion about his place if he had composed works of learning. Premchand was never influenced by caste, money or such other social evils. He is one of the first Indian writers who refused to follow this path, who was fiercely independent in his attitude and absolutely uncompromising in his principles. His resignation form government service was in its way an example of his courage to stand up against oppression. Thus great as Premchand is as a novelist, short-story writer, essayist and moralist, he is equally great as a humanist, a humanitarian and a man. An estimate of his worth as a creative writer which ignores his distinction as a human being runs the risk of being partial and inadequate.

## 8.1 Text—Godan

*'That damned cow came and ruined everything'.* **—Godan**

India at the beginning of the 1930s was a country in flux. The nationalist euphoria and idealism of the early 1920s—born of the Khilafat movement, Gandhi's Rowlatt Satyagraha and the Indian National Congress Party's Non-Cooperation campaigns—had given way to nascent ideological orthodoxies and political opportunism. The violence and social upheaval of the 1947 Partition and the ambivalent victories of independence were still on the historical horizon. The decade began under the ominous burden of a world wide economic depression; and ended with the definitive parting of ways between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress (INC), symbolised in Jinnah's observance of the 'Day of Deliverance' (of Muslims from the alleged tyranny of the Hindu-dominated INC) in December 1939. By its close, euphoria and optimism had, for many, turned into bitterness and cynicism. If the 1930s were to be given a name, perhaps the most fitting would be the 'age of disillusionment'.

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The renowned North Indian writer Premchand[1] penned his last complete novel Godan (The Gift Of a Cow) right in the middle of the intellectual and moral turmoil of the 1930s. Published in 1936, it is considered by many to be Premchand's finest achievement, if not in fact the finest novel ever written in Hindi.[2]

As a writer, Premchand had his hand on the pulse of many trends and movements, and he was particularly adept at translating his observations into a lively, accessible stream of prose—one of the many factors that make his fiction simultaneously tangible, rich and evocative. But if Godan can perhaps be seen as Premchand's Swansong, it is by no means merely the grand culmination of his previous works—especially his morally didactic and overtly ideological early novels. Godan is different. Premchand was acutely aware of the changing moods of the 1930s, and as a result, Godan is a novel of weary disillusionment. At the heart of Godan is a continual and relentless lamentation over the prevalence of injustice in everyday life and the frustrating absence of any meaningful way to offer resistance, seek redress, or find justice. The 'great struggles' of nationalism, and the Gandhian projects of self-sufficiency and moral redemption, dominant themes in Premchand's earlier works, now seemed to him too abstract and self-absorbed to have any widespread impact on the sufferings of the Indian masses.[3] The mantra of 'blame the British' had also, by the 1930s, begun to appear to Premchand too convenient and contrived to provide a satisfying explanation for the outrages of everyday life that eroded the lives and hopes of the majority of his fellow Indians. And other proffered remedies for India's malaise looked ever more barren. The retreat to a putatively moral and pure past as recommended by the cultural nationalists, had revealed itself to be little more than an elitist and communal platform for promoting

1. Premchand (1880–1936) is the pen-name of Dhanpat Rai. The name change became necessary after the publication of his first collection of stories Soz-e-vatan (1910) incurred the ire of the authorities. The stories were written under the name of Nawab Rai, but since the district officer had demanded that he not publish anything else without first showing it to the local officer in charge, the name change to Premchand was one efficient way around the request. On his life and times, see, among others, Madan Gopal, Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964); and Amrit Rai, Premcand: Kalam ka Sipahi (Allahabad: Hamsa Prakashana, 1962).
2. Citations from the works of Premchand in Hindi are all taken (unless otherwise indicated) from the collected works edition Premcand Racanavali, Ramvilas Sharma (ed.) (Delhi: Janavani Prakashan, 1996), 20 vols. Hereafter this will be cited as Prem. Rac. followed by the volume and page number. Volume 6 contains Godan, so all references in the text refer to that volume. Other useful collections of Premchand's works are Mansarovar (Allahabad: Sarasvati Press, 1956), 8 vols., which comprises short works of fiction; and Vividh Prasang (Allahabad: Hans Prakashan,1962), 3 vols., which comprises many essential essays and editorials. There is an English translation of Godan available by Gordon C. Roadarmel under the title The Gift Of a Cow (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1968). This translation has recently been re-issued (2002) as a second edition with a new preface by Vasudha Dalmia. Throughout the text, I have given two page numbers for each quotation from Godan: the first refers to the Hindi text, and the second to the English translation. Though all translations here are my own, readers of the English translation should be able, I hope, to locate the appropriate passages if they wish to pursue their interests further.
3. Among Premchand's other novels, those that deal with the themes of social reform or with the Gandhian vision of a reconstructed India are Sevasadan (The Abode Of Service) (1918), Prem. Rac. 3, which deals with the rehabilitation of prostitutes and other 'fallen' women; and Karmabhumi (The Field Of Action) (1932), Prem. Rac. 5, which is Premchand's last attempt to engage Gandhian ideals seriously (in the novel, through programs of uplift and respectability for the dalit community of Chamars). Many of Premchand's contemporaries also used their literary works to promote social reform and Gandhian ideals, among them Pandey Becan Sharma (pen-name 'Ugra') (1900–1969) in works such as Buddhua ki Beti (Buddhua's Daughter) (1928), which dealt with caste injustices, and Sharabi (The Alcoholic) (1930), which promoted abstention from alcohol as the path to moral rejuvenation; and Rishabhcaran Jain (1912–1986), in works such as Dilli ka Vyabhicar (An Adultery in Delhi) (1928) and Vesyaputra (The Prostitute's Son) (1929), both of which addressed issues such as the treatment of Hindu widows or the plight of 'morally compromised' women.

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conservative Hindu interests.[4] Alternatively, those who advocated revolutionary violence had much to offer in terms of fiery and sloganistic rhetoric but little to offer in terms of constructive, positive, and material results.[5] Even those we conventionally think of as society's 'subalterns'—the toiling peasant, the agricultural labourers, the industrial wage-earners, increasingly came across to Premchand as active perpetrators of injustice rather than merely its innocent victims.[6]

However the disillusionment that permeated the 1930s should not be confused with hopelessness or apathy. Many individuals, movements, and organisations continued to devote themselves to building a more progressive and egalitarian society in advance of the coming independence. Premchand may have become disillusioned, but he never stopped writing; and in that sense never gave up hope that a better world and a better India were still possible. Indeed, the Hindi literary world was generally one of the major sites in this period for attempts to recreate the electricity of early nationalist politics, making it a vibrant component of what Francesca Orsini has called the 'Hindi public sphere'.[7] Yet even here, disillusionment was never quite expunged. As the new Hindi literature became more and more a vehicle for Hindi-region nationalism, other cultural, religious, and linguistic nationalisms (most notably Tamil) were moved to protest this perceived bid for 'Hindi hegemony'.

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4. The ideas of the cultural nationalists, which in many ways dominated the Hindi literary market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had an influence on Premchand's earlier writings. The roots of this 'school' of thought can be found, for instance, in the writings of Bharatendu Hariscandra, on whom see Vasudha Dalmia, The Nationalization Of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Sudhir Chandra, The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.117–42. At the time that Premchand began his literary career, many writers still espoused the ideas of cultural nationalism, for instance Lajjaram Sharma Mehta (1863–1931), in works such as Hindu Grhasth (A Hindu Household) (1901), Adarsh Hindu (The Invisible Hindu) (1914) and Swatantra Rambha aur Partantra Lakshmi (Independent Rambha and Dependent Lakshmi) (1915).
5. Premchand's novel Premashram (Sanctuary Of Love) (1922), Prem. Rac. 2, combines turgid Marxist ideological rhetoric—at times even the peasants talk like committed Bolsheviks—with Gandhian plans of action. Similarly, Rangabhumi (The Battlefield) (1925), Prem. Rac. 3, details the plight of the exploited labouring masses, in this case through the tale of a blind beggar who is literally killed by the march of industrial 'progress'. In general, although radical Leftist politics had only a marginal influence on formal politics, it had immense influence in the literary world—Hindi literature was no exception. Jainendra Kumar, for instance, who was a contemporary and friend of Premchand, had explored revolutionary themes in his famous novel Sunita (Sunita) (1935), but the revolutionary aspects of the novel are at times awkward and forced, as if they were merely part of a passing and somewhat contrived fad. More committed to the project of literature and revolutionary propaganda was Yashpal (1903–1976), especially in his controversial novel Dada-Kamred (Comrade Dada) (1941), which in essence re-works and rewrites Jainendra Kumar's character Sunita into a more hardcore revolutionary figure (the main female character here is Shaila). Ajneya's (Sachchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan) novel Shekhar: Ek Jivani (Shekhar: A Life) (1941), is written in (auto)biographical style and puts the revolutionary terrorist character at centre stage as a somewhat ambivalent 'hero'.
6. The term 'subaltern' is drawn, of course, from the writings of what has been termed the 'subaltern school', whose views found collective expression in the series of volumes published as Subaltern Studies, originally under the editorship of Ranajit Guha. For early theoretical underpinnings, see Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects Of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). For critical reactions, see Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial (London: Verso, 2000); and David Ludden (ed.), Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization Of South Asia (London: Anthem Press, 2002).
7. Francesca Orsini, The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age Of Nationalism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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Nevertheless, even a more sanguine reading of the politics of the 1930s would surely see Premchand's disillusionment as a powerful voice of dissent. To the extent that one could argue that Premchand was not necessarily anti-nationalist, his project remained in the mid-1930s to rescue the ethical self from the ravages of conformist nationalism, or at the very least to advocate an ethical nationalism where the individual remained consistently responsible for his or her actions and their consequences. Premchand may have written poignantly of India's masses, but certainly by the mid-1930s, he had no use or tolerance for mass-based ideologies that dissolved the responsible self into the unreflective nationalist crowd.

Understanding the many sources of the palpable sense of injustice that saturated the everyday lives of so many 'ordinary' Indians in the 1930s is the key to understanding Premchand's masterpiece. Here I propose to look at several thematic realms of injustice—economic, rural/urban, gendered, religious, and political—in the novel, with a view to showing that Premchand's Godan is actually something of an antinationalist dirge—one, moreover, that held that the problems confronting colonial India were to a large degree internal, 'indigenous', and self-inflicted.

On the other hand, I am conscious of the need to balance this bleak interpretation of Premchand's politics with another that recognises the complexity of the novel as a commentary on the human condition, for Premchand was too passionate and committed a thinker merely to leave his audience with the bitter taste of pointless toil and endless disillusionment. If the sources of injustice were internal for India, then so too must be the solutions. Through the character of Hori, Premchand makes clear his belief that giving up the fight for justice (even in the face of what seem to be cosmically-cursed odds) would be the worst injustice of all.

## The Outrage of Everyday Life

In Godan, Premchand embarks on a project of ideological iconoclasm. The long eloquent polemic of the novel is driven by the realisation that all of the grand ideologies of the day that claimed to offer cures to India's ailments or answers to her many questions, have failed. More than that, they have failed not because of the overwhelming dominance and hegemony of colonial power, but rather because they lacked any sense of ethical and moral consistency from within. Premchand was not merely attacking these ideologies as an outside observer; in many cases he was going through a painful process of self-reflection and re-evaluating many of the ideologies that had informed his earlier works. At the time of writing Godan, for instance, Premchand had become involved with the Progressive Writers' Association (in early 1936 he was elected its president). But while Premchand may have still believed that literature could be an important political instrument—one of the central tenets of the Progressive Writers' Movement—by the mid- 1930s the aesthetic confines of 'socialist realism' as a school of thought could not adequately express his political views or creative impulses. Indeed, Premchand was now moving toward the idea of writing popular and hence marketable literature, struggling to find a way to reconcile artistic integrity with mass marketability.[8] With Godan, Premchand finally bids farewell to pre-packaged ideological frameworks and focuses his literary craft on the more intricate and complex process of cultivating self-awakening and self-awareness.

Thus no proponent of any of the grand ideologies that have purported to offer schematic answers to the troubles of India—Marxist, feminist, Gandhian, nationalist, subalternist—can find true solace or vindication in this narrative. In Premchand's world of disillusionment, all grand schemes of morality are opportunistic. Yet Premchand is too conscientious a writer to merely leave the ideological landscape full of shattered ruins. His answer to the collapse of all these grand schemes is to offer a possible alternative in the form of the reconstruction of the internal architecture of the individual. Premchand's Godan is a novel about the death of ideology and the rebirth of the self.

8. On this and related ventures, see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'Writing and Money Making: Munshi Premchand in the Film Industry, 1934–35', in Contemporary India, Vol.1, no.1 (Jan.–Mar. 2002), pp.87–98.

## Synopsis

**Notes**

I will begin with a brief outline of the main narrative elements of the novel. At the centre of the story is Hori Ram, a farmer in Belari village in Awadh (now Uttar Pradesh), who struggles to get by in a small household with his wife Dhaniya, their son Gobar, and their two daughters Sona and Rupa. Like many farmers of the period, Hori longs not so much for material wealth as for social respectability; he dreams of owning a cow, not only for the economic bounty it would provide, but also for the respectable status it would confer on his family. By chance, he is given the opportunity to buy a cow from a widowed milkman named Bhola, who agrees to give the cow to Hori at a good price if Hori helps him find a suitable wife. Hori is overjoyed, but things turn sour quickly when Hori's younger brother Hira, overcome with jealousy at the prospect of Hori's new respectability and enhanced status, sneaks into Hori's house one night and poisons the cow, which subsequently dies. Hori suspects Hira from the start, but prefers to keep his suspicions within the family to protect the family's name; his wife Dhaniya, though, is outraged and publicly denounces Hira. An investigation of sorts follows—really just a formalistic orchestration of motions designed to elicit bribes for the police inspector—with Hori's attempts to cover for Hira undone once again by Dhaniya's exposure of the corruption of the inspector and the entire village leadership.

In the meantime, Hori's son Gobar has fallen for Bhola's widowed daughter Jhuniya, and made her pregnant. Bhola is humiliated; Gobar flees; and Jhuniya takes refuge with Hori and Dhaniya. The village leaders see Gobar's actions as an affront to the moral fabric of the village, and levy a heavy fine on Hori.

As Hori sinks further and further into debt, many of the village leaders take advantage of his precarious situation for their own profit; to make matters worse, the two bullocks he used to plough his fields are taken away by Bhola as 'compensation' for the cow (for which Bhola has never been paid). Gobar meanwhile has found his way to Lucknow where he has managed to achieve a certain amount of economic security. He returns to the village, denounces the hypocrisy of the village leaders at a festival (which he has set up at his own expense), chides his own father and mother publicly for their behaviour, and then sets out once again for the city, this time taking his wife Jhuniya and their newborn son Mangal with him. Hori's situation becomes increasingly desperate, and when his own daughters Sona and Rupa reach marriageable age, Hori's repeated attempts to salvage any sort of respectability all but collapse. He gives his daughter Rupa to a much-older farmer in exchange for 200 rupees; takes a job as a day laborer in a road construction project—back-breaking, poorly-paid work during the oppressive heat of summer; and at night he and Dhaniya make ropes in order to earn whatever extra money they can. Hori literally works himself to death, and one day he suffers sunstroke. As he is dying, Dhaniya rushes to be by his side. Hira, who has returned to the village, advises Dhaniya to make a gift of a cow (Godan) to a Brahmin in order to ensure peace for Hori after he passes. In a gut-wrenching scene of genuine pathos, Dhaniya takes the twenty annas she has earned making ropes and places them into the hands of her dead husband. As she does this, she says to Datadin, one of the village leaders (and a Brahmin): 'Maharaj, in the house there is neither cow nor calf nor money. These few coins here, these are his Godan' (Hindi text p.328/ English text p.437). Dhaniya falls to the ground, unconscious, and the novel comes to its tragic end.

There is also a subplot that takes place in Lucknow and involves a number of separate characters, mostly linked by the pivotal figure of Rai Sahib, a zamindar who circulates with equal ease in both the rural and the urban worlds. In the city we find Mehta, a professor of philosophy; Khanna, a bank manager and owner/operator of the sugar mill; Malati, a foreign-trained doctor and the model of the modern, 'liberated' woman; and Onkarnath, a newspaper editor, among others. The interactions between all of these characters, the ideologies they espouse, and the events they set in motion will now be discussed in the context of a thematic exploration of the relentless acts of injustice and the palpable sense of outrage that make up the fictional universe of Godan.

Notes

## 8.2 Economic Injustice

By the time he wrote Godan, Premchand had already established a sizeable archive of trenchant writings about various forms of economic injustice and exploitation. At times, the influence of Marxism seemed to compel him to denounce capitalism as a viable economic system and to embrace the rise of the Soviet Union, then under Stalinist rule. Apparently blind to the horrible injustices being inflicted on the Soviet people during Stalin's rule, Premchand often wrote that the Soviet system, and not 'capitalist civilization', would be the best future for India.[9] But Premchand by the 1930s was no longer prepared to embrace any one particular explanation or ideology, preferring instead to find a path that allowed for individual exceptions or for some type of understanding in the grey area between extremes. In an editorial article of 1933, for example, on relations between capitalists and farmers, Premchand had this to say: 'We are not saying that the capitalist has no place in our social life, nor that society does not obtain some benefit from him; but it is of utmost importance that the legal protections which the capitalists have procured for the tyranny over their own tenants be somewhat reduced'.[10] The same approach can be seen in Godan, where capitalism as a system is often criticised in part but never dismissed as an absolute evil. Hori's son Gobar, for instance, goes to the city as a poor peasant and ends up doing quite well for himself—economically and socially—through his entrepreneurial skills.

One of the many merits of Premchand's fiction is his ability to portray the lives of ordinary or marginalised Indians with a realism that is both sensitive and stark. Premchand remained sympathetic to the plight of India's poor throughout his life, and his empathy with the ways in which economic deprivation and chronic poverty erode the essence of human dignity is omnipresent in his fiction and nonfiction writings.[11] Thus in Godan, we see that Hori's actions are driven by the 'impulsiveness that comes from poverty' (13/18) while his wife Dhaniya is made prematurely old by the 'anxieties of hunger' and by living a life that 'never finds joy'—only an 'ongoing infirmity that remains cruelly indifferent to her sense of self-respect' (11/16). Hori's sister-in-law Punni, who is married to Hira, is described as someone for whom 'deprivation and powerlessness have dried up any character she once had' (33/44), leaving only a hardened shell.

Yet Premchand has also distanced himself from his earlier works where 'the poor' were nothing but innocent victims. In Godan, Premchand refuses to accept poverty as a convenient justification for committing acts of injustice, nor does he portray marginalised and impoverished individuals

9. See, among many others, Premchand's articles 'Mahajani Sabhyata' (Capitalist Civilisation), in Hans (Sept. 1936); 'Soviyat Rus ki Unnati' (The Progress Of Soviet Russia) (1932), Prem. Rac. 8: 192; 'Rus ka Naitik Utthan' (Russia's Political Awakening) (1934), Prem. Rac. 9: 59–60; and 'Rus Men bhi Punjivad' (Capitalism in Russia Too) (1934), Prem. Rac. 9: 97–8.

10. 'Mahajan aur Kisan' (The Capitalist and the Peasant) (1933), Prem. Rac. 8: 365.

11. In Premchand's short story 'Vidhvans' (Destruction) (1921), Prem. Rac. 12: 302–5, for example, a poor Gond woman named Bhungi manages to subsist by parching grains in her oven for other villagers. The Brahmin who runs the village, however, Pandit Udaybhan, continually exploits her by demanding free labour and service, and one day, when she is 'blessed' with enough business to have food security for a week, Pandit Udaybhan sends two servants with large amounts of grain which must be parched immediately—for free—causing her to lose her other business. She cannot finish the task in time and so Pandit Udaybhan comes and smashes her oven to pieces as punishment for being 'lazy'. An argument ensues, after which Pandit Udaybhan has his servants set fire to the broken oven to ensure it cannot be rebuilt; Bhungi, in despair, throws herself on the flames—an economic sati of sorts. The fire rages out of control and ultimately consumes Pandit Udaybhan's house. See also 'Sadgati' (Deliverance) (1930), Prem. Rac. 14: 404–10, in which the character Dukhi literally works himself to death (cf. Hori in Godan), after which his body is dragged away and left to be devoured by animals.

**Notes**

and communities as being morally superior to wealthier elites.[12] There is a strong sense of sarcasm and satire when Premchand speaks of Hori's tendency to deceive moneylenders and merchants: 'Even if he had several rupees at home, he would swear before the moneylender that he didn't have even a paisa. And it was perfectly valid by his code of ethics to increase the weight of jute by adding water to it, or of cotton by adding the seeds to it' (15/20).[13] Also, peasant life is often portrayed as a realm bereft of any sense of mutual trust: as soon as Hori turns his head for just a moment, for example, thieves make off with his potatoes, forcing him to take on yet another debt to make ends meet. And though Hori and other marginal farmers bemoan the continual injustices of indebtedness, as soon as any of them comes into even a small amount of money—ten or twenty rupees even—they immediately set themselves up as moneylenders to exploit their fellow villagers.[14]

It would seem that there is little 'subaltern' unity here. In fact, Hori admits as much to Gobar: 'We can't even stand the sight of each other. There is no unity here' (27/36). The goal of the subaltern classes, at least in the world of Godan, is apparently not to dismantle the structures of injustice that pit oppressor against oppressed, but rather to join the ranks of, or at least to emulate, the very groups responsible for their subordination.

Yet Gobar defies the deterministic explanations from his father. Although at one point he chides a local landowner, Jhinguri Singh, that 'it isn't knowledge [ilam] that counts in the world, but honesty [iman]' (196/260), Gobar is also something of a capitalist entrepreneur. Thus the 'traditional' rural economy of India, so often trumpeted by Gandhi and his followers as the as the blueprint for India's future, is here shown to be just as exploitative as modern capitalism. In contrast to Gobar's entrepreneurial success and new-found independence and self-respect, Hori and Jhinguri Singh (who has also used his transport service to make as many people indebted to him as possible) proclaim that what counts in economic relations is not honesty and trust but 'authority and pressure'. Indeed there is a strong sense in Godan that structural economic injustice is inherent in the pre-colonial, or non-colonial world of the traditional economy. As the Rai Sahib protests righteously, the system 'forces' him to extort tenants and pay bribes; that is the way it has 'always been'.

Gobar appears to have been somewhat successful in the city. Yet Premchand makes it clear that this does not mean that the urban capitalist economy is the answer to India's economic ills. Gobar may represent the 'good' capitalist, but there are others who clearly show the pejorative tendencies of capitalist economic relations. When a strike breaks out among workers at the sugar mill in town owned and operated by Khanna, the latter comes out against the strike and defends his stance with some interesting logic: while he had earlier 'been arrested' to prove he was a good nationalist, now this was business and the shareholders (who are also 'good' nationalists for investing in

12. Over time, Premchand gradually moves away from moral sympathy with abstract groups and classes and towards moral sympathy with 'awakened' individuals—a point that is, as I argue below, central to an understanding of Godan. While many a zamindar character is portrayed as harsh and selfish, in stories like 'Updesh' (The Lesson) (1917), Prem. Rac. 12: 33–47, one role model of a 'good' enlightened zamindar is presented (albeit in heavily moralistic, Tolstoyan and Gandhian fashion). Similarly, in Premchand's f1amous short story 'Kafan' (The Shroud) (1936), Prem Rac. 15: 401–7 (published in Urdu as 'Jamiya' in 1935), the two central untouchable characters, poor as they are, are portrayed individually as lazy and unprincipled.

13. One could see in this also the type of 'resistance from below' as interpreted by James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms Of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). It is unlikely Premchand would have seen it this way.

14. On a side note, in my own fieldwork in rural Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka (1995–6, 1998), I witnessed the same phenomenon over and over again. There were at the time a handful of local non-governmental organisations trying to establish alternatives (such as rotating credit societies), but their reception by local villagers was often lukewarm. Premchand spent considerable literary energy attacking various exploitative aspects of the 'traditional' system of moneylending. His short story 'Tagada' (Demands) (1932), Prem. Rac. 15: 106–12, for instance, details the way in which a 'typical' debt-collector spends his time continually pilfering from his many debtors, and the pointless but avoidable suffering and hardship that this engenders.

Notes

'indigenous' businesses) demand their returns (267/351). Moreover Khanna admits that much of his success was based on the exploitation of others and on dishonesty and cheating; and he has no problem taking advantage of the strike to lower workers' wages and to worsen their working conditions. This, according to Premchand, is the true face of economic nationalism. For their part, the workers do not come across solely as heroes or victims: like the peasants in the villages, they are unable to agree upon or unite for anything, and are more than happy to take advantage of each other to gain a better position at the mill after the strike is over. In the end, violence breaks out and the mill is simply burnt down— a stark and poignant symbol of the failure of the Gandhian vision and of the promise of subaltern unity.

## 8.3 Political Injustice

Much of the intellectual discussion of political ideas takes place among the characters in the urban subplot of the novel. In many ways, the very format of the discussion can be taken as the first level of Premchand's critique. Mehta and Khanna are intellectuals who talk at length of politics but never feel obliged to translate ideas into actions or to bring their actions into accord with their ideals. Here Premchand seems to be making an indirect attack on the elite politicians of the time by associating them with hypocrisy and narcissism, and by targeting the staleness of political and intellectual discourse. Of the character Tankha, Premchand states: 'when Congress had power he supported the Congress candidate, and when communal parties had power, then he campaigned for the Hindu Sabha' (90/116). Another character declares: 'I no longer have faith in this democracy', and goes on to explain why chaotic India will always need an absolute ruler—'whether Indian or British doesn't matter' (91/117). Yet the novel is not in the least an attack on democracy. Democracy is not to blame, Premchand demonstrates, but the self-serving opportunism and lack of ethics among the nationalist political elite that is at fault for ruining and pilfering the democratic promise.[15]

The character of Rai Sahib is a case in point. He is described as a 'nationalist who maintains good relations with government [British] officials' (18/23). And when he is awarded the title of 'Raja' from the provincial governor, he is filled ironically with 'pride and patriotism' (288/384). Yet we are told that during the Civil Disobedience Movement the Rai Sahib put himself at the head of the local agitation, was arrested and went to jail, like a good nationalist. To be sure, while in jail he continued to cheat and exploit the peasants on his zamindari lands, but the peasants could not complain lest they were seen as 'anti-national'. Likewise, when Rai Sahib hears that a fine has been levied against Hori in his zamindari village of Belari he becomes furious and—being the good nationalist that he is—orders the money to be returned. The village leaders, however, have already pocketed and spent the money from the fine, so they think of a way to avoid Rai Sahib's request.[16] One of them, Pateshwari, decides to run a story in the local nationalist paper run by Onkarnath (a paper that is funded, it turns out, largely by ads selling foreign products) denouncing the exploitative actions of the Rai Sahib. The latter hits back by visiting Onkarnath and adding one hundred new subscribers to the cash-starved paper—an action that is simultaneously nationalist and philanthropic. Onkarnath is trapped: the ethics of journalism require him to run the story, but the ethics of nationalism require him not to. The fact that such a choice is created at all shows the emptiness of nationalist rhetoric and action, particularly at the local level.

15. A point foreshadowed in an earlier story of Premchand's entitled 'Cakma' (Deception) (1922), Prem. Rac. 12: 366–71.

16. As would be expected, Premchand also wrote extensively about issues of Panchayat justice. In 'Panc-Parameshwar' (The God Of the Panchayat) (1916), Prem. Rac. 11: 394–403, a friendship is initially torn apart when one of the friends, who is on the Panchayat, does not automatically rule in favour of the other in a case brought before the Panchayat. The friendship is renewed when, in a later case, the judgment is rendered in favour of the friend (but on the merits of the case only). The point is that justice is supposed to be impartial, and not based, as it is 'traditionally' practised, on connections.

**Notes**

As with economics, there seems to be an abstract 'system' or machine in Premchand's world that generates political injustice, but for which no one is prepared to claim or accept responsibility. Institutions to fight injustice are there—the British government has set up a court system—but local 'resistance' has corrupted the ability of the courts to render justice or for marginalised individuals and communities to seek it (226–7/300–1).[17] Within the law enforcement system 'looting is rampant [carom taraf lut hai]' (319/424).[18] Similarly, when it is suggested that the British administration set up a loan program for poor farmers to get out of debt, village leaders begin to plot various ways to ensure that the program does not succeed—all in the name of some abstract and vague understanding of tradition and custom. Political injustice seems to occur in the world of Godan because, with very few exceptions, everyone is pursuing acts of self-interest at the expense of others' well-being; there is a total absence of civic spirit. As Rai Sahib points out: 'We give gifts and perform acts of charity. . .only to make our fellow citizens [barabar] appear lower than ourselves. Our gifts and acts of charity are simply selfish, purely selfish' (18/24).

## 8.4 Village Injustice

There are at least three levels of interaction within the village where Premchand explores the roots of injustice: within the family; within the caste community; and within the village itself. Contrary to the domestic bliss of traditional values being promoted by cultural nationalists at the time, Premchand portrays the family as a zone of nearly continual conflict and unjust action.[19] The members of Rai Sahib's extended family are forever trying to steal each other's lands and possessions; at one point even Rai Sahib's own son double-crosses him. When Bhola's daughter Jhuniya goes off with Gobar, Bhola denounces his own daughter as a 'witch' and adds: 'if I saw her begging and sifting through refuse, it would soothe my heart' (144/190). As for Gobar, at one point he comes close to renouncing his mother for her behaviour, creating a scene in which the 'the mother in her was like a house that had been torched and reduced to ashes' (211/280). And of course, the cow is the poisoned by Hori's own brother, Hira. Moreover domestic violence is rampant in the novel: at one point Hori beats Dhaniya in front of the whole village, and even Gobar, the defiant, ethically-awakened rebel, decsends to beating Jhuniya. 'At home, there is a Mahabharata war continually raging', complains Bhola (28/38). The romanticised, culturally-nationalist image of the Indian domestic household as a haven of familial warmth is here effectively demolished by Premchand.

Caste politics fare no better. Just as the extortionate landlords keep the peasants and tenants in a precarious situation, so too, in the world of Godan, do members of the same caste find ways to extort, punish, or oppress one another. When Dhaniya decides to take pity on Jhuniya and accept her into the household, Hori reminds her that 'our salvation lies entirely in the hands of our caste community' (121/159)—and in the event Hori's biradari behaves with predictable malice and excommunicates his entire family. Gobar, too, must face the wrath of his caste for his liason with

17. In Premchand's story 'Nasha' (Intoxication) (1934), Prem. Rac. 15: 232–37, the narrator, an elite nationalist reformer who criticises, among other things, the exploitation of the zamindari system, finds himself at one point in the third class section of a train, crammed in with 'the rest of India' (the non-elite). Between the 'boorish' behaviour of the non-elites, and the fact that other educated nationalists in the compartment are praising the merits of British judicial equality, the narrator explodes and begins to beat a villager whose bag keeps bumping his face. He is denounced by the 'educated' and by the villagers in the compartment, and in that moment he realises he has been 'intoxicated' with traditional ideas of status and power (instead of the true equality of civil interaction).

18. The corruption and incompetence of local police is another common target of attack in Premchand's fiction. See, among other stories, 'Darogaji' (The Police Inspector) (1928), Prem. Rac. 14: 113–19.

19. Premchand has explored the needless violence and injustice that often stems from marriage and the subsequent forced dislocation of family members in India in other works as well (perhaps inspired by his own personal experience with a disastrous first marriage). His novel Nirmala is particularly important here. See also the short stories 'Bade Ghar ki Beti' (The Daughter-in-Law) (1910), Prem. Rac. 11: 106–13; and 'Ghar Jamai' ('The Son-in-Law) (1929), Prem. Rac. 14: 281–9.

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Jhuniya, knowing that every time his 'brothers' see them together they will 'cackle' at him. Yet Gobar also hints at possible means of rebellion against caste tyranny—to leave and start somewhere else, where one is not known. 'Aren't there other villages in the world', he asks? Premchand seems to be implying that the many injustices that follow from the dominant principle of hierarchy—as both within and between castes—are, to a considerable extent, self-inflicted.

The harmony of the traditional, naturally cooperative village was a central pillar in Gandhi's vision of India's moral past and its morally reconstituted future.[20] Premchand's break with the relevance of that vision is perhaps most starkly expressed in Godan. In one of many passages in which he puts satire to powerful use, he describes the 'vision' of village justice from the perspective of one of the village leaders, Lala Pateshwari:

It was his supreme duty [param dharma] to look after the well-being of the entire village. He had no faith in compromise or in mutual conciliation, as these were only a sign of weakness [nirjivita]. He was a devotee of conflict, for it was a sign of life. He was always trying to stir up some excitement for this 'life', and as a result disputes of one kind or another were always erupting (247/330).

It would be one thing if Lala Pateshwari were an isolated individual with an idiosyncratic vision of the way village life should be. But that is not the case—conflict really does seem to be the common mode of interaction in village life, and the injustices and difficulties generated by such conflict are endlessly compounded. Jhinguri Singh is continually trying to get Hori in a tight spot so he can take his cow. When first his family and then the entire village turn against Bhola, he turns to Nokheram, another village leader, for assistance. Nokheram, however, like the other 'traditional' village leaders, has no interest in helping unless money is involved, and tells Bhola: 'Who shows any regard for justice and righteousness here?' (244/324). When Hori, who has already been forced to take out a loan when other villagers steal his potatoes, discovers the wife or daughter (Hori isn't sure which) of one of the village elders stealing his peas, he asks: 'Why were these people's intentions so insincere [khoti]?' (113/147). Similarly, when Gobar returns from the city and sees the village from a new perspective, he says he can only see 'everyone trying to dominate everyone else' and 'slavery to no end' (321/427). Lives are continually ruined by 'village justice', which Premchand interprets as a kind of totalitarian rule based on fear: 'society would see to it that those who violate its traditions [maryada] cannot be left to sleep in peace' (120/156).

Finally, lest the reader begins to think that the city represents a welcome respite from the subaltern authoritarianism of the village—especially since Gobar's flight to the city gives him new insight into, and new power to undermine, the closed and exploitative society of the village—Premchand describes Lucknow society in equally unforgiving terms. In the city's industrial quarters, unemployed workers are given small pittances to partake in 'gladiator' -type games that are both exploitative and humiliating; still, every day a large crowd gathers to enjoy the spectacle. The city leaves its inhabitants vulnerable to exploitation just as does the village.

Premchand seems to be suggesting that if there is a utopia waiting for India, it will not be found in any physical space—whether the 'modern' city or the 'traditional' village—but rather will need to be created from the actions of awakened individuals, wherever they may be residing.

## 8.5 Gender Injustice

Premchand's earlier works often, if unwittingly, portrayed a male-centred world, and when he finally turned his energies toward putting women at centre-stage, as with his novel Nirmala

20. During Premchand's period as a dedicated Gandhian, he put these ideas into literary form in stories such as 'Lag-Dant' (Hostility) (1921), Prem. Rac. 12: 275–80. In this story, a long-standing village feud is resolved effortlessly with Gandhian methods and ideas. That possibility is resolutely rejected in Godan.

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(1927),[21] Premchand often focused on their 'plight'. That is, women were portrayed either as paragons of virtue in the face of suffering and adversity, or as rather one-dimensional victims of social forces and outmoded traditions deserving of pity but needing help to change their situation.[22] In Godan, however, the world of women is portrayed with all its simultaneous grit and glory. Just as there is no trace of subaltern unity either in the village or the city, in Godan there is no trace of feminist solidarity or domestic virtue; women are just as likely as men to exploit others for their own benefit or bring the lives of others—male and female—to bitter ruin.[23] For instance one of the most ruthless moneylenders in the village—Dulari—is a woman. When she tries to take advantage of Hori's desperation by agreeing to arrange a marriage for one of his daughters for the outrageous price of two hundred rupees plus extortionate interest, she is denounced by Dhaniya as an absolute 'witch' (curail) (237/314–5). And while domestic violence against women is portrayed as a frequent occurrence, there are also many instances where women in the village physically beat and humiliate the men. When Damri, a local cane-weaver, becomes involved in a dispute with Hira's wife Punni and ends up giving her a shove, Punni becomes enraged—'A mere basket-weaver pushing her? What an insult!'—and begins to beat him mercilessly with her sandal. Premchand then adds an interesting comment here about the overriding nexus between class and power: 'Damri, having pushed her, had to suffer the insult: he had no other recourse but to stand there and be beaten' (33/44).

Meanwhile, the urban characters offer up revealing musings about the 'proper' role of women in society. At the heart of these discussions is Malati, the foreign-trained medical practitioner who represents the new modern woman who believes in, and struggles for, equal rights between the genders.[24] Mehta is entranced by Malati, but in spite of all his intellectual talk about various social issues, when it comes to women he is the epitome of patriarchy and sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely, offers various trenchant criticisms of Malati's liberated independence: that a woman's essence is always and only to be a mother; and that the spread of Western values is responsible for

21. Prem. Rac. 4. An English translation by Alok Rai is available as Premchand, Nirmala (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). For a full-length study of the depiction of women in Premchand's fiction, see Gita Lal, Premcand ka Nari Citran (Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Samsar, 1965).

22. There is an ambivalence in Premchand's works about how women can achieve 'empowerment'. In the historical short story 'Sati' (Sati) (1927), Prem. Rac. 13: 363–71, for instance, Cinta Devi becomes a sati for her 'dead' husband, Ratan Singh, who is in fact still alive but has cowardly deserted a battle against Maratha forces. A husband who has lost his 'manliness' is as good as dead, so Cinta Devi upholds her devotion by throwing herself on a pyre which in fact has no body. Ratan Singh is so impressed by his wife's 'power' that he then follows her onto the pyre as a male sati. Whether power that stems from devotion to traditional subservient roles is 'empowerment' is debatable. Premchand has another later story by the same title 'Sati' published in 1932 (Prem Rac. 15: 40–6) with a very different approach. Yet in other stories, such as 'Nairashya' (Despair) (1924), Prem. Rac. 13: 68–75, the injustices against women that stem from the 'social preference' for male children are explored, exposed, and condemned.

23. In one of Premchand's early stories, 'Garib ki Hay' (Cry Of the Poor) (1911), Prem. Rac. 11: 174–83, for instance, a Brahmin widow named Munga holds a dharna (a traditional form of resistance involving a fast unto death against a person who is the target of a grievance) against a local notable named Munshi Ramsevak, whom she accuses of cheating her out of a sum of money. Munshi Ramsevak's wife Nagin, who is happy to benefit from Munshi Ramsevak's acts of deceit and exploitation, shows neither sympathy nor compassion for Munga, whose action she detests. Eventually Munga dies on Munshi Ramsevak's doorstep; as a result, Nagin is driven mad and subsequently dies, while Munshi Ramsevak is ostracised from the village. Munga's 'power' stems not from the fact that she is a woman, but from the fact that she is a Brahmin and a widow.

24. As we shall see, Malati has a personal 'ethical' awakening. In another of Premchand's short stories that centres around a similarly 'liberated' modern woman and written around the time of Godan, 'Miss Padma' (Miss Padma) (1936), Prem. Rac. 15: 429–34, however, liberation, modernity, and independence bring only misfortune and unhappiness for the central female character.

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the decline of the spirit of devotion, self-sacrifice, and submission that have 'traditionally' made Indian women 'superior' to their Western counterparts. Khanna, too, blames 'slavish attachment to the West' (219/290) for the ruin of the traditional Indian household.

But unlike in earlier works, where the authorial Premchand might have agreed with such opinions, here the attempt to blame the West for the ruin of Indian women is rendered hollow; both Khanna and Mehta are portrayed as using the West as a convenient target to cover up their own shortcomings and weaknesses. Nor is Malati championed as an emblem of India's modern future. Khanna's wife Govindi, who reviles Malati for bewitching men and leading them astray, says of Malati: 'In my opinion she is even worse than the prostitutes, since she does her hunting under cover' (178/236). And when Malati thinks she is being treated with less than appropriate deference by one of Rai Sahib's servants, she hotly rebukes the girl, adding:

Men take such pleasure in these slutty servant-girls [laumdi], who, whether they have any skills or not, run around here and there tending to their every desire and praising their fate that they have a man to order them to do some task or other. They are goddesses—powerful and glorious ones. I thought at least you lacked this one male quality [to Mehta], but inside, aside from all your culture, you're a barbarian like all the rest (84/108–9).[25]

Mehta attributes Malati's reaction to feminine 'jealousy', but the reality is that this is another example of Premchand's portrayal of the lack of consistency among practitioners of all grand ideologies: for Malati, gender equality is meant for the upper classes and respectable castes, not for servants.

A further example of Premchand's wry take on the gender issue is provided by Bhola's wife Nohri, who has been scheming to find ways to aggrandise her power in the village. As her schemes and alliances yield success, she starts to insult Bhola's lack of 'manliness', and pour shame on other village leaders who cross her path. For a time, at least, as Premchand describes her, she becomes 'queen of the village' (246/327).

Bhola did not want to be dependent on her. There was no greater humiliation than to live off the earnings of a woman. He earned all of three rupees a month, but he couldn't even lay his hands on that sum—Nohri would take it and squander it. He couldn't even get a half-paise of tobacco to smoke, while Nohri chewed two annas worth of pan a day (246/328).

Note the interesting role reversal here: as Bhola's fortunes dwindle and his masculinity is disempowered, and as Nohri's fortunes rise and she is newly empowered, her attitude towards Bhola becomes not one of equality but of dominance.

Although there is a considerable amount of satire and irony involved here, and eventually Nohri 'falls' from her exalted position, the implication is that a matriarchal household would probably be no more just and free from conflict than a patriarchal one. And just as Indian men (such as Mehta and Khanna) are often depicted as harbouring expectations that Indian women will fulfil their proper 'womanly' roles, it is also clear that the women of Belari village expect their men to fulfil their proper 'manly' roles—and are prepared to humiliate them publicly, as Nohri does to Bhola, when they fail. Premchand has masterfully undermined the simplistic view that gender justice of any sort can be found in any one grand ideological scheme— Feminism, traditionalism, culturalism, and modernism are all here found lacking.

## 8.6 Religious Injustice

Premchand's various expositions in Godan on the ways in which religion is often used to mask or compound various acts of injustice all share a common desire to separate religion as it is from

25. There is a double meaning here that is hard to capture in English. The Hindi word 'laumdi' can mean both a servant-girl and/or a (sexually) promiscuous woman.

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religion as it should be. Characters from various religions show a tendency to corrupt spiritual teachings to avoid or excuse personal complicity in the commission of acts of injustice or to find a way to personally benefit from religious status without having to accept the concomitant responsibilities and austerities.[26] Thus Mirza Khurshid is a Muslim who shows a complete lack of charitable concern for the poor. Premchand adds: 'He had twice made the hajj to Mecca, but he drank heavily' (62/82). Khanna points out to Rai Sahib at one point: 'You proudly invoke the names of Buddha and Shiva and then go around killing animals' (90/116).[27] The various Brahmins who are supposed to act as spiritual and political leaders in the village are shown to be holy on the outside and corrupt on the inside, lusting at alternate moments for money or for vulnerable, low-caste women.[28] Perhaps the only character who embarks upon a spiritual journey and remain religiously 'consistent' in terms of linking teachings with actions is Hori. True, at times Hori seems excessively attached to religious traditions—even to those that deprive him of status, freedom, or dignity. Yet, to Premchand's credit, he does not show Hori to be the stereotypical Hindu fatalist who meekly accepts whatever comes his way. Rather, Hori undergoes a bhakti-style type of spiritual transformation, reflecting at one point:

Why should he be a slave [gulami] to tradition? Why should he give up his spiritual merit just because of tradition? If people laughed, then let them laugh. He didn't care. He wanted nothing but for God to keep him from doing wrong (175/232).[29]

Through Hori, Premchand seems to suggest that traditional religious acts and devotions are not inherently evil, but only retain value and meaning if they are carried out as self-willed acts and if they allow for a direct relationship between divine power and human conscience.

One of the more interesting sections of the novel relates to the interplay of religion and injustice; it is the sexual relationship of Datadin's son Matadin, a Brahmin, with Siliya, a Chamar (dalit) girl

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26. Cf. Premchand's story 'Babaki ka Bhog' (The Pleasure Of the Holy Man) (1926), Prem. Rac. 13: 351–3, in which a 'holy man' (sadhu) comes to the house of a poor farmer asking for food. The sadhu simply cannot take his food without the luxurious taste of ghee; to please the sadhu, the farmer's family obtains the ghee, but as a result of the expense have nothing left to eat themselves. Far from the austerities associated with 'holy men', the sadhu happily rubs his full stomach while the poor family goes hungry. Premchand's biting satire can be seen in the last line of the story: when the hungry farmer lies down to sleep, he thinks to himself—'And he is better than me! [mujhse to vahi acche]'.

27. Though Godan would appear from its title to be more concerned with the fate of Hori's poor cow, the poisoning of the cow is more background for action between human characters. Nevertheless, Premchand's writings reveal a strong sympathy for the plight and suffering of animals at the hands of their human counterparts; at times, the bond between animal and human is depicted as being stronger than that between people. In 'Do Bailo ki Katha' (A Tale Of Two Bullocks) (1931), Prem. Rac. 14: 528–37, two bullocks appear as central characters with emotions, feelings and personalities (sadly, at a time when it would have been far stranger and controversial to do the same for untouchables). In other stories such as 'Pus ki Rat' (A Night During (the Month Of) Pus) (1930), Prem. Rac. 14: 350–5, and 'Dudh ka Dam' (The Price Of Milk) (1934), Prem. Rac. 15: 283–90, characters who are despised, cast-out, or otherwise mistreated find friendship and comfort (and a lack of concern for social barriers and exploitative social norms) from companion dogs. Considering the status of dogs in India at the time, this is quite a powerful statement.

28. Or, as in the series of humorous stories regarding Moteram Shastri, lusting after various sweets. See 'Satyagraha' (Satyagraha) (1923), Prem. Rac. 12: 455–65; 'Manushya ka Paramdharma' (The Highest Moral Duty Of Man) (1920), Prem. Rac. 12: 195–8); 'Moteramji Shastri' (Mr. Moteram Shastri) (1928), Prem. Rac. 14: 19–23; 'Moteramji Shastri ka Nairashya' (Moteram Shastri's Despair) (1928), Prem. Rac. 14: 77–82; and 'Sampadak Moteramji Shastri' (Editor Moteram Shastri) (1928), Prem. Rac. 14: 119–25.

29. In highlighting the theme of individual liberation in Godan, Premchand uses the word 'gulami' (slavery) frequently and strategically to emphasise the multifaceted nature of mental and physical enslavement. The word is used here to show Hori's sudden awareness that uncritical acceptance of tradition is slavery; the same word is also used in Gobar's observation of village life as 'slavery to no end' and in Mehta's claim that the downfall of the Indian woman has occurred due to her 'enslavement' to Western values.

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from the village. The relationship of course violates all the 'rules' of caste, and Siliya, not surprisingly, is out-casted from her community, her own mother exclaiming: 'Why don't you go drown yourself in a handful of water?' (230/305). As with Jhuniya, Siliya soon finds herself seeking refuge with Dhaniya. Matadin, meanwhile, attempts to keep himself 'pure' and above suspicion by strictly observing all the Brahmanic food rules, a strategy whose inherent absurdity is not lost on Premchand: 'Maintaining proper food habits provides a shield protecting us from unrighteousness [adharma]' (168/222).[30] The Chamars, though, are quite aware of this 'shield', and also know exactly what to do to pierce the ritual armour. In a disturbing scene wrought with frustration, violence, and outrage, several members of the Chamar community overpower and detain Matadin and force a bone down his throat, ending his protective state of caste purity. Matadin is able to return to the caste fold by 'spending several hundred rupees' and by consuming cow's dung and cow's urine, and yet he realises the hollowness of the ritual 'rehabilitation': aside from literally being able to buy back his caste status, the reality is that he is still treated as a Chamar, since many people now refuse to take water from him or let him touch their cooking utensils. After the death of Ramu, Matadin and Siliya's newborn child, Matadin is 'reborn' a Chamar and takes up residence with Siliya. As with Hori, Matadin's behavior is another example that shows that the only authentic spirituality is chosen from within; rituals are only external and superficial, and caste is ultimately just a state of mind.[31]

Premchand also spends a considerable amount of time exploring the relationship between dharma and justice.[32] When Matadin makes his decision to move in with Siliya, he declares: 'I want to live as a Chamar, not as a Brahmin. Whoever keeps to his dharma is a Brahmin; whoever turns away from his dharma is a Chamar' (316/419). The statement seems somewhat ambivalent at first, but in the context of Premchand's extended critique of religious injustice, it makes perfect sense.[33] Since dharma has become associated with injustice, turning away from one's dharma is ironically to turn away from injustice. There is also an implication that the Chamars have more justice than the Brahmins! Earlier in the novel, when Bhola comes to Hori's house seeking redress for the loss of the ill-fated and now deceased cow, he declares that he must take away Hori's bullocks as just compensation. Hori is shocked and says to Bhola: 'If you take these two bullocks, then I'll be ruined. But if your dharma says so, then go ahead and take them' (142/189). Bhola duly takes the bullocks. When Datadin subsequently hears of this, he declares it to be utterly 'inhuman'; yet when Hori explains to Datadin (and to Lala Pateshwari) that it was a matter of dharma, Datadin opines reverently: 'When it's a matter of dharma, then what can anyone say?' (146/193). Here dharma

30. Here it is food, but in the story 'Sabhyata ka Rahasya' (The Secret Of Civilisation) (1925), Prem. Rac. 13: 166–71, it is the rituals of 'cultured' or 'civilised' behaviour among elites. Whether religious or social, Premchand had little tolerance for rituals that hid or shielded one from culpability.

31. One of Premchand's most powerful stories about the state of mind produced by caste prejudice and injustice can be found in his story 'Thakur ka Kuan' (The Thakur's Well) (1932), Prem Rac. 15: 54–6. In this story Gangi, an untouchable woman, desperately needs water but, being an untouchable, is not allowed even to approach near the Thakur's well. She sneaks to the well at night, but when she tries to get the water, the Thakur's door suddenly opens. She is not caught, but it is the fear—the continual and oppressive fear—that Premchand evokes so strongly here. As he describes Gangi's reaction to the sound of the opening door: 'The jaws of a tiger could not have been more frightening to her' (p.56).

32. Justice is of course a theme throughout much of Premchand's fiction. Other stories that explore directly the relationship between religious and legal justice are, for instance, 'Iswariya Nyaya' (Divine Justice) (1916), Prem. Rac. 11: 403–17; and 'Dharma Sankat' (A Crisis Of Dharma) (1913), Prem. Rac. 11: 268–74.

33. Another of Premchand's stories that brings many of the themes presented here together is 'Brahm ka Swang' (The Brahmin Farce) (1920), Prem. Rac. 12: 198–204. In this story, full of Gandhian influence, a Brahmin husband and wife 'duel' in their attempts to break down caste barriers. The satirical message is that what is understood as caste equality by the upper castes is really only caste inequality, just less of it.

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has been invoked to justify an inhumane and unjust act that will leave Hori in ruin; religion has become corrupted.

In the event, Gobar finally goes to Bhola's place and gets his bullocks back—but not before promising Bhola that he will be fairly compensated for his loss. Gobar's honesty, and his appeal to fair economic transactions, would appear to offer a better hope for justice than a hopelessly corrupted concept of dharma. Or perhaps Gobar's actions and words offer the possibility of a more meaningful and more tangible type of dharma—one that does not discriminate by caste or class, and one that is equally at home in the temple or the marketplace.

## 8.7 The End of Nationalism and the Origins of the Awakened Self

The hollowness, hypocrisy, and opportunism that have undermined the grand ideologies competing to draw the map of India's utopian and independent future help explain the palpable sense of disillusionment in Godan. It is in this respect that I suggest that Premchand's novel may be the finest Indian literary work that sets out to capture the mood of its time.

By the mid-1930s, the pessimism and disillusionment that was adrift in the political air began to settle into Premchand's prose. All this frustration, pessimism, and disillusionment find their voice in Godan. Although no longer a cultural nationalist (having watched cultural nationalism decay into cultural chauvinism and then blind communalism), Premchand remains too much of a Marxist to go in for the elite politics of most nationalist leaders, and too much of a Gandhian to go in for the violence advocated by the Marxists. Nationalism, which had once called to him powerfully, now seemed a hollow and spent force, smothered by orthodoxy.[34] Also, Premchand began to perceive that nationalism could never provide an adequate or fulfilling answer for the injustices of imperialism because the injustices that saturated the worlds of most 'ordinary' Indians—the people who provide the inspiration for his fictional world in Godan—were not imposed from the outside but cultivated from within.[35] In 1934, for instance, Premchand could write despairingly: 'we merely shout "nation! nation!" but our hearts are still plunged into the darkness of caste distinctions'.[36] With no ideology holding sway over him, with no simplistic remedies to provide a cure for the many social ailments he saw around him, Premchand wrote Godan to describe everyday life and its diurnal struggles not as others imagined it could, or should, be, butmerely as it was.[37] Lacking the ideological filter or political melodrama of his earlier works, Godan brings to life the local history of late-colonial India with a complexity that vastly transcends the once-dominant master narrative of heroic nationalism. The book offers an unflinchingly honest and uncompromising testament to the gritty, brutal, and often inhumane existence of India's subalterns.

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34. Some of Premchand's stories that deal with his earlier optimism regarding the promise of nationalism are: 'Duniya ka Sabse Anmol Ratan' (The Most Priceless Jewel in the World) (1908), Prem. Rac. 11: 18–24; and 'Samar Yatra' (A Pilgrimage to Battle) (1930), Prem. Rac. 14: 341–50.

35. Perhaps the greatest story explaining why Gandhian nationalism would never work is also Premchand's shortest: 'Rashtra ka Sevak' (Servant Of the Nation) (1930), Prem. Rac. 14: 403–4, is roughly half a page in length. In the course of a short dialogue between father and daughter, the father, the 'servant of the nation', extols caste equality, until her daughter says she wants to marry one of the lower caste men. Suddenly the 'servant of nation' cannot even bear to look at her, and turns away in disgust.

36. Quoted in Govind Narain, Premchand: Novelist and Thinker (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 1999), p.133.

37. Indar Nath Madan, Premchand: An Interpretation (Lahore: Minerva Bookshop, 1946), argues that the excessive attempt by Premchand to fit ideology and 'message' into his fiction greatly reduced its quality and literary potential: 'The main reason why he could not, in spite of his undoubted talents, create an immortal character lies in his wrong conception of the function of art' (p.98). For Madan, Hori is Premchand's first and only 'immortal character'.

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Yet in spite of his disillusionment, Premchand struggled, to the end, not only to propose possible solutions to his country's problems, but also to put them into action in his own life. Premchand's struggle to find a unified language shared by both Hindus and Muslims, for instance, and to resist the communalisation of Hindi and Urdu, remained a central part of his literary craft right to the end of his life. Premchand also endeavoured to make Hindi more accessible to the ordinary, non-elite reader by bringing together the inspiration of socialist realism with the reforms of the Hindi language (through its de-Sanskritisation). Though Premchand himself after about 1910 switched from Urdu to Hindi as his main public medium of expression, he continued to write in the first instance in Urdu, afterwards translating his own first drafts into Hindi or at times striving for a means of expression that borrowed from both. The project for a unified 'Hindustani' language failed in the end, but Premchand clung stubbornly to his belief in its potential, and unlike so many others, he practised what he preached, consistently and productively[38]—even in the face of outspoken criticism from his fellow Hindi writers (who mistrusted his praise of Urdu) and from Urdu writers who continued to treat him as an outsider.[39]

Of course, Premchand was certainly not the first author to become first enamoured with, and then disillusioned by, utopian ideologies and specifically by the failure of nationalism. In fact, in its tone, import, and intent, Godan is very reminiscent of Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World (Ghare-Baire) of 1915, which is constructed around the nationalist upsurge generated by the partition of Bengal in 1905, and the ensuing Swadeshi Movement. But Tagore's nationalist 'hero', Sandip, is shown to be hypocrite, a fraud, and an opportunist who leads individuals and communities to ruin and to violence, and Tagore's decision to keep that action focused on Indian characters and not on the British colonial administration forces the reader to the conclusion—as does Premchand's Godan—that much of the violence and injustice that emerged out of the nationalist agitation in India in the early twentieth century was generated from within.[40]

Also like Tagore, Premchand was too gifted a writer and too passionate an activist merely to write a novel of persistent complaint; he could never resist the temptation to provide answers, and at least in Godan, his efforts are put to impressively good and complex ends. Ideologies may have failed, Premchand suggests, but that merely shifts the burden onto the individual self. Premchand shows a keen interest in the (re)construction of the self in Godan, and yet, again like Tagore, he is no longer able to embrace the Gandhian project of the reconstructed moral self, a project that seems too deeply embedded in the rituals and trappings of conservative elitist traditions. In Godan, Premchand offers a glimpse of the reconstructed awakened self in a form that puts the burden of responsibility on the individual; it is a humanist project, but one that does not, as 'classical'

38. Harish Trivedi, 'The Progress Of Hindi, Part 2: Hindi and the Nation', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp.967–71.

39. Muhammad Sadiq, A History Of Urdu Literature (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1995), p.439.Premchand's experience can be compared with that of the main character, Pravin, in his short story 'Lekhak' (The Writer) (1931), Prem. Rac. 14: 538–45. Pravin is a poor struggling writer, surrounded by various characters who do not understand the power and beauty of the literary craft. Premchand is careful to find a non-communal balance: there are unflattering portrayals of Hindus and Muslims in equal measure. In the end, Pravin realises that he is a lamp (dipak) and that 'literary service is complete sacrifice [sahitya-seva puri tapasya hai]'—carefully chosen words that imply that the principled writer is like an ethical ascetic. On the Hindustani issue, see Premchand's essay 'Urdu, Hindi, aur Hindustani' (Urdu, Hindi, and Hindustani) (1935), Prem. Rac. 7: 447–54.

40. On Tagore's critique of nationalism, see Manju Radhakrishnan and Debasmita Roychowdhury, '"Nationalism is a Great Menace": Tagore and Nationalism', in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds), Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003): pp.29–40; and Ashis Nandy, The Illegitimacy Of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics Of Self (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

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humanism does, exclude the possibility that spirituality can play a constructive role.[41] Grand ideologies, such as nationalism, or forms of spirituality that are excessively ritualised or politicised, are shown to constrain the self from its full potential. The moments of awakening and self-awareness among many characters in the novel come precisely at the moment where they shed their ideological shells. Matadin, as we have seen, discovers the possibility of an authentic self by casting off the identity given to him from birth, an identity that required only external conformity, and creating an identity anew from his own personal, ethical, and spiritual choices. Malati has a similar moment of awakening when she unravels herself from the preconceived ideological grip of Feminism and nationalism and devotes herself—as an individual act of choice—to serving the people with her medical training. Dhaniya's decision to provide refuge first to Jhuniya and then to Siliya is transformed from one motivated by shame and external pressure to one of individual conscientious choice.

And then there is Hori. As we have already seen, Hori, too, has his own moment of individual enlightenment, but he also does something more than merely introspect. Perhaps more than any other character in the novel, Hori continually strives—even in the face of overwhelming adversity—to renovate the cultural, social, and political architecture of his world in ways that would render them simultaneously meaningful, relevant, and just. Hori is not interested in the language of revolutionary destruction, class conflict, or social levelling. Instead, he strives for the one thing he finds lacking nearly everywhere he looks: respect, both self and mutual. Hori seeks this respect not in the rhetoric of any grand ideology but rather in the face-to-face interactions of civil society. His search for meaning is an all-consuming project, and in the end it quite literally costs him his life. And yet we should not read Hori's death as a pathetic example of futility, or of a life lived in vain; rather, Hori's passing is itself a final act of rebellion. In Hori's mind, anyone—regardless of ritual or social status—should be entitled to a dignified life and a dignified death. To fight for anything less would render existence meaningless. The moment of Hori's passing thus becomes not a definitive ending but merely another milestone in an ongoing struggle for justice and meaning. Hori's last Godan is not an act of failure but an act of open-ended defiance against all that is corrupt and unjust. In many ways, Premchand's own Godan was no different.

41. In hindsight, many of Premchand's earlier stories also emphasise the responsibility of the self and glimpses of the difficulties that self-awakening will necessarily create on the way to enlightened liberation. In 'Sirf ek Avaz' (Only One Voice) (1913), Prem. Rac. 11: 286–91, Thakur Darshan Singh decides to embark upon a life that embraces caste equality from untouchable to Brahmin, citing the exemplary resolve and suffering of the Christian missionaries who do not let caste stand in the way of their work and wondering why Indians are not doing the same. No one in the village joins him. In 'Mantra' (Mantra) (1926), Prem. Rac. 13: 261–72, the main character is a Brahmin who has a moment of self-awakening about what 'true' Hinduism teaches, and dedicates himself to working among untouchables to end caste oppression. Again, his struggle is an individual one; no one follows him. By contrast, the main character in 'Donom Taraf Se' (From Both Sides) (1911), Prem. Rac. 11: 134–44, Pandit Shyamsarup, a lawyer in Patna, is able to use his own example of working for the uplift of untouchables to inspire at least one other person to follow suit. In the story 'Jurmana' (The Penalty) (est. 1935), Prem. Rac. 15: 464–7, the Inspector of Sanitation is 'awakened' by the repulsiveness of his own actions—in this case, abusing his authority and withholding pay from Alarakkhi, a sweeper woman under his supervision, when she refuses his amorous advances. Alarakkhi thinks she will be fired, but the inspector, converted to a more humanistic sense of self, for the first time pays Alarakkhi her full wages. In the anti-communal story 'Mandir aur Masjid' (The Temple and the Mosque) (1925), Prem. Rac. 13: 171–9, Premchand shows individuals from both Islam and Hinduism distancing themselves from the group mentality of the crowd (arguably, the basis for communalism) and choosing instead to interact with and view others as individuals rather than faceless members of a group. For those who cling blindly to such group identities, these actions are unsettling and disconcerting.

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## 8.8 Summary

- Premchand's "Godan" produces the rustic, simplistic and heart-rending lives of the peasants. Far, from exaggeration, "Godan" is "a novel of stark reality". It deals with the dreams, despairs and day-to day events of Hori, the protagonist of the novel, and his family. Through the peasants, Premchand has portrayed the pathetic life of the rural arena. Hori is an embodiment of peasant-virtue, simplicity and truth. He leads an inconsistent life with his wife Dhania, and his three children. Their unstable financial situation always tends to lend them frustration and despair. A tension-free life is not theirs. If they spend a quarter of their lives in starvation, they spend the rest paying unwarranted loans. The money-lenders take full advantage of their poverty ad therefore take unreasonable interest from them. Premchand writes:" A loan was an unwelcome guest, once in the house, dug himself into permanent fixture." The money-lenders also exploit the ignorance and gullibility of the peasants. The village-folk in the higher strata of society, who are financially sounder, take advantage of the village-peasants. In the novel, we find, we find how Dulari mounts a small amount of money into a hundred rupees within a small fraction of time.
- The zamindars are no exception in this regard. They make maximum use of the tenants and extract manual labour from them. Hori, already old, and fatigued from poverty has to do strenuous work in order to make both ends meet. The cow he eventually gets hold of is mercilessly killed by his cruel brother Heera.
- Their ambitions and dreams are also made apparent by the novelist. While some of them love their soil, the younger generation opts for city life. For them, material prospects hold more water than sentimental values. Hori therefore does not approve with Gobar to shift to the city. For Gobar, material prospects hold more water than sentimental values. Therefore Hori does not embrace the idea of moving to the city. A typical peasant, his land is everything to him.. He regards the cattle also as a member of the family. Isolated life does not appeal to them and they long to thrive and integrate with the community. This becomes apparent when Hori is willing to pay the fine imposed by the village for admitting Jhunia. Hori does not want to be treated as an outcaste. He tells Dhania that he wants to live with society and not outside society.
- The lack of education of the peasants can be considered a major factor in their backwardness. Superstitions are prevalent. We have a humorous account of how news spreads in the village of Dhania's over-powering the inspector. After the incident, people flock around Hori's hut to have a Darshan of Dhania. They undergo all the rites , to protect the newly arrived cow from the evil eye. They cannot fling away their false pride even in the face of dire poverty. Eventhough, Sona's bridegroom does not demand any dowry, they pay it as it a matter of prestige in society. Again, the caste-system very much exists . We find Heera admonishing Punia for quarrelling with a low caste man.
- Women are not portrayed as equal to men. We find Damri exclaiming to Hori how his son ran away leaving his wife with another woman. Subsequently, his wife gets married to another man. Damri gets revolted only with the infidelity of women and not men thereby practicing double standards. The husbands ill treat their wives after drinking. Dhania talks of Hori's ill-treatment and quips how it would have been if it were the other way around. Heera also abuses his wife. Though Gobar is affectionate towards his wife in the beginning, gradually their relationship deteriorates. "Early married life throbs with love and desire; like the dawn the span of life is suffused with a roseate glow. The afternoon of life dissolves illusion into its stinging rays, but brings face to face with reality."
- Some of the scenes will always be memorable. Like, for instance, when Rupa sucks on a raw mango in starvation. The handing over of the child-like Rupa to the elderly man in marriage.

**Notes**

The deserting of the aged parents by Jhunia and Gobar, who bore all pains and social stigma for them. The economical system came as a blessing, but Jhenguri Singh makes maximum use of it to manipulate people. The most heart-rending scene is the death of Hori or more precisely his last moments. His being religious and magnanimous, the family does not possess the adequate means even to complete his final rites. The novel thus ends in a tragedy.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Choose the correct options:**

(*i*) Premchand's "Godan" produces the rustic, simplistic and heart-rending lives of the ..... .

(*a*) student (*b*) poor (*c*) peasants (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) The deserting of the aged parents by ..... and Gobar, who bore all pains and social stigma for them.

(*a*) Heera (*b*) Jhunia (*c*) Punia (*d*) None of these

(*iii*) Heera admonishing ..... for quarrelling with a low caste man.

(*a*) Jhunia (*b*) Gobar (*c*) Punia (*d*) None of these

(*iv*) After the incident, people flock around Hori's hut to have a Darshan of ..... .

(*a*) Heera (*b*) Punia (*c*) Dhania (*d*) None of these

## 8.9 Key-Words

1. Escapist : Indulging in or characterized by escapism.
2. Magnanimous : Very generous or forgiving, esp. toward a rival or someone less powerful than oneself.

## 8.10 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on the role of Dhania.
2. Why did Jhunia and Gobar bear all pains and social stigma?
3. Write a brief note on Godan.
4. Discuss Premchand as a renowned writer.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*b*) (*ii*) (*b*) (*iii*) (*c*) (*iv*) (*c*)

## 8.11 Further Readings


1. Premchand Pachnavali (collected works of Premchand) Vol. 20, Delhi, Janwani Prakashan 1996: 377–425.
2. Godan (The Gift of a Cow) (1936) English translations by Gordon c. Roadarmel (2007, 1968, New Delhi).

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# Unit 9: Premchand: Godan—Plot Construction and Characterisation

CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Introduce the Plot of the novel Godan.
- Discuss Characterization of Godan.

## Introduction

The Indian novelist and short-story writer Premchand was the first major novelist in Hindi and Urdu. His writings describe in realistic detail the political and social struggles in India of the early 20th century.

Premchand, whose real name was Dhanpatrai Srivastava, was born in the small village of Lamhi a few miles from Benares. His immediate forebears were village accountants in Lamhi. His intimate acquaintance with village life began here and continued when, as a schoolteacher and subdeputy inspector of schools, he traveled extensively for 21 years through Uttar Pradesh State.

Premchand's early writing was all done in Urdu, but from 1915 he found that writing Hindi was more profitable. Hindi, using the Sanskrit-based script and borrowing heavily from Sanskrit vocabulary, was strongly promoted by the Hindu reform group called the Arya Samaj, and within a few years Hindi publications numerically outstripped those written in Urdu.

Premchand's early work in Urdu reveals the strong influence of Persian literature, particularly in the short stories. These were usually romantic love stories in which, the course of love not being smooth, various unusual devices are used to bring lovers together again. In these romantic stories and novels, however, also appear evidences of patriotic fervor and descriptions of Indian and foreign heroes who died bravely for their countries. Premchand's first collection of short stories, Soz-e-Vatan, brought him to the attention of the government. The British collector of Hamirpur District called them seditious and ordered that all copies be burned and that the author submit future writing for inspection. Fortunately, a few copies survived, and Premchand, in order to evade censorship, changed his name from Dhanpatrai to Premchand..

In 1920 Premchand resigned from a government high school and became a staunch supporter of Mohandas Gandhi, whose influence strongly marked Premchand's work from 1920 to 1932. With realistic settings and events, Premchand contrived idealistic endings for his stories. His characters change from pro-British to pro-Indian or from villainous landlord to Gandhi-like social servant in midstream; the frequent conversions tend to make the stories repetitious and the characters interesting only up to the point of conversion.

**Notes**

Premchand's last and greatest novel, Godan, and his most famous story, Kafan (The Shroud), both deal with village life. However, whatever the setting, his late work shows a new mastery. The characters appear to have taken over their own world. The claims of social, moral, and political tenets are secondary to the claims of artistry. Premchand died from a gastric ulcer. One son, Amrtrai, was a noted Hindi writer, and the other, Sripatrai, a talented painter.

## 9.1 Plot Construction of Godan

Godan has been described as an epic novel on the peasant life. Almost all classes of people and all aspects of peasant life have been vividly depicted in Godan. Contemporary urban life also finds vivid and detailed delineation through a parallel plot based on urban milieu. Thus Godan involves intertwining of two distinct threads into one whole. The plot based on rural life is the more prominent of the two while that based on urban life is secondary. To put the whole perspective in just one sentence, Godan represents a vibrant and lively portrayal of contemporary Indian life which reflected the true faces of India's rural and urban milieu. Premchand's art of novel writing touches its acme in this novel.

The main plot of Godan (gifting a cow) is centred in a village 'Belari' in Avadh. Hori, a poor peasant of the village leads a quiet life with his wife Dhania, their son Gobar and their two daughters Sona and Rupa. He has two brothers Shobha and Hira, who are not only lethargic by nature but are also jealous by temperament. Hori entertains no hostility towards anybody, nor is he jealous of any one. He toils hard to earn his meagre living from his land and cares a lot to maintain and enhance his family prestige. Despite the partition of the family property among the three brothers, he still fondly cares for the well-being of his brothers. Sometimes Hori would go to Kusumadeva wrote his Drishtantashataka (or Drishtantakalika), a collection of hundred proverbs in which certain wisdom is stated in the first line and then illustrated with an example in the second line.

*Did u know?* Godan (Hindi), is the most outstanding of Premchand's pay his regards to Amarpal Singh, the zamindar of his village.

Once while coming back to the village, he happens to see the beautiful cow of Bhola. Seeing the cow, his heart yearns to possess it. He contacts Bhola and through clever persuasion manages to get the cow. While bringing the cow, his sone Gobar falls in live with Bhola's daughter Jhunia. The ownership of the cow sends Hori, Gobar and Dhania into ecstatic joy. The whole village gathers there to have a look at the cow and to congratulate him. His brother Hira and his spouse Punia, however, turn green with jealousy continues to grow in Hira's heart, so much so that one day he seizes an opportunity to poison the cow. Dhania raises hue and cry but Hori sides with his brother during the police enquiry and manages to save his skin. The geniality, simplicity and large-heartedeness of Hori are fully reflected in this incident.

Although Hori's financial condition continues to deteriorate day by day, he does not waver from his righteous path. From his righteous path. From a farmer he turns into a labourer and joins the menial service of Datadin to eke out an existence by toiling relentlessly on the latter's farm along with his family. His son, Gobar, escapes to Lucknow with Bhola's daughter Jhunia. The debts on Hori Continue to mount and he gets fully entangled in the clutches of the money-lenders. Even when pushed into such a tight spot, he does not abandon his large heartedness and geniality. The entire family, his son, his brother, his sister-in-law and his daughter-in-law grows sore and unhappy with his behaviour. Once while toiling on the far in scorching heat, he gets a heat-stroke and falls seriously ill. Owing to his utter indigence, however, he gets no medical treatment. Perceiving Hori's approaching end, his brother, Hira tells Dhania; "Bhabhi, steel you heart and arrange for Godan, for Dada (Hori) is about to depart''. But Dhania has no money to arrange for a cow and she tells Datadin "Maharaj, I have neither a cow, nor a calf, nor money! I have only twenty annas (Rs.1.25) received from the sale of cord. That is all I have and that is the Godan for my husband!"

Notes

Thus ends the tragic tale of the peasant here and this marks the end of the plot centered round the village. Premchand so deeply identifies himself with rural ethos and depicts the rural life with such touching poignancy that the novel makes all the villages of north India and their environs come alive before one's mind's eyes.

In the plot set in the urban-life, Premchand has divided his characters into seven broad categories. Repressed, exploited and aggrieved classes of the society for this purpose.

Godan's plot is a complex one and its characterisation is comprehensively vivid. The episodes of the novel are close to reality. Premchand frankly exposes the human frailty of his characters. He freely expounds the weakness of even his naive protagonist Hori. He makes no effort to mute the love-affair between Gobar and Jhunia. In fact, he exposes it uninhibitedly, with a sense of subdued admiration. He delineates the inner conflict of Dr. Malati and Professor Mehta on a rather psychological plane.

In Short, Godan represents a superb achievement of the Hindi novel. The objective of the novel is clear. The novelist wants to focus on the orthodox and superstitious ways that throw the Indian society into their clutches. A society so rigidly stuck in the mire of false prestige and hollow norms cannot be reformed by superficial reformist approach and slogans. What is needed for a social transformation is a gigantic movement. Only then can the society be liberated from the deadly hold of the standard-bearers of feudalism, capitalism and sham religion. Godan offers the formula of collective awakening of the oppresdied while in service.

## 9.2 Characterisation of Godan

### Hori

Hori is a peasant who is married to Dhania and has two daughters and a son. He is an uprighteous man and struggles throughout his life to preserve his uprighteousness. He has two younger brothers and he considers his obligation as the eldest brother to help them and save them from problems, sacrificing his own family. He bribes the police officers who come to the village enquiring the death of his cow. Thus, he saves the police from entering his brother, Hira's house for a search. He is a man who is bound to the community and considers the verdict of the panchayat as final. He is penalized for the death of the cow and accepts. He feels orphaned to be out of the community and hence accepts the penalty levied by the panchayat when Gobar brings home a low caste girl. Similarly, he allows Bhola to take his oxen away as he is neither able to pay the cost of it nor willing to send Jhunia away from his house. They have accepted her as their daughter-in-law and her child as their grandchild. He is kind and generous. He does not hesitate to give shelter to Seliya, a cobbler's daughter who is exploited by Matadin, a Brahmin, and is shirked by her own people.

### Dhania

Dhania is Hori's wife, devoted to him and always supportive to him. She is bold and fiery and cannot tolerate injustice. She raises her voice against injustice, against the wishes of Hori and irritates him. She is vexed when Hori puts up with a lot of oppression from the money lenders and the Brahmin Priest. Hori, though beats at times for disobeying him, knows that her arguments are correct. She makes him see the truth and the realty of facts. Unlike him, she is not lost in rigmarole of cliches and ideals. She stands by what she thinks is correct and her dharma, rather than the traditional principles of the community. She knowingly accepts into her household, a low caste girl, as her daughter-in-law .She does not blame only Jhunia for placing them in an embarrassing position. She knows that her son, Gobar, is equally responsible. She is a kind and loving mother and sacrifices much for the sake of her children. She has a generous heart; she takes care of Hira's children when occasion demands, she willingly accommodates and shelters the pregnant Seliya, the cobbler's daughter. Dhania has never known a life of peace and comfort, as throughout the novel we see her struggling along with her husband for a livelihood. She emerges as a powerful woman, who irrespective of caste or creed helps the needy.

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## Gobar

Gobar is the only son of Dhania and Hori. Born into a poor family, he aspires for a life of comfort. Though initially a simpleton like his father, he gets exposure in the city, lucknow, and learns to be practical and worldly wise. He impregnates Jhunia, Bhola's daughter, and lacking courage to face the wrath of the villagers, runs away to the city, leaving Jhunia at his parents doorstep. His insensible hasty behaviour creates trouble to Hori, who pays the penalty. Gobar works for Mirza Kursheed, but gradually starts his own business. He also lends money to other people. When he comes to the village dressed as a gentleman with pump shoes, on a short visit, he is unrecognized with difficulty. He becomes the centre of attraction in the village, the other young men are tempted to go to the city seeing him. He promises to get them jobs. When he comes to know that Datadin is exploiting his father, he advices his father to come out of the shakles of traditional bindings. He organises a function and with his friends enacts a skit to expose and satirize the mean mentality of the village money lenders and the Brahmin priest. He threatens to drag the priest to court and has a fight with his father on this issue. He realizes that Hori is too simple, god fearing and cannot go against his dharma. Angrily, he leaves the village with his wife Jhunia and returns to the city. His weakness for liquour and short tempered nature affects his relation with Jhunia. He realizes his mistake only when his devoted wife nurses him during his illness. He works in the sugar factory and later becomes the chowkidar at Malathi's house.

## Datadin

Datadin is the village Brahmin Priest and a greedy moneylender. It is ironic that this man with low moral standards goes about the village policing the wrongs of the other villagers. He penalizes Hori for accepting and sheltering a low caste girl, Jhunia, as their daughter-in-law. He is a hypocrite and is blind to the fact that his own son Matadin is having an affair with Seliya, a cobbler's daughter. He invites pundits from Varanasi to perform the purifying rituals of his defiled son so that he is brought into the main stream of Brahminism. He does not pity Hori's poverty, rather takes advantage of his goodness and exploits him.

## Matadin

Matadin is the son of the brahmin priest Datadin. He is young and has an affair with Seliya, a low caste woman who works on the farm for him. The villagers know about it. Seliya does not have entrance to his house. Her parents and relatives hopefully wait for her to be accepted by him. Finally, they decide to punish him and beat him and put a piece of bone into his mouth, a taboo, for the brahmin. Seliya comes to his help and saves him. Matadin becomes an outcast in his own house. His father performs purifying rituals to bring him back to the mainstream of brahminism. He spends a lot of money on the rituals and pundits from Kashi are called in. Matadin's malarial fever which had taken him to death's mouth has made him realize his mistake in exploiting Selia. When Matadin comes to know that he has a son from Seliya, he longs to see the child and goes on sly in her absence. He is repentant and sends her two rupees through Hori. He realises that he is bound by duty to Seliya and his son. He removes his holy thread and thus liberates himself from the shackles of Brahminism. Now, he is free to live courageously with Seliya as his wife.

## Bhola

Bhola is a cowherd of the neighbouring village. He is a widower and has two married sons and a young widowed daughter, Jhunia. Bhola agrees to give Hori a cow on loan and in turn Hori promises to find a companion for him to remarry. Bhola is very upset when his daughter elopes with Hori's son Gobar. He comes to Hori's house on vengenance and claims money for the dead cow. Hori does not have Rs.80, the cost of the cow. Bhola threatens to take his oxen away, that would reduce Hori to a labourer. When Hori pleads with him, Bhola suggests that they should throw Jhunia, their daughter-in-law, and his own daughter out of the house as she had hurt his

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feelings. This is not acceptable to Dhania, Hori's wife. It is unbelievabe that being Jhunia's father, instead of being contended that Hori and his wife have accepted this girl who became pregnant without her marriage being sanctified, he would like to see her sent away with her infant. He heartlessly takes away Hori's oxen and renders him totally helpless.

The urban society is represented by Malati devi (Doctor), Mr. Mehta( Lecturer and philosopher), Mr. Khanna (Banker), Rai Sahib (Zamindar), Mr Tankha (Broker) and Mr. Mirza (social worker).

### Rai Sahib

Rai sahib has won the local elections twice. He wanted to marry his daughter off to a rich zamindar to again win in the election and claim the property of his in-laws. Thus, he married his daughter off to another rich, widow and rake zamindar. He claimed and won the zamindari of his in-laws. He won the election and became the municipal minister. But when he planned to get his son married to the daughter of Raja Suryankant for his family's prestige, his son refused that. He is in love with Saroj, the younger sister of Malati devi. They both married and went away to London. His son claimed and won the entire property Rai sahib won from in-laws leaving Rai sahib in huge debt. His daughter got divorced. This eventually left Rai sahib too dissatisfied despite all his efforts.

### Miss Malati

Miss Malati is a beautiful lady intelligent doctor who is educated in Europe. She is one of the three daughters of Mr. Kaul. She is the centre of attraction in the parties and is flirtatious. Mr. Khanna flirts with her and she is envied and disliked by Govindi. Malati in turn falls in love with Mr. Mehta because of his ideology, his simplicity and intelligence. On a trip to the village of Hori, she explores herself. She starts serving the poor and gets involved in many social activities. After seeing the change in Malati, Mr. Mehta falls in love with Malati. But though Malati loves Mr. Mehta, she refuses his marriage proposal. She now wants to serve the poor and does not want to marry. Mr. Mehta and Malati keep serving the poor and needy people together. Malati devi is the only character shown as conteded at the end of the novel because of her commitment to charitable deeds.

### Mr. Mehta

Mr Mehta is a scholar and lectures philosopy in a college. He is also authoring a book on Philosophy which he dedicates to Malati. Malati and Govindi are two characters who are influenced by him. Govindi finds solace talking to him as he appreciates her concept of womanhood. Malati loses her ego and understands the true meaning of life through him. She learns to serve the poor. He needs the guidance of Malati as he has mismanaged his funds and income in overgenerously serving the poor. Though he is interested in marrying Malati, the two mutually agree to remain as friends under the same roof.

### Mr. Khanna

Mr. Khanna is an industrialist and owns a sugar factory. Though married and father of three children, he disrespects his wife Govindi for her traditional values. He flirts with Malati. He is unable to recognize the virtues in his wife. Govindi is fed up of his behaviour and this goads her to leave home. He exploits the labour class. It is only when his sugar factory is destroyed in a fire accident and Govindi stands by him encouraging him to set it up once again, he realise his mistake. Mr. Khanna eventually starts loving his wife.

### Govindi

Govindi is Mr. Khanna's wife, the rich industrialist, and is epitomized as an ideal Hindu wife. She is virtuous and very tolerant with her husband and children. Unfortunately, Mr. Khanna is

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disinterested in her as he finds fault with her traditional values. He takes interest in Miss Malati and flirts with her. Govindi is desperately dejected and decides to abandon him and his house. But it is Mr. Mehta, who has always been appreciative of her ideals, who advises her to return back to the children. She is a moral support to her husband when his sugar factory gets destroyed in fire. It is she who encourages him to set it up again.

### Self- Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) In 1920 Premchand resigned from a government high school and became a staunch supporter of ..... .

(*ii*) The main plot of Godan is gifting the ..... .

(*iii*) Hori a poor peasant of the village leads a quiet life with his wife Dhania, their son Gobar and two daughters ..... .

(*iv*) The Plot set in ..... .

## 9.3 Summary

- Godan has been described as an epic novel on the peasant life. Almost all classes of people and all aspects of peasant life have been vividly depicted in Godan. Contemporary urban life also finds vivid and detailed delineation through a parallel plot based on urban milieu. Thus Godan involves intertwining of two distinct threads into one whole. The plot based on rural life is the more prominent of the two while that based on urban life is secondary.
- The main plot of Godan (gifting a cow) is centred in a village 'Belari' in Avadh. Hori, a poor peasant of the village leads a quiet life with his wife Dhania, their son Gobar and their two daughters Sona and Rupa.
- Godan (Hindi), is the most outstanding of Premchand's pay his regards to Amarpal Singh, the zamindar of his village.
- Once while coming back to the village, he happens to see the beautiful cow of Bhola. Seeing the cow, his heart yearns to possess it. He contacts Bhola and through clever persuasion manages to get the cow. While bringing the cow, his sone Gobar falls in live with Bhola's daughter Jhunia. The ownership of the cow sends Hori, Gobar and Dhania into ecstatic joy.
- In the plot set in the urban-life, Premchand has divided his characters into seven broad categories. Repressed, exploited and aggrieved classes of the society for this purpose.
- Godan's plot is a complex one and its characterisation is comprehensively vivid. The episodes of the novel are close to reality. Premchand frankly exposes the human frailty of his characters. He freely expounds the weakness of even his naive protagonist Hori. He makes no effort to mute the love-affair between Gobar and Jhunia. In fact, he exposes it uninhibitedly, with a sense of subdued admiration. He delineates the inner conflict of Dr. Malati and Professor Mehta on a rather psychological plane.
- **Hori** is a peasant who is married to Dhaniya and has two daughters and a son. He is an uprighteous man and struggles throughout his life to preserve his uprighteousness.
- **Dhania** is Hori's wife, devoted to him and always supportive to him. She is bold and fiery and cannot tolerate injustice.
- **Gobar** is the only son of Dhania and Hori. Born into a poor family, he aspires for a life of comfort. Though initially a simpleton like his father, he gets exposure in the city, lucknow, and learns to be practical and worldly wise. He impregnates Jhunia, Bhola's daughter, and lacking courage to face the wrath of the villagers, runs away to the city, leaving Jhunia at his parents doorstep.
- **Datadin** is the village Brahmin Priest and a greedy moneylender.

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- **Matadin** is the son of the brahmin priest Datadin. He is young and has an affair with Seliya, a low caste woman who works on the farm for him. The villagers know about it. Seliya does not have entrance to his house.
- **Bhola** is a cowherd of the neighbouring village. He is a widower and has two married sons and a young widowed daughter, Jhunia. Bhola agrees to give Hori a cow on loan and in turn Hori promises to find a companion for him to remarry.
- **Rai sahib** has won the local elections twice. He wanted to marry his daughter off to a rich zamindar to again win in the election and claim the property of his in-laws.
- **Miss Malati** is a beautiful lady intelligent doctor who is educated in Europe. She is one of the three daughters of Mr. Kaul.
- **Mr Mehta** is a scholar and lectures philosopy in a college. He is also authoring a book on Philosophy which he dedicates to Malati.
- **Mr. Khanna** is an industrialist and owns a sugar factory. Though married and father of three children, he disrepcts his wife Govindi for her traditional values. He flirts with Malati.
- **Govindi** is Mr. Khanna's wife, the rich industrialist, and is epitomized as an ideal Hindu wife.

## 9.4 Key-Words

1. Realistic : Tending to or expressing an awareness of things as they really are.
2. Contemporary : A person or thing living or existing at the same time as another.
3. Meager : Lacking in quantity or quality

## 9.5 Review Questions

1. The plot set in urban life. Do you agree? Discuss.
2. What is the main plot of Godan ? Explain.
3. Discuss the plot and characterization of Godan.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Mohandas Gandhi (*ii*) Cow
   (*iii*) Sona and Rupa (*iv*) Urban life

## 9.6 Further Readings


1. Premchand Pachnavali (collected works of Premchand) Vol. 20, Delhi, Janwani Prakashan 1996: 377–425.
2. Godan (The Gift of a Cow) (1936) English translations by Gordon c. Roadarmel (2007, 1968, New Delhi).

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# Unit 10: Premchand: Godan -Theme

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Understand Godan as an Agrarian Novel.
- Discuss the theme of the novel of Godan.

## Introduction

Godan are all agrarian novels, wherein everything else revolves round the life of the peasant. In Premasram or in Gosha-i-Afiat (Urdu), it is his struggle against the Taluqdar or the hereditary landlord; in Rangabhumi or in Chaugan-i-Hasti (Urdu), the struggle is against the pseudo-nationalist industrialists; in Karmabhumi or in Maidan-I-Amal (Urdu), it also envelops the Harijans and the labour class in the fight for the vindication of their rights. The shame-faced and ruthless exploitation of the peasant by the moneylender is the theme of Godan.

The last of his agrarian epics, Godan, is also the last of Premchand's novels, published in the year of his death, 1936. And it is his best. For its characters are more Chiseled, polished and realistic, the plot more coherent, although herein, as in most of his novels, the two main themes run parallel to each other and touch only at a few points and that too only at the surface. The ideas are more systematically arranged and the dull monotony of long speeches and harangues is broken by the periodic criticisms and interruptions by Pandit Onkar Nath, the editor of the Bijli, and in the speech of Mr. Mehta on women's demand for equality with man. Premchand's art is seen here at its best. Unlike far too many of his novels, wherein the characters die unnatural deaths, by epidemics, suicide, murder or drowning and far too many improbable happenings and coincidences take place, in Godan, these defects cannot be pointed out.

## 10.1 Godan—Analysis

Godan, a story of stark realism, is Premchand's most outstanding novel. The realism, artistry and tenderness with which he has created the characters here, particularly that of Hori, are unparalleled and unsurpassed in the whole fiction of India. Hori is an immortal character symbolic of the peasantry of this country.

Godan, which means "the gift of a cow", is a novel that takes you through the lives of Hori and his wife Dhania. A peasant by profession, Hori pays for carrying a noble and pure heart inside him.

Page after page you get the same sinking feeling that Hori gets when his spirit is crushed every waking moment by the machinery comprising of the Zamindari system, the police, the money lenders, the religious zealots, the caste system and prestige.

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Godan starts with Hori procuring a cow from Bhola. Already under a debt of 200 rupees, Hori takes a loan of 80 rupees to buy this cow. Possessing a cow is a symbol of prestige in rural India. Additionally, it allows him to sell the milk for a few annas a day. The cow is poisoned by Hori's jealous brother and the cow dies. And hence dies his source of milk for his family. Yet, Hori does not want his brother to get arrested. For this, he has to bribe the police inspector. Hori takes a loan of 50 rupees for this.

Hori's son Gobar flirts with a girl from another village. The girl gets pregnant and Gobar runs away. Hori's wife Dhania gives shelter to the pregnant girl (since her parents disown her). This is considered a blotch on Hori's village by the Panchayat. Out comes another 300 rupees (loaned) to uphold the honour of the village. He also loses his only pair of bullocks as a punishment.

No bullocks means no ploughing hence no crop and no food to eat. Having two daughters to look after, Hori suffers under the rising debt and diminishing stocks of grain.

One by one, everyone fleeces Hori. His only son, on whom all his hopes rested, refuses to help him out. The son settles down with the girl in the city and refuses to even look at his mother before leaving. The novel brings out the havoc that the political and administration system of the villages wreaks on the poor.

Hori represents that section of rural India which is trampled every day. That section which is made to pay for every sin and desire of the babus. Interspersed within the story is a beautiful love-hate relationship between Mr. Mehta, a philosopher, and Miss Malti, a doctor. Miss Malti is of the modern school of thought. A Feminist. Believes in equal opportunity for men and women. Believes that women should not be housewives.

Mr. Mehta belongs to the traditional school of thought. The debates between these two make for an interesting read. Mr. Mehta says that women are far more superior than men. By asking for equal rights, they were infact asking for lowering their position in society. He also says that qualities like love, sacrifice etc are qualities that come naturally to women and hence they should be in positions where they can give out such attributes to others.

Walking into the war-zone, along with men, lowers the status of women and goes against nature since nature has made women for higher things in life. Coming back to Hori, his entire life is a struggle. Struggle to make ends meet. Struggle to keep up his prestige. Struggle to provide for his children.

The strong relationship between Hori and his wife keeps him going till the end. Till the end, when Dhania pleadingly asks Datadin, a money lender, to take 3 rupees from her and help save Hori from dying. That one scene has left a scar in my mind.

That one scene brought out tears. That one scene made me reach out to Hori and pay off his debt. A classic of peasant India, the book is much more than what I have written over here. Hope, Struggle and Optimism – You see all this in starved, half-naked souls waiting for their much coveted God to help them out. A heart-wrenching masterpiece is what this book is. And I am in love with it.

My meek attempt at a review of this book is akin to holding a candle to the sun and expecting to shed some light on the sun. Godan, which means "the gift of a cow", is a novel that takes you through the lives of Hori and his wife Dhania. A peasant by profession, Hori pays for carrying a noble and pure heart inside him.

## 10.2 Themes

The novel has several themes:

1. Problems due to caste segregation: People of different vocation and their respective castes represent the village. Datadin, the Brahmin priest represents the uppermost caste; he exploits

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the lower caste villagers with his various religious sanctions. Hori [peasant], Bhola [cowherd] , Selia [a cobbler's daughter] represent the various hierarchies of lower castes in the caste system that existed in India.

2. Exploitation of the lower class— —Premchand has drawn a realistic picture of the poor peasants exploited by the village zamindar and the greedy moneylenders. The zamindars collected the revenue and imposed fine. Here, Rai Saheb fined Hori for the death of the cow, though he did not kill it. The peasants are unable to pay the debts in time and it gets multiplied with the passage of time. They are caught in a debt trap and they suffer, like Hori, until their end. The author is advocating the need to end the feudal system that existed in the country.
3. Exploitation of Women—the women characters Dhaniya, Jhunia, Seliya and Rupa are exploited by the men they love and are dedicated to.
4. Problems due to industrialization—growth of capitalistic greedy industrialist who exploit the labour class. Migration of youngsters from the villages to cities, conflicts and tensions in cities are some of the problems.
5. Interpersonal relationships, Love, and marriage— — Premchand as a progressive writer envisages a modern India where love and intercaste marriages would thrive. We have the intercaste marriages of Gobar and Jhunia, Matadin and Seliya and that of the educated pair, Rudra Pratap and Saroj. The marital relationship of Mr. Khanna and his wife is strained as he lacks love and respect for her. Mr. Mehta and Miss Malathi have serious thought provoking discussions on the issues of love, the institution of marriage, the relation of man and woman and womanhood. They represent the voice of modern India and mutually decide to live as friends serving society in their respective capacities.
6. Political scenario of the period— the country was fighting for its liberation from colonial powers. It was the period for the growth and development of different parties and ideologies.. Premchand, through the novel, expresses his stand as a socialist. Socialism is a panacea for all kinds of discrimination and exploitation.

The narrative represents the average Indian farmer's existence under colonial rule, with the protagonist facing cultural and feudal exploitation. It shows how the life of these characters takes shape.

The act of donating a cow in charity, or *Godan*, is considered to be an important Hindu ritual, as it helps in absolving one of sin, and incurring divine blessings. It is nevertheless, not essential. The word *dharma* has been used 34 times in the novel in different context and by different Characters. The word connotes as religion, moral principles and values, conscience and duty. It means differently to each character.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Write True or False against the following statements:**

(*i*) Hori's son Gobar flirts with a girl from another village.

(*ii*) No horses means no Plough.

(*iii*) Hori represents the section of Rural India.

(*iv*) Miss Malti is of the modern school of thought.

(*v*) Mr. Mehta says that men are far more superior than women.

## 10.3 Summary

- Godan, which means "the gift of a cow", is a novel that takes you through the lives of Hori and his wife Dhania. A peasant by profession, Hori pays for carrying a noble and pure heart inside him.

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- Godan starts with Hori procuring a cow from Bhola. Already under a debt of 200 rupees, Hori takes a loan of 80 rupees to buy this cow. Possessing a cow is a symbol of prestige in rural India. Additionally, it allows him to sell the milk for a few annas a day. The cow is poisoned by Hori's jealous brother and the cow dies. And hence dies his source of milk for his family. Yet, Hori does not want his brother to get arrested. For this, he has to bribe the police inspector. Hori takes a loan of 50 rupees for this.
- The narrative represents the average Indian farmer's existence under colonial rule, with the protagonist facing cultural and feudal exploitation. It shows how the life of these characters takes shape.
- The act of donating a cow in charity, or *Godan*, is considered to be an important Hindu ritual, as it helps in absolving one of sin, and incurring divine blessings. It is nevertheless, not essential. The word *dharma* has been used 34 times in the novel in different context and by different Characters. The word connotes as religion, moral principles and values, conscience and duty. It means differently to each character.

## 10.4 Key-Words

1. Interruptions : To break the continuity or uniformity of , to hinder or stop the action or discourse of (someone) by breaking in on.
2. Zealots : A person who is fanatical and uncompromising in pursuit of their religious, political, or other ideals.

## 10.5 Review Questions

1. Godan is a story of stark realism. Discuss.
2. What is the theme of the novel Godan?

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) True (*ii*) False (*iii*) True (*iv*) True (*v*) False

## 10.6 Further Readings


1. Premchand Pachnavali (collected works of Premchand) Vol. 20, Delhi, Janwani Prakashan 1996: 377–425.
2. Godan (The Gift of a Cow) (1936) English translations by Gordon c. Roadarmel (2007, 1968, New Delhi).

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# Unit 11: Girish Karnard: Nagmandla—Introduction to the Text

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know the life and works of Girish Karnard.
- Introduce Nagmandla.

## Introduction

Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, Maharashtra, into a Konkani-speaking brahmin family. As a youngster, Karnad was an ardent admirer of Yakshagana and the theater in his village. He earned his Bachelors of Arts degree from Karnataka College Dharwad, in 1958. Upon graduation Karnad went to England and studied at Lincoln and Magdalen colleges in Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar (1960-63), earning his Master of Arts degree in philosophy, political science and economics.

After working with the Oxford University Press for seven years (1963-70), he resigned to freelance. He has served as Director of the Film and Television Institute of India (1974-1975) and Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the National Academy of the Performing Arts (1988-93). During 1987-88, he was at the University of Chicago as Visiting Professor and Fulbright Playwright-in-Residence. It was during his tenure at Chicago that Nagmandala had its world premiere at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis based on an English translation of the Kannada original that Karnad himself did. Most recently, he served as Director of the Nehru Centre and as Minister of Culture, in the Indian High Commission, London (2000-03).

Karnad is most famous as a playwright. His plays, written in Kannada, have been widely translated into English and all major Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English, in which he dreamed of earning international literary fame, nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada. When Karnad started writing plays, Kannada literature was highly influenced by the renaissance in Western literature. Writers would choose a subject which looked entirely alien to manifestation of native soil.

In a situation like that Karnad found a new approach like drawing historical and mythological sources to tackle contemporary themes. His first play, "Yayati" (1961), ridicules the ironies of life through characters in Mahabharata and became an instant success, immediately translated and staged in several other Indian languages. "Tughlaq" (1964), his best loved play, established Karnad as one of the most promising playwrights in the country. Karnad himself has translated all his plays into English. A large number of his kannada plays have been translated by Dr. Bhargavi P Rao.

He has played the role of Karadi, the sootradhar (narrator), for several stories in the popular audiobook series for kids, Karadi Tales. He has also been the voice of APJ Abdul Kalam, President of India, in the audiobook of Kalam's autobiography by Charkha Audiobooks Wings of Fire.

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## 11.1 Introduction to Nagmandla

Nagamandala is a critically acclaimed Kannada movie released in 1997. The story of the film was adapted from a play of the same name written by well-known writer Girish Karnad. The movie was directed by award winning director T.S. Nagabharana, who is deemed to be one of the ace directors in Kannada film industry. Music was scored by C. Aswath and Srihari L. Khoday produced the movie.

The film touches one of the most sensitive issues of marital life. In folk style and form, the film throws open a question as to who is the husband - the person who marries an innocent girl and indulges in self pleasures or the person who gives the real and complete experience of life.

The film stars Prakash Rai, Vijayalakshmi (kannada), Mandya Ramesh, and B. Jayashri in prominent roles. The film is centered on three people, Appanna (Prakash Rai), his wife Rani (Vijayalakshmi) and Naga, a King Cobra, who can assume the form of a human being (Prakash Rai).

The strong points of the movie remain the amazing acting by the leading cast and an authentic portrayal and command on story by the director. The director has made some change to the original play in the climax.

Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman. It is a Chinese box story with two folktales transformed into one fabric where myth and superstition, fact and fantasy, instinct and reason, the particular and the general blend to produce a drama with universal evocations. The predicament of Rani as opposed to the name is deplorable than that of a maid. The name 'Rani' ridicules at the Indian ideal of womanhood as the Rani or Lakshmi of the household. As Virginia Woolf asserts in A Room of One's Own, "Imaginatively, she's of the highest importance, practically insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, is all but absent from history."

The woman is portrayed as dependant in all three phases of her life-as a daughter (Rani's dependence on her parents), as a wife (Rani's reliance on Appanna) and, as a mother (Kurudavva's handicap without Kappanna). In Indian society, the woman is said to be complete only after marriage. However, paradoxically she neither belongs to this world or that: her parental home or her husband's abode. For the woman, the home is said be an expression of her freedom: it is her domain. However, Rani is imprisoned in her own house by her spouse in a routine manner that baffles others with the door locked from the outside. She does not shut the door behind her like Nora does in "A Doll's House", but God opens a door for her in the form of a King Cobra. The king cobra gets seduced by the love potion provided by Kurudavva to Rani to lure, pathetically, her own husband who turns a blind eye to her. The snake assumes the form of a loving Appanna in contrast to the atrocious husband at day. The climax is reached when Rani becomes pregnant and Appanna questions her chastity. Her innocence is proved by virtue of the snake ordeal that the village elders put before her, and she is eventually proclaimed a goddess incarnate.

Appanna literally means "any man" and points to the metaphor of man in general, his chauvinistic stance and towering dominance to the extent of suppressing a woman's individuality. Rani endeavours to discover her individuality by seeking refuge in dreams, fairy tales and fantasies to escape the sordid reality of her existence. At an age where the typical fantasy would be a Sultan or prince coming on horseback, Rani's flight of the imagination transports her to a seventh heaven where her parents wait for her. So much for her aversion to the institution of marriage. Critics show her body as a site of "confinement, violence, regulation and communication of the victimized gender-self". And they also point out how she later uses the same body to rebel, to subvert and to negotiate her space in society. Appanna poses her as an adulterous woman whereas he himself has an illicit relationship with a concubine. He and his hypocritical society questions Rani's chastity and side-steps the validity of Appanna's principles. This is just a miniscule cross-section of the patriarchal society that we live in. In Indian myth, a miracle has been mandatory to establish the purity of a woman, while a man's mere word is taken for the truth; whether it be Sita, Shakuntala or Rani in this instance.

The author also remarks of the identity of tales in general, about their reality of being and their continuance only on being passed on. The objectivity leads us to perceive the story as a concept

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with its own existence and identity; and to emphasize its individuality it is personified in the form of a woman. V. Rangan says "A story is born and grows; it has life. Each story has an independent existence, and a distinctive character. All story tellers are ancient mariners cursed of keep the story alive." The Story seems to echo that in order to live, a story has to be "told" and "re-told ".i.e. the story has no role without the listener or perceiver. And cannot help thinking that whether the author is stressing the reader's role in constructing meaning or phenomenology. The reader-response theory questions the endurance of the author's viewpoint that has no existence without the reader's perception. Being "told" and "re-told" is nothing but "interpretation" and "re-interpretation". Therefore, any literary piece is only an object without the reader breathing meaning into it. So for the story to survive, it must be ultimately "passed on". The backdrop of the flames emphasizes the idea of 'passing on'.

Otherwise, the flames in the story were attributed with 'not having' the qualities of 'passing on'. However, this is what they were precisely doing at the outset. Therefore, 'passing on' has wider ramifications here, than merely physically transmitting.

Again the playwright is a man, and the story is personified as a woman. So does Man create Woman? However the playwright echoes that the story has an autonomous existence and lives by virtue of interpretation and re-interpretation. Likewise, a woman has her own existence and lives by virtue of meaningful procreation. Thus, the gist of the framework of the story runs parallel to the theme of the main story. As Rani's role gets inverted at the end of the story and Appanna turns into a mere "instrument to prove her divinity", likewise roles get reversed as the playwright (a man who tells stories) "listens" to the Story (a woman).

### Self -Assessment

**1. Tick the correct statements**

(*i*) Appanna poses her as an adulterous woman whereas he himself has an illicit relationship with a concubine.

(*ii*) Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman.

(*iii*) Rani's flight of the imagination transports her to a seventh heaven where her parents wait for her.

(*iv*) Nagamandala is a critically acclaimed Kannada movie released in 1997

(*v*) The name 'Rani' ridicules at the Indian ideal of womanhood as the Rani or Lakshmi of the household.

## 11.2 Summary

- Karnad is most famous as a playwright. His plays, written in Kannada, have been widely translated into English and all major Indian languages. Karnad's plays are written neither in English, in which he dreamed of earning international literary fame, nor in his mother tongue Konkani. Instead they are composed in his adopted language Kannada.
- Nagamandala is a critically acclaimed Kannada movie released in 1997. The story of the film was adapted from a play of the same name written by well-known writer Girish Karnad.
- The film touches one of the most sensitive issues of marital life. In folk style and form, the film throws open a question as to who is the husband - the person who marries an innocent girl and indulges in self pleasures or the person who gives the real and complete experience of life.
- The strong points of the movie remain the amazing acting by the leading cast and an authentic portrayal and command on story by the director. The director has made some change to the original play in the climax.
- Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman. It is a Chinese box story with two folktales transformed into one fabric where myth and superstition, fact and fantasy, instinct and reason, the particular and the general blend to produce a drama with universal evocations. The predicament of Rani as opposed to the name is deplorable than that of a maid.

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- The author also remarks of the identity of tales in general, about their reality of being and their continuance only on being passed on. The objectivity leads us to perceive the story as a concept with its own existence and identity; and to emphasize its individuality it is personified in the form of a woman.
- The Story seems to echo that in order to live, a story has to be "told" and "re-told ".i.e. the story has no role without the listener or perceiver. And cannot help thinking that whether the author is stressing the reader's role in constructing meaning or phenomenology. The reader-response theory questions the endurance of the author's viewpoint that has no existence without the reader's perception. Being "told" and "re-told" is nothing but "interpretation" and "re-interpretation".
- Thus, the gist of the framework of the story runs parallel to the theme of the main story. As Rani's role gets inverted at the end of the story and Appanna turns into a mere "instrument to prove her divinity", likewise roles get reversed as the playwright (a man who tells stories) "listens" to the Story (a woman).

## 11.3 Key-Words

1. Phenomenology : Phenomenology is commonly understood in either of two ways: as a disciplinary field in philosophy, or as a movement in the history of philosophy. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience.
2. Perception : Perception is the identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment. All perception involves signals in the nervous system, which in turn result from physical stimulation of the sense organs. For example, vision involves light striking the retinas of the eyes, smell is mediated by odor molecules and hearing involves pressure waves. Perception is not the passive receipt of these signals, but can be shaped by learning, memory and expectation.

## 11.4 Review Questions

1. Write briefly about Girish Karnard.
2. Briefly introduce Nagmandla written by Girish Karnard.
3. The golden rule is that there are no final truths. Discuss with reference to Nagmandla.
4. Karnad successfully uses the myth to reveal the absurdity of life in Nagmandla. This brings him closer to the modern Brechtian drama. Discuss.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) True (*ii*) True (*iii*) True (*iv*) True

## 11.5 Further Readings


1. Karnad, Girish. Two Plays by Girish Karnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
2. Rangan, V. "Myth and Romance in Nagamandala or their Subversion? " Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.201.
3. Seeta, B.T. "Quest in Hayavadana and Nagamandala." Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. 98.

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# Unit 12: Girish Karnad: Nagmandla Detailed Study of the Text

CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Introduce Karnad.
- Discuss Nagmandla.

## Introduction

Girish Karnad has emerged as the most significant playwright of post-independence Indian literature, according to the Indian critic P. Dhanavel (2000:11).[1] The critic emphasizes Karnad's humanism, derived mainly from his profound concern for the "oppressed" and the "downtrodden", his compulsive return to and reinterpretation of the mythical past and oral tradition, and his "determined demystification of the dominant beliefs and practices".

## 12.1 Girish Karnad: Nagmandla

Girish Karnad's play *Nâgmandla* is consciously anchored in the ancient theory and tradition of Indian theatre. The play thus reflects Karnad's respect for technical elements of theatrical art and also for the Indian tradition of storytelling, even though he innovates and experiments by sharing twentieth century views. In *Nâgmandla,* the author brings his drama into line with the changes occurring in Indian society and mentality. The article analyzes his technique of using different narrative levels and shows how in *Nâgmandla* the superimposed stories lead to an exemplification of his vision of theatre as a unifying, total experience. It is shown how the overall structure of the interrelated stories and plots, the triangular relationships, and the triple ending can be visualized graphically as a Mandala. The article ends by focusing on and discussing the three endings of the play, which have been the cause of surprise and controversy. It concludes that, though the last ending is not within the orthodoxy of Indian epic texts, the play must be studied and interpreted not only by keeping elements of Hindu philosophy as points of reference, but also by taking into account the cultural context of the Indian woman of today who seeks to fulfil her needs and aspirations.

Other Indian critics, in their analysis of contemporary Indian theatre, focus on its ambivalent relationship both to its classical and colonial past, and to the contemporary problems of Indian

1 Girish Karnad was born in Matheran, near Bombay, in 1938 and grew up in Sirsi (Karnataka). He writes his plays in Kannada and he himself translates them into English.

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society. Aparna Dharwadker specifies that Karnad "employs traditional Indian narrative materials and modes of performance successfully to create a radically modern urban theatre" (in Karnad 1995:355).[2] Indeed, Karnad has felt challenged by the tension that exists nowadays between these two realities in India, the traditional and the modern, and has thrived in developing a credible style of social realism.

Karnad shows a great interest in the theatre as representation as well as in the incorporation of stories which come from popular wisdom. His interest in storytelling contributes to the success of his plays in Indian villages, as he proudly admits (Karnad 1995: 368). Karnad looks for subjects in traditional Indian folklore, is attentive to the innovations brought about by the European playwrights of the first half of the twentieth century, and uses magical-surrealistic conventions to delve into the situation of the Indian men and women of today, consciously giving expression to the concerns of people.[3]

Speaking of his own work, in the introduction to *Three plays; Nâgmandla*, *Hayavadana, Tughlaq,* the playwright tells us how the cultural tensions which remained dissembled up to the moment of India's independence visibly surfaced afterwards and required authors to deal with those tensions openly (1999:3).[4] In each of his plays the tension caused by the drama's major conflict progressively disappears, and in the case of *Nâgmandla* different levels of knowledge are superimposed and different theatrical techniques are used, which permit us to discover, or at least surmise, the possibility of transcending the conflict to achieve wholeness.

Karnad says that to create his plays he holds up a mirror in which the present society can be reflected. However, he also incorporates elements of the collective tradition of storytelling (in Mendoca 2003:4). As he explains in the Introduction to *Three Plays:*

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head. The various conventions—the chorus, the masks, the seemingly unrelated comic episodes, the mixing the human and nonhuman world—permit the simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative attitudes to the central problem. (1999:14).

As a playwright, he thus combines conventional and subversive modes, as is clear in *Nâgmandla*.[5] This play is labelled as "story theatre", that is , theatre whose action is based on folk stories. Karnad found his source of inspiration for this play in stories that he heard from the poet and academic A.K. Ramanujan. Karnad explains that this type of story is told by women while they feed children in the kitchen, but that very often these stories serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family (Nâga:16-17). Consequently, the purpose of this analysis is to discover the meaning conveyed by the protagonist of the story and to study the way in which the author structures the play and presents and solves the conflicts. I then propose to show that the folk stories reveal the perception a woman can have of her own reality and that, in this sense, these stories counterbalance the classical texts and serve as means of escaping the orthodoxy of Indian epic stories.

Focusing on the four different stories which make up the play *Nâgmandla* , we see that they are on four narrative levels. The frame story contains three other stories, each one of them inside the previous story. On the first narrative level, the frame story tells of an author whose plays were so

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2. In a recent publication of Girish Karnad's *Collected Plays,* Dharwadker states that Karnad belongs to the "formative generation" of Indian playwrights who "collectively reshaped Indian theatre as a major national institution in the later twentieth century" (2005:vii)
3. In this respect, Veena Noble Dass says that Karnad has been influenced by Brecht, Anouilh, Camus, Sartre and to a considerable extent, Pinter (1990:71)
4. In subsequent references the play *Nâgmandla* will be referred to as Nâga.
5. *Nâgmandla* means "snake circle"

**Notes**

boring that the audience often went to sleep. For this "crime" the Author is condemned to death unless he manages to remain awake for one entire night before the end of that month. The night of this theatrical performance is precisely his last chance. We hear his repeated laments: "I may be dead within the next few hours" (Nâga: 22).

The second and third narrative levels contain magical elements. The second is formed by the gossip-type tales that a group of personified flames tell each other when they gather at night, after their work has ended. The Flames choose to go to the same ruined temple where the Author is bewailing his plight. When he sees them arrive, he hides behind a column from where he closely follows their stories. On the third narrative level, there is the tale told by one of the Flames who wants to be forgiven for arriving late. Her singularised tale is about a woman who knew a beautiful story but refused to tell it and share it with other people. One day, that story taking advantage of the fact that the woman was sleeping with her mouth open, escapes and is transformed into a young lady. And the song that accompanies it turns into her beautiful sari. The story thus personified on the fourth narrative level relates the life of Rani, the main character of *Nâgmandla* . The need for the story to escape illustrates the paradoxical nature of oral tradition, according to Karnad. Stories are autonomous and independent of the person who tells them, although they live by being told and shared (Nâga: 17).

The moment when the main story, Rani's begins is interestingly complex from the point of view of structure, because there is interaction between the narrator of this story, the personified story, and the narrators of the previous stories, the unfortunate Author and the Flames. The Author-narrator of the first level, who has been listening to the second and third narrative levels, establishes a dialogue with the Story-narrator of third level and he suggests a name for the main masculine character in the central story, Appana, which means "any man". Furthermore, they reach an agreement by which the Author promises to retell the story, thus keeping it alive, if it is interesting enough to keep him awake for the whole night, which would amount to saving his life.

*Did u know?* The plot of this central story, Rani's story, can be summarized as follows: young Rani, recently married to Appana, is locked inside the house by her husband. He treats her as if she were a mere servant, and meanwhile he keeps and uses a concubine.

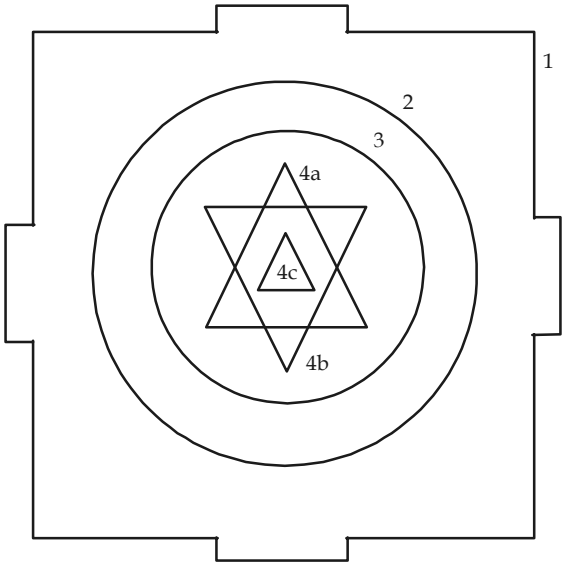
An old blind woman, who is always carried around by her son Kappana, tries to help Rani by giving up that plan at the last moment, however, and pours the potion on the ant hill which happens to be the dwelling place of a King Cobra. The Cobra ( a Nâga) then falls in love with Rani.[6] He enters the house through the drain in the bathroom at night and once inside takes on the appearance of Appana, the husband. Despite the disorientation and wonder that this new situation causes in Rani, their relationship is fruitful and results in Rani getting pregnant. As soon as Appana discovers her pregnancy, he informs the elders of the village in order that they may determine her guilt or innocence, since he and she had never had sexual intercourse. Rani proves her "innocence" by undertaking the Snake Ordeal, that is, by holding the King Cobra in her hand. Surprisingly, the Cobra, instead of biting her, "slides up her shoulder and spreads its hood like an umbrella over her head" (Nâga: 58). The onlookers are awestruck, Rani is considered a goddess, and Appana can do nothing but accept her as his life.

6 The *Nâgas* in Indian mythology are considered deities, half human and half snake, and are carriers of fertility, especially in the south of India.

Notes

In Hindu tradition the intersection of two triangles, one pointing upwards and another one pointing downwards, indicates the union of the male and female principles, that is, the union between Shiva (the Supreme Consciousness) and Shakti (the Creative Force), Finally, a third triangle can be visualized, inside the other two, to represent the three endings that the play offers.

Furthermore, by taking into account the setting and structure of the play as well as the different narrative levels and the symbolism in each one of the stories, we can comprehend the whole play as a complete mandala in graphic form. A mandala, we remember, imposes order over chaos and leads, by means of concentric geometric figures, to a centre and resolution (Cirlot 1962:192).




**Graphic representation of the play Nâgmandla**

1. Square, Base of the ruined temple
2. First circle, Ring of the Flames
3. Second circle. Acoustic wave of the song
4. (*a*) Upward triangle: Kurudavva-Rani-Appana
   (*b*) Downward triangle: Appana-Rani-Cobra
   (*c*) Inner triangle: The triple ending of the play

This graphic mandala represents the four different narrative levels of the play, starting from the outside. The outer square represents the base of the ruined temple. The first circle stands for the Flames of the second narrative level who form a "circle of fire". In that circle, there is another one that represents the acoustic wave of the song, materialized in a sari wrapped around the beautiful woman who is the personification of the Story of the third narrative level. Finally, in the centre we see the three triangles previously described. The square, the circles, and the triangles are geometric figures which complement each other and lead to the required balance of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of a mandala. Furthermore, if we imagine this mandala as three dimensional, then we can see that, as the performance progresses, Karnad is symbolically reconstructing the ruined Indian temple.

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The characters of this main story, which, as mentioned above, develops on a fourth narrative level, appear in two groups of three interrelated individuals that can be visualized geometrically as two intertwined triangles: one formed by the three protagonists, Rani-Appana-Nâga, and the other by Rani, Kurudavva (the old blind woman), and her son Kappana.

The sacred level (the temple) and the artistic level ( the theatre) are one more identified following the Hindu tradition. The Indian theatre has a divine origin according to the *Natya Shastra,* one of the earliest treatises on theatre in the world.[7] There is said that it was Brahma who wrote the fifth *Veda, Natyaveda*, or sacred book of dramatic art.[8] The *Natya Shastra* also makes explicit that the drama contains the three worlds (the celestial, the terrestrial, and the infernal) and thus integrates the supernatural, the human, and the subhuman. The mandala evokes the complexity of the cosmos and interweaves the three worlds, just as the theatre does.

*Nâgmandla* is unconventional in that it offers three endings. The question may persist as to whether this decision responds to differences in points of view, or whether it reflects a more serious aim or purpose planned by Karnad from the beginning. In this connection, Shubhangi S. Raykar has called attention of Karnad's conscientiousness. He says, "Usually the idea of a play incubates in his mind for a long time and it is only when the total action of the play is clearly before his mind's eye, that he starts writing a play" (1990:46).

The first of the three endings goes along with what one would expect in a fairy tale or folktale. Rani, after having succeeded spectacularly in demonstrating her innocence, is considered a goddess.[9] Appana automatically considers her his wife and forgets about his concubine, who voluntarily becomes Rani's servant. This ending is found to be loose, however, as the Author-narrator points out. Obviously, Appana knows that the child his wife is expect is not his, since he has never had any sexual relationship with Rani. Though Appana has his doubts, he can do nothing and, in fact, as Dhanavel says, "Appana begins to suspect his own sanity", when the elders convince him that Rani is the "Mother goddess" (2000:24). The spectator or reader has access to his thoughts expressed in these lines: " What am I to do? Is the whole world against me? Have I sinned so much that even Nature should laugh at me? ....Let any miracle declare her a goddess. But I know!" (Nâga:60). And furthermore, the Cobra cannot be ignored. On the Story-narrator's part, she wonders about Rani's thoughts. Now, after being intimate with her husband, Rani has to know that the man with whom she used to have intercourse was not her husband.

The second ending takes into account both Appana's suspicion and the state of mind of the Cobra who, after recognizing his love for Rani in another soliloquy, is ready to sacrifice himself. He

7 The *Natya Shastra,* written by Bharata Muni around the 2nd century B.C., is the earliest and most elaborate treatise on Indian theatre. In it, various traditions in dance, mime, and drama were consolidated and codified.

8 According to legend, God Indra, with the rest of the gods, approached Brahma, the Creator of the Universe, and begged for a mode of recreation accessible to all classes of society. Brahma acceded to this request and decided to compose of speech, song, mime and sentiment and thus created *Natyaveda,* the holy book of dramaturgy. He asked Indra to pass the book on to those of the gods who are skilful, leaned, free from stage fright, and given to hard work. As Indra pleaded the gods' inability to enact a play, Brahama looked to Bharata and revealed to him the fifth *Veda.*

9 This situation reminds us of the stories of Sita and Savitri, but it offers a very different point of view. Sita, wife of king Rama in the epic Ramayana, is a powerful symbol of female purity, fidelity, and endurance in Hindu culture. Savitri, whose story appears in the *Mahabharata,* symbolizes conjugal love that defies death and the gods.

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hides in Rani's abundant hair and dies. The Flames, this time, do not seem to be pleased with an ending which involves the death of the Cobra. Therefore, Rani and Appana reappear on the stage to perform a third ending, which at first seems to be a repetition of the second one. However, this time when the Cobra falls from Rani's hair he is alive. Appana immediately thinks about killing the snake, but Rani devises a way to save the Cobra. She lets him hide in her hair again, though she tells Appana that he has escaped. It ends with these words spoken by Rani: "This hair is the symbol of my wedded bliss. Live in there happily, for ever" (Nâga: 64).

Sometimes academics and critics do not wish to accept interpretations which run counter to religious or social conventions. Indian culture, says Manchi Sarat Babu, consider marriage to be "the supreme boon of a woman" because it offers her "salvation through her service to her husband". For that woman "chastity is superior and preferable to life" (1997:37). Therefore, the third ending of *Nâgmandla* may not be acceptable within the orthodox Indian tradition. Accordingly, Karnad can be seen as an author who presents the character of the married woman from within an unconventional perspective. His point is that Indian society at large is "dreadfully puritanical" and that most Indian men are "embarrassed by women who are not closely related to them". As a consequence "most Indian palywright just don't know what to do with their female characters" (Karnad 1995:359). In fact, Satyadev Dubey believes Karnad to be "the only playwright in the history of Indian theatre to have treated adultery as normal and treated adulterous women sympathetically" (Karnad 1995:358). Yet, Karnad repeatedly turns the situations and manipulates language brilliantly so as to create ambiguity and a space of freedom for himself and the readers and spectators.[10] We recall here how Federico Garcia Lorca, whom Karnad admires for his capacity to develop extraordinarily powerful feminine characters, claims that the theatre should be "a rostrum where men are free to expose old equivocal standards of conduct, the explain with living examples the eternal norms of the heart and feelings of man" (1982 (1960): 59).[11] Furthermore, A.K. Ramanujan reminds us that by using folklore, the author and his public can think more freely. He says: "Tales speak of what cannot usually be spoken. Ordinary decencies are violated. Incest, cannibalism, pitiless revenge are explicit motifs i this fantasy world, which helps us face ourselves, envisage shameless wish fulfillments, and sometimes 'by indirection find directions out" (Ramanujan 1989:258).

Still, the second ending, in which the cobra dies, is chosen as the most satisfactory ending by some critics. Those critics, among them K.M. Chandar, probably do not want to diverge from the canonical texts which, in the words of Karnad himself, have "glamorized the devoted wives, the Sitas and the Savitris" (1995:359). If the Cobra disappears, the possible destablizing element for the new home is eliminated and the value of the *akam* and the *puram*, in Chandar's opinion, would be restored to their respective places. This critic mentions the need for an equilibrium between the *akam*, which according to A.K. Ramanujan, means "interior, heart, self, house, household", and the *puram*, which means "exterior, outer parts of the body, other , the yard outside the house, people outside the household" (1989:256). Consequently, the moment when Appana gives up searching for the values of the *akam* outside the house, Rani should do the same. In this latter case, we could assume that Rani embodies the ideal wife, patient faithful, and ready to submit and sacrifice herself. As regards this second ending, if we limit the role of the Cobra to the sexual sphere, and interpret the fact that he hides in the "long dark serpentine tresses" as a symbol of fertility, the way Chander and Dhanavel do, then the ending could be convincing (Chander 1999:79; Dhanavel

10 Karnad tells us in the introduction to the play: "The position of Rani in the story of *Nâgmandla* , for instance, can be seen as metaphor for the situation of a young girl in the bosom of a joint family where she sees her husband only in two unconnected roles— as a stranger during the day and as a lover at night"(Nâga:17).

11 Girish Karnad expressed his admiration for Lorca in this sense during a conversation I had with him at the University of Mysore, India, on 23 July 2005.

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2000:28). However, the role and symbolism of the Cobra in his relationship with Rani can be interpreted as going further, confirming that Karnad has defied the orthodoxy of Indian epic stories.

In the Indian cultural context, specifically in Kundalini-Yoga, the snake is the image of vital energy of the cosmos. Ajit Mookerjee says: "The Sanskrit word Kundalini means 'coiled up'. The coiled Kundalini is the female energy existing in latent form, not only in every human being but in every atom of the universe" (2001:9). Thus, the process of development in human beings consists in moving up this energy, coiled at the base of the spine, so that the seven centres of energy and consciousness (chakras) can be progressively opened. The initial state of this energy is described in this way in the *Yoga Kundalini Upanishad 1.82:* "The divine power, /Kundalini, shines/like the stem of a young lotus; /like a snake, coiled round upon herself/she holds her tail in her mouth/ and lies resting half asleep/at the base of the body" (Mookerjee 2001:10).[12]

In the case of Rani the spectator or reader can believe that, after her sexual awakening, her vital energy moves up. Her satisfactory emotional relationship with the Cobra culminates with the awakening of her consciousness (when the sixth *chakra*, the ajña or third eye of Shiva is opened). This moment when the individual is capable of discovering his or her true essence is symbolically represented by her placing and keeping the Cobra in her hair.[13] Rani, by taking this step and declaring "Live in there happily, for ever" (Nâga:64), explicitly accepts not only the existence but also the significance of her relationship with the Cobra.[14] Thus, from the philosophical and mythological point of view, there is reason to say that the Cobra causes Rani's integration at different levels, the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, and the intellectual, and that he has given her the chance to choose and achieve liberation.

As has been mentioned above, in the Natya Shastra it is specified that drama has a role of integration of the three worlds. Likewise, throughout his play Girish Karnad manifests a unifying purpose. The setting, scheme, structure, and symbols of the play, all contribute to the author's aim. The setting is a temple, the Hindu temple being a mandala, a representation of the whole universe, of the cosmos. The four stories of *Nâgmandla* are interconnected and the plot of the main one moves towards the liberation and fulfilment of Rani, the new Indian woman, through her relationship with the Cobra. The complete circles and the complementary intertwined triangles, which in this case are part of the mandala, are symbols that in themselves represent unity. Here all of them help the layered structure of the drama to give graphic from to the essential universal pattern of the mandala.

## Self -Assessment

**1. Choose the correct option:**

(*i*) Appana which means ..... .

(*a*) own (*b*) any woman (*c*) any man (*d*) None of these

(*ii*) Rani is locked inside the house by ..... .

(*a*) King cobra (*b*) Kappana (*c*) Appana (*d*) None of these

12 As Mookerjee explains, "The human body is divided into zones which involve the sacral plexus, the solar plexus, the cardiac plexus, the laryngeal plexus, the region of the pineal gland and the cerebral cortex" (2001:73).

13 In *The Child and the Serpent,* we read that according to the Visnu Purana (1.5. 26-48), "the hairs of Brahma's head became serpents. These were called serpents because they glided (sarpana), and snakes (ahi) because they departed (hina).... But hair has deeper unconscious connections. It seems to represent life and vitality itself" (Sahi 1980:161).

14 For more information on the awakening of consciousness see Chapter 4, "Transformation of Energy" (Mookerjee 2001: 59-70).

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(*iii*) Upward triangle means ..... .

(*a*) Kuruda Vva-Rani-Appana (*b*) Ring of the flames

(*c*) Appana Rani-Cobra (*d*) None of these

(*iv*) The cobra falls in love with ..... .

(*a*) Appana (*b*) Rani

(*c*) Shiva (*d*) None of these

## 12.2 Summary

- Girish Karnad has emerged as the most significant playwright of post-independence Indian literature, according to the Indian critic P. Dhanavel (2000:11).[1] The critic emphasizes Karnad's humanism, derived mainly from his profound concern for the "oppressed" and the "downtrodden", his compulsive return to and reinterpretation of the mythical past and oral tradition, and his "determined demystification of the dominant beliefs and practices" (2000:16).
- Girish Karnad's play *Nâgmandla* is consciously anchored in the ancient theory and tradition of Indian theatre. The play thus reflects Karnad's respect for technical elements of theatrical art and also for the Indian tradition of storytelling, even though he innovates and experiments by sharing twentieth century views. In *Nâgmandla,* the author brings his drama into line with the changes occurring in Indian society and mentality.
- Karnad shows a great interest in the theatre as representation as well as in the incorporation of stories which come from popular wisdom. His interest in storytelling contributes to the success of his plays in Indian villages, as he proudly admits (Karnad 1995: 368). Karnad looks for subjects in traditional Indian folklore, is attentive to the innovations brought about by the European playwrights of the first half of the twentieth century, and uses magical-surrealistic conventions to delve into the situation of the Indian men and women of today, consciously giving expression to the concerns of people.[3]
- As a playwright, he thus combines conventional and subversive modes, as is clear in *Nâgmandla*.[5] This play is labelled as "story theatre", that is , theatre whose action is based on folk stories. Karnad found his source of inspiration for this play in stories that he heard from the poet and academic A.K. Ramanujan.
- Focusing on the four different stories which make up the play *Nâgmandla* , we see that they are on four narrative levels. The frame story contains three other stories, each one of them inside the previous story. On the first narrative level, the frame story tells of an author whose plays were so boring that the audience often went to sleep.
- The second and third narrative levels contain magical elements. The second is formed by the gossip-type tales that a group of personified flames tell each other when they gather at night, after their work has ended. The Flames choose to go to the same ruined temple where the Author is bewailing his plight. When he sees them arrive, he hides behind a column from where he closely follows their stories.

## 12.3 Key-Words

1. Sacred level : The temple
2. Artistic level : The theatre
3. Nagmandla : Snake Circle
4. Appana : Any man

Notes

## 12.4 Review Questions

1. Explore the theme of Love and Marriage in the play Nagmandla. Discuss with reference to Rani-Appanna and Rani-Naga relationship in the play.
2. Discuss the use of metamorphosis and shape shifting in Naga Mandala. How far do you think has Karnad been able to use the device successfully in Naga Mandala?
3. Girish Karnad successfully mixes the mythical, folk and modern sources and style in the play Naga Mandala. Elucidate.
4. The riddles of life are inexplicable and inescapable. The only way to cope with them is to reconcile with the enigma that they present. Discuss with examples.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) (*c*) (*ii*) (*c*) (*iii*) (*a*) (*iv*) (*b*)

## 12.5 Further Readings


1. Karnad, Girish. Two Plays by Girish Karnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
2. Rangan, V. "Myth and Romance in Nagamandala or their Subversion? " Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.201.
3. Seeta, B.T. "Quest in Hayavadana and Nagamandala." Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. 98.

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# Unit 13: Girish Karnad: Nagmandla – Plot Construction and Characterisation

CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Analyse characterisation.
- Discuss plot construction.

## Introduction

Girish Karnad is known for his versatile genius. It is his greatness that he is one of the greatest dramatists of Indo-Anglian literature. His greatness is hidden in quality in place of quantity. He has only five or six plays to his credit. The best of them are 'Yayati', 'Tughlaq' and 'Hayavadana'. Karnad is a film producer, an actor, and a TV artiste and above all a dramatist. Certainly, his 'Tughlaq' has been popular far and wide. It is true that Girish Karnad wept when he realized that he would not be a poet, but be only a dramatist. Karnad was deeply influenced by Ibsen, Shaw and Shakespeare. Girish Karnad was highly influenced by trends in Kannada literature and he took legend, history and myth for the plots of his plays.

Nagmandla is an elaborate and spectacular ritual of serpent worship at present found in Tulunadu, especially in Mangalore and Udupi districts. Nagmandla is also called hudiseve, mandlabhoga or mandlaseve by the Baidyas. But Nagmandla is a term generally used by all to denote this form of worship.

The term Nagmandla is a compound of two words: naga and mandala. Naga means serpent and mandala implies decorative pictorial drawings on the floor. The decorative drawing in this context means the drawing of the figure of serpent god in a prescribed form. Nagmandla depicts the divine union of male and female snakes.

Noted play writer Girish Karnad wrote a play titled Nagmandla in 1987-88. Like the ritual this also revolves around the union of a snake. However, here the union was not with another snake. Instead it was the union of a snake in the form of a human with another human. The play is based on two folk-tales that Karnad heard from his mentor A.K Ramanujan. The above paper will take a direction towards the idea of snake in the play and its various connected concepts to the Indian culture.

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## 13.1 Nagmandla by Girish Karnad

The play Nagmandla revolves around the character Rani. Rani is a young bride who is neglected by her indifferent and unfaithful husband, Appanna. Appanna spends most of his time with his concubine and comes home only for lunch. Rani is one of those typical wives who want to win her husband's affection at any cost. In an attempt to do so, she decides to drug her husband with a love root, which she mixes in the curry. That curry is spilled on the nearby anthill and Naga, the King Cobra drinks it.

Naga, who can take the form of a human being, is enchanted with her and begins to visit her every night in the form of her husband. This changes Rani's life completely as she starts to experience the good things in life though she never knows that the person with her is not her husband but the Naga.

One of these days, she gets pregnant and breaks the news to Appanna. He immediately accuses her for adultery and says that he has not fathered the child. The issue is referred to the village Panchayat. She is then asked to prove her fidelity by putting her hand in the snake burrow and taking a vow that she has not committed adultery. It is a popular belief that if any person lies holding the snake in their hand, they will be instantly killed by the snake God.

She does place her hand in the snake burrow and vows that she has never touched any male other than her husband and the Naga in the burrow. She is declared chaste by the village Panchayat. Later, Appanna accepts Rani and starts a new life together. Karnad gives a binary ending i.e. one were the snake is been killed by the villagers and another ending is of Rani after realizing everything helps the snake to live in her hair thereafter. This sort of a happy and a sad ending to the play is been given by Karnad which is been kept open for the readers to select and interpret.

## 13.2 Cultural Code of Naga in Nagmandla

Cultural code works on the principle of shared world view. It exploits information that persists it one culture and uses it to the best of its ability. By using appropriate cultural codes a lot of decoding is made easier for the readers.

It throws light on the beliefs and superstitions that exist in that particular culture. For example, in that culture the snake is regarded as a sacred species. It is also feared by many and there is a saying that if one talks of the snake, the snake tends to appear immediately. The Snake primarily represents rebirth, death and mortality, due to its casting of its skin and being symbolically "reborn".

The best use of cultural code would be the snake ordeal that Rani performs in order to prove herself not guilty. Traditionally in that culture it is believed that to prove oneself not guilty one would either have to hold red hot bars of iron in the hand and plead innocence or perform the snake ordeal. Here Rani takes ordeal where she has to put her hand into the termite hill and pull out the snake. After which she has to prove her statement by promising in the snake's name. It is a belief in that society that if that person has said the truth then the snake would bless that person, if not, it would bite the person which eventually led to the death of the person.

In Rani's case the snake blesses her. Immediately the society divinizes her for her supreme powers and capacity and expresses guilt in putting her through the ordeal.

The play has made use of the snake effectively to bring out many massages. Unless and until the snake was personified, given a human form, the play would not have been able to get the message

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across. The snake here through its games and acts has given the rigid hero a new way of life. It has thrown light on the new relationship pattern and the importance of a wife and her love in a man's life. It is through the snake which is worshiped for fertility that Rani conceived and it is this point on her life that brought a complete change. Snake led to effected lives of many and redefined many relations especially of Rani and Appana. To conclude, people especially the devotees, strongly believes that the ultimate results of Nagmandla is nagamangala i.e. prosperity of the village, prosperity of the town and bless for all living beings.

### Self -Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Karnad has only five plays to his credit. The best of them are yayati, Tughlaq and ..... .

(*ii*) Nagmandala is an elaborate ritual of serpent worship at present found in ..... .

(*iii*) The term Nagmandla is a compound of two words: Naga and ..... .

(*iv*) Nagmandla-published in ..... .

## 13.3 Summary

- Rani is a young bride who is neglected by her indifferent and unfaithful husband, Appanna. Appanna spends most of his time with his concubine and comes home only for lunch. Rani is one of those typical wives who want to win her husband's affection at any cost. In an attempt to do so, she decides to drug her husband with a love root, which she mixes in the milk. That milk is spilled on the nearby anthill and Naga, the King Cobra drinks it.
- Naga, who can take the form of a human being, is enchanted with her and begins to visit her every night in the form of her husband. This changes Rani's life completely as she starts to experience the good things in life though she never knows that the person with her is not her husband but the Naga.
- One of these days, she gets pregnant and breaks the news to Appanna. He immediately accuses her for adultery and says that he has not fathered the child. The issue is referred to the village Panchayat. She is then asked to prove her fidelity by putting her hand in the snake burrow and taking a vow that she has not committed adultery. It is a popular belief that if any person lies holding the snake in their hand, they will be instantly killed by the snake God.
- She does place her hand in the snake burrow and vows that she has never touched any male other than her husband and the Naga in the burrow. She is declared chaste by the village Panchayat. However, her husband is not ready to accept that she is pregnant with his child and decides to find out the truth by spying on the house at night. Appanna is shocked to see the Naga visiting Rani in his form, spending time with her and then leaving the house.
- Appanna gets furious with the Naga and indulges in a fight with him. Both of them fight vigorously. Eventually, the Naga dies in the fight. After this incident, Appanna realizes his mistake and he accepts Rani along with the child she is carrying.

## 13.4 Key-Words

1. Mandala : The decorative pictorial drawing of the figure of serpent god.
2. Naga : Serpent.

Notes

## 13.5 Review Questions

1. The characters in Girish Karnad's Naga Mandala lack dimension and dynamism. Do you agree?
2. The story of Rani is the story of every wife, that of Kurudavva every mothers story. Discuss the vents of their lives bringing out their universality and common appeal.
3. Naga, the King Cobra is a symbol of male strength, lover's adoration and an anti chauvinist male. Discuss giving examples from the play.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Hayavadana (*ii*) Tulunadu
   (*iii*) Mandala (*iv*) 1987–88

## 13.6 Further Readings


1. Karnad, Girish. Two Plays by Girish Karnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
2. Rangan, V. "Myth and Romance in Nagmandla or their Subversion? " Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.201.
3. Seeta, B.T. "Quest in Hayavadana and Nagmandla." Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. 98.

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# Unit 14: Girish Karnad: Nagmandla—Themes

CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Examine the view of Karnad towards the marital relationship between Rani and Appanna.
- Discuss the themes of Nagmandla.

## Introduction

The present unit purports to examine the view of Girish Karnad towards the marital relationship between Rani and Appanna in Naga-Mandala. The conjugal relationship between Rani and Appanna is lop-sided and imbalanced where the latter ignores the existence of the former as human being. The position of Rani is analogous to that of slave and animals. She is subjected to various forms of deprivation, violence and torture, and left with no choice and voice. The playwright fuses energy in Rani to enable her to subvert the patriarchal value system which helps Appanna subjugate her on various planes of life. He strikes a balance in their relationship by deconstructing the patriarchal value system. Towards the end, Rani enjoys the status analogous to that of her husband. Appanna also changes his attitude towards Rani by appreciating her beauty and acknowledging her existence as human being. With this Rani finds a dignified position in the conjugal life with voice and choice. Moreover, the play accommodates lover and concubine within the fold of marriage. Now both the husband and wife live happily with their differences and choices. The way the marital relationship fructifies exemplifies the vision of the playwright--the vision of co-existence. As a humanist, the playwright underscores the human virtues such as love, trust, tolerance, mutual understanding for harmonious and healthy human relationships.

Girish Karnad's deep-rooted humanitarian zeal impels him to give voice to the silenced majority through his plays. His plays are filled with the deprived, dispossessed and down-trodden who are subjected by patriarchy or upper class hierarchy. Deprived of decent and dignified life as human beings, their position is analogous to that of slaves and animals in the contemporary democratic and civilized world where the constitutional bodies like Human Rights Commission operate on various levels with a view to ensure justice to those who are meted out injustice. Karnad not only underscores their subservient and sub-human plight and position but also fuses in them energy enough to protest against the life-denying system and to shift their position to the level of their counterparts.

In the dramatic world of Karnad, women, within and without wedlock, are subjected to various forms of deprivation, humiliation, violence and torture in almost every walk of life in one way or the other. The playwright not only exposes the arbitrariness of the system where women are

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considered as a second sex, other, but also questions the way women are socialized to internalize the reigning hegemonic ideology and degrade their own position to perpetuate the on-going subordination and subjugation. Patriarchal hegemony deprives them of due chances to realize their innate powers and potentialities as human beings: A Gender equality still remains a myth--the discussion of the relationship between man and woman have been prescribed by man not by woman. Man who is ruled by the mastery-motive has imposed her limits on her. She accepts it because of biosocial reasons).

## 14.1 Nagmandla—Themes

In Naga-Mandala, the playwright foregrounds the recurring problems of women in the present-day Indian rural society. The play registers a strong protest against the patriarchal social order for its myriad forms of deprivation, violence and oppression of women in the contemporary Indian society. In the play, Rani, a native and submissive girl, falls prey to the unjust social order through the institution of marriage which impedes all the channels that can provide her with opportunities to have self-discovery, self-growth and self-actualization as a human being. The patriarchal order uses marriage as a coercive tool to exploit and oppress women on various planes---physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual and social. Rani's father arranges her marriage with a parentless young boy with plenty of wealth, but the choice of Rani is grossly overlooked taking for granted that she is incapable of taking decision. Alike many Indian fathers he looks at the marriage from a materialistic perspective, thereby overlooking all other aspects of healthy and meaningful marital life: Her fond father found her a suitable husband. The young man was rich and his parents were both dead (Naga-Mandala). Here the word is used ironically. Appanna is not a human being, rather he is a wild beast or a reptiles in the guise of man, but under the umbrella cover of patriarchy he oppresses Rani, thereby ignoring her existence as a human being.

A patriarchal social set up, like ours, firmly asserts men's superiority over women and is based not on mutuality but on oppression. The image of woman was created by man. It is what "he wants her to be inferior and he never wants her to be an equal, a co-sharer of all the privileges he is enjoying. It is generally assumed that the biological factor plays an important role in the ascription of male or female too, but the societal forces also play an equally important part in the division of gender. Simon de Beauvoir's assertion that "One is not born a woman, but rather, becomes a woman" is quite sound and appears equally applicable in case of man. One is not born a man, but rather becomes one under the impact of the existing socio-cultural and economic forces. In this play, Appanna is not born a man, but becomes one under the male-hegemonic social system.

Rani in Nagmandla is a creation of patriarchal social order which ignores the existence of women as human beings. In the tight noose of traditional marriage, Rani finds it very hard to have healthy marital and social interaction and articulate her grievances and grudges, as Appanna keeps her locked up like a caged bird. Rani longs to have flight and freedom from the cruel clutches of Appanna. On the sexual plane, she is neglected; on the physical she is bullied and beaten; on the emotional she is crushed; on the intellectual she is hushed up, and on the social she is almost ex-communicated. As a result, she is left with no voice and choice as a dignified member of human society. Marriage is not only an honourable career and one less tiring than many others: it alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfillment as lived one and mother. But here, in a patriarchal society Rani is always subordinated and treated as a second sex by Appanna.

As a young girl, Rani has preferences and proclivities; desires and dreams, needs and necessities, but she has to suppress all of them in the face of stiff and strong hegemonic system. The prime factor behind her silence and submission is that she has been counseled and conditioned to be cordial and co-operative; shy and submissive, timid and tolerant in her marital life. As a result,

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she fails to gather courage and confidence to question the exploitative and oppressive system. In a patriarchal social order, "masculinity' is associated with superiority; whereas 'feminity' is linked with inferiority," and while "masculinity implies strength, action, self-assertion and domination, feminity implies weakness, passivity, docility, obedience and self-negation.

Appanna's bestial instincts come to the fore the very first day of the marriage when he goes out to meet his mistress locking up Rani in the house with the words: be back tomorrow at noon. Keep my lunch ready. I shall eat and go. Neither does he tell her why and where he goes to nor does she gather courage to question his nocturnal visits. In patriarchal order, women are not supposed to question man's indiscretions; rather they are subjected to harsh interrogation and severe chastisement if they try to deviate even slightly from the prescribed rules and roles. The lock signifies the entire patriarchal discourse of chastity which is used to contain and confine woman's urges. This solitary confinement of Rani by Appanna in the house symbolizes the chastity belt of the Middle Ages, the reduction of women's talents to housework and the exclusion of women from enlightenment and enjoyment.

In a patriarchal social system, husband is supposed to provide security and safety to wife, but in the play, it is the husband who engenders sense of insecurity and fear in his wife. Rani feels frightened being alone in the house haunted by the feelings of fear and insecurity, but Appanna, instead of providing her any emotional succor and support, threateningly interrogates her: what is there to be scared of? Just keep to yourself. No one will bother you. Locked up in the empty and isolated house, Rani finds no one to share her pains and privations. Rani tells Kurudavva: you are the first person I have seen since coming here. I am bored to death. There is no one to talk to. Rani is impatient to vent her anxiety and agony, but Appanna hushes her up with the harsh words: Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand? In the conventional marriage, husband enjoys all privileges to give orders, not to be dictated; whereas wife is forced to go by his all and sundry wishes and whims, desires and dictates. Rani, alike other Indian wives, suffers from an acute sense of loss and lassitude within wedlock. Being helpless, she suppresses her urges---sexual, social and psychological.

In Indian society, a woman is not supposed to claim freedom and individuality. In such a situation, repression of individuality is inevitable. In tradition-bound societies like India, the women happen to be the worst sufferers as the social norms and moral codes have been so framed as to be particularly disadvantageous to them. In the twentieth century, psychological theories make the point that repression of the natural urges puts tremendous impact on the psyche of an individual. One has to represses his or her natural instincts, under the duress of socio-cultural codes and mores, to conform to the socially sanctioned roles, but the repressed desires get fulfillment through dreams, hallucinations and myths. Peter Barry holds the view:

The underlying assumption is that when some wish, fear, memory, or desire is difficult to face we may try to cope with it by repressing it, that is, eliminating it from the conscious mind. But this doesn't make it go away: it remains alive in the unconscious, like radioactive matter buried beneath the ocean, and constantly seeks a way back into the conscious mind, always succeeding eventually.

Rani, as a victim of severe repression and alienation, seeks refuge in the world of dreams and hallucinations. She fantasizes that she is being carried away by an eagle far from the world of Appanna. She asks the eagle: Where are you taking me?. The eagle answers . Beyond the seven seas and the seven isles. On the seventh island is magic garden. And in that garden stands the tree of emeralds. Under that tree, your parents wait for you. Then Rani asks him again: Do they? Then please, please take me to them. While dreaming she falls asleep and moans: But the make-believe world does not last long; very soon she confronts the harsh realities of life, on waking up, to find her in the locked house of the monstrous Appanna. Rani's dreams reveal the inner working of her psyche; they are articulation of the innermost desires suppressed in her consciousness. The eagle

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symbolizes flight and freedom which represents Rani's yearning for release from the cruel clutches of Appanna. She yearns to fly away from the dark and dreadful world of Appanna, but to no avail.

Rani, being aggrieved and upset, dreams that she is in the comfortable company of her parents: Then Rani's parents embrace her and cry. They kiss her and embrace her. Don't worry, Don't be worry, they promise her. We don't let you go away again ever. But the parents, in reality, do not come to her rescue, holding the view that she would be happy with her husband or it would be an act of encroachment on the territory of the husband. In her imagination she finds the stag with golden antlers comes to the door. He explains, as I am a prince. It is evident that she has cherished a desire that a prince would come and make her real Rani, but Appanna, in the form of monster, has taken her away and reduced her to the position of a maid to look after his physical needs. Then she alone in the house at night imagines: the demon locks her up in his castle. The demon is none other than Appanna who locks her up in the house. Rani only duty is to cook food for him. He locks her up in the house and brings home a watchdog and a mongoose to ensure her complete alienation from the society.

At this critical juncture in Rani's life, Kurudavva, a blind and aged woman, comes to her rescue, but her help is limited in time and space. Kurudavva offers her magical roots as remedy to win back her husband from the clutches of his mistress. But the magical potion turns into a disaster-like situation as Appanna consumes it; he falls on the floor and becomes unconscious. On the insistence of Kurudavva, Rani tries the bigger root to woo her husband, but the curry turns red---blood red. Frightened Rani stealthily rushes out and pours it into the anthill, but this gesture of Rani infuriates Appanna. In fury, he slaps her hard and she collapses to the floor. It is Rani who feels herself nothing without Appanna. That is why, she does not give him the blood coloured curry even though it is believed to have power enough to win over Appanna's love and attention. Rani, alike the Indian wives, is concerned about the safety of her husband: Suppose something happens to my husband? What will my fate be? Forgive me god. This is evil. I was about to commit a crime. Father, mother how could your daughter agree to such a heinous act. No tradition-bound Indian woman likes to see her husband die before her death and wants to become a widow. Born and brought up in the man-made system, she is averse even to the idea of death of her husband while she remains alive because she knows that the life of a widow is not only vulnerable but also painful.

Ironically enough, the magical potion succeeds in wooing Naga living in the anthill. Now Naga visits her at night through the drain in bathroom and puts on the guise of Appanna. Naga gradually succeeds in breaking her frigidity and removing her feelings of fear and insecurity with the help of honeyed words. Rani tells Naga: don't feel afraid anymore, with you beside me. He praises her long tresses and talks a lot about her parents, besides listening to her intently. Gradually, Rani falls in love with Naga and waits for him impatiently when the evening approaches, and when he does not come for fifteen days, she spends her nights crying wailing, pining for him. Naga coaxes her into sexual union, and resultantly she becomes pregnant, but this turn of events invites anger, insults and beatings from Appanna. At this critical juncture, Naga also expresses his helplessness: sorry, but it cannot be done and does not like to be exposed publicly. But it is Naga who brings about radical changes in Rani. Now she becomes bold and assertive. When Naga expresses his helplessness to save her from the chastity test, Rani comes out with reactionary words:

I was stupid, ignorant girl when you brought me here. But now I am a woman, a wife, and I am going to be a mother. I am not a parrot. Not a cat or sparrow. Why don't you take it on trust that I have a mind and explain this charade to me? Why do you play these games? Why do you change like a chameleon from day to night? Even if I understood a little, a tiny bit----but I could bear it. But now---sometimes I feel my head is going to burst!

When Rani reveals her pregnancy to Appanna, he beats her up accusing her of adultery with the indecorous ugly words: Aren't you ashamed to admit it you harlot? I locked you in, and yet you

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managed to find a lover! Tell me who it is, who did you to with your sari off. But Rani who has not committed any crime swears to him about her innocence: swear to you I have not done anything wrong. Women are sexually oppressed. It is reflected in the concept of chastity, a patriarchal value. It is one of the most powerful, yet invisible cultural fetters that have enslaved women for ages. Extra-marital enjoyment for women is a taboo in this ultra-modern age. But Appanna reports the matter to the village elders who pass orders that she must undergo chastity test either by putting red hot iron on her palm or putting hands into the whole of cobra. With great fear and trepidation Rani puts her hands into the hole of cobra and vows: Since coming to this village. I have held by this hand, only two. My husband. And this Cobra. The Cobra instead of stinging her ways its hood gently for a while, then becomes docile and moves over her shoulder like a garland. At this the villagers, who were determined to declare her a whore a minute ago, exclaim: A Miracle! A Miracle! She is not a woman! She is a Divine Being. The villagers fall at her feet. The crowd surges forward to prostrate itself before her. They elevate her to the status of a goddess: Appanna your wife is not an ordinary human. She is goddess incarnate. Don't grieve that you judged wrongly and treated her badly. The transformation of Rani and her emerging identity is a direct outcome of the emotional support and succor that she receives from Naga.

In the end, Appanna changes his behaviour and attitude towards Rani, may be under the pressure of the village community or because of the pricks of his conscience. He falls at her feet and says: Forgive me. I am a sinner. I was blind. Now he realizes the beauty of her long tresses and dignity as a human being. When the dead Naga falls from her hair, Appanna says: Your long hair saved us from the deadly Cobra. When Rani expresses her wish that the cobra has to be ritually cremated, the fire should be lit by our son and every year on this day, our son would perform the ritual to commemorate its death, Appanna agrees: Any wish of your will be carried out. Now Rani plays an active role in the familial affairs. She is fully confident of her role and status, and assertive of her thoughts and decisions. In the alternate end to the play, Rani's acceptance of Naga as her lover within wedlock presents a much more bold and rebellious character of the protagonist. She invites Naga Get in (to my hair). Are you safely in there? Good. Now stay there. And lie still. You don't know how heavy you are. Let me get used to you, will you?

Thus, Rani moves from the marginalized position to the central one in the arduous journey of her marital life. Though the journey is fraught with pains and privations, she occupies the central position in the familial affairs by collecting courage and confidence and by disconcerting the male ego and his inflated sense of power over women. Though Rani emerges a completely changed woman with modern outlook, entirely in harmony with her desires and decisions and true to her wishes and instincts, she does not reject the world of Appanna. The fact remains that the non-human world and the human world form a part and parcel of each others existence.

## A Reluctant Master

Girish Karnad says that, though the English writers and the thought of writing in English influenced him, it was unknowingly that he became a playwright and started writing in Kannada. 'Yakshagana', the traditional folk theatre of Karnataka, influenced him. Karnad's plays, Yayathi, Hayavadana, Tughlag, and Nagamandala certainly reveal this influence.

## Two Folktales and a Play

The play Naga Mandala is based on two folk-tales of Kannada. It was first staged at the University of Chicago. Karnad says:

The energy for the folk-theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values. The various conventions- the chorus, the music, the seemingly unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of human and non human worlds permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view.

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## Bed Time Stories For Living in Day Time!

Old women in the family usually narrate the folktales, either when the children are being fed in the evenings or when they are put to bed in the night. Though they are narrated to children, stories serve as a parallel system of communication among the women in the family.

## A Two Acts Play with a Prologue

The play Nagamandala is divided into prologue and two acts.

## The Problem Starts With the Audience!

In the prologue, we find a ruined temple with a broken idol. A man comes to the temple and says that he was a playwright earlier, who with his plays had made many audiences to sleep. They cursed him to death!

A mendicant had advised him that if he could keep awake at least one whole night he would not die. That day was the last day of the month, and he kept himself awake in order to overcome the curse of death. He then swore to himself that if he could survive that night without sleep, he would have nothing more to do with story writing.

After sometime, he heard some voices and then saw some flames.

## Flames With Speaking Tongues

Karnad says that the writer had heard that in some remote villages, the flames had the ability to speak. These flames talk to each other with female voices.

Flame 1 says that her master was a miser and hence had put the lights off early and due to this she could come to the temple early.

Flame 2 says that she came from a family, whose master was a 'lustful man'. He needed the light to feast on his wife's body.

Flame 3 says that, hereafter she could come early because her master and wife were free now to enjoy worldly pleasures. The master's mother had died and now both of them were free to enjoy.

All these flames are not mere flames, but they represent the society. The play deals with the loose morals that are being practiced in society. Further, humans in the present day do not give any importance to religious values.

## A Different Story to Tell

Flame 4 has a different story to tell. The lady in her house was doubtful about her husband and she had a story and a song inside her mouth, which she kept for herself. She did not reveal it to anybody. One day, while she was snoring, the story and the song jumped out of her mouth. This story became a lady and the song took the form of a saree. When the woman woke up, she saw a young lady, coming outside her husband's room. It is reported that these were some hallucinations in the mind of the woman. This story and song tell a new story.

## Breaking Vows

The writer-character, in spite of his vow not to indulge in any more story telling, promises that he would pass the story to others.

## The Story of Rani and Appanna

The story deals with the life of Rani and Appanna. They are not given any name in the beginning and hence they represent the whole humankind. Rani is so called because she is the queen of the long tresses, which, when tied into a knot, resembled a 'cobra.'

Appanna and Rani are married, apparently Rani being a child bride. After gaining puberty, she is bought to her husband's house. Appanna is not a faithful husband. He spends his time with his concubine and comes to his house only to have his lunch. He speaks to Rani only in "syllables." He says:

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APPANNA: Look, I don't like idle chatter. Do as you are told, you understand?

Rani leads a secluded life and then Kurudavva saves her. It is only she who understands Rani's real problem. Kurudavva gives two small roots to Rani and asks her to mix it in Appanna's food. It is believed that, by taking the root, Appanna will not go and visit with the concubine again. She says:

KURUDAVVA: Once he gets even the smell of yours he won't go after that concubine.

The first root has no effect on Appanna. Rani takes a bigger root, and when she mixes it in the curry it becomes bloody red. She actually curses herself for trying to give this to Appanna. She says:

RANI: Suppose it harms my husband, what will happen to me?

She spills it on a nearby anthill. A snake living in the anthill instantly falls in love with Rani.

The snake in the myth is believed to be a symbol of fertility. The snake takes the shape of Appanna and has sexual communion with Rani. It is through the snake that Rani understands the meaning and passion of love in marital life. When the real Appana finds that she is pregnant, he calls her a "whore." Appanna asks:

APPANNA: Don't you feel ashamed to admit that you are pregnant, you whore?

Rani is asked by the village leaders to perform the ordeal of holding the hot iron rod to demonstrate that she is a chaste woman and faithful to her husband. The snake advises her to perform the ordeal of holding the snake instead. Rani follows this advice, and holds the snake, which spreads its hood on her head and sways it gently and hangs like a garland around her neck. The elders on the village judicial committee proclaim her to be a 'goddess.'

Elder 2 says that she is not a woman but she is a goddess.

In the end, Rani gets her husband back and enjoys a happy life. Naga, the snake, who has brought about such a happy consummation of married love, wants to have a final look at Rani. He makes the final visit when they are fast asleep. Naga then presses Rani's hair to his body, ties a noose and strangles himself to death. When Rani combs her hair later, a dead cobra falls to the ground. It is cremated and her son lit the funeral pyre. Once again, the snake appears and Rani allows it to live in her tresses forever.

## Supernatural Elements

Like in most folktales, supernatural elements play the vital role in Nagamandala. Traditional beliefs help generate supernatural elements. There is always some magical power in specific roots, according to traditional belief. Kurudavva gives Rani the magical roots but the root is consumed by a king cobra which results in very interesting twists and turns in the play. Another belief is that the cobra has divine power and it can assume any form it desires. In the play, Naga takes the form of Appanna. It is by the form of Appanna that Rani becomes pregnant. So, in some sense, Rani has nothing to do with this "unlawful" sexual communion. It is with his supernatural powers, Naga saves Rani from her pitiable and dangerous plight prove her chastity.

The story of Appanna also has certain interesting touches. It is believed that some witch or fairy enchanted him away from his lawful wife. Once again, the act of the unfaithful husband is explained away through the use of some mysterious fairy. The identity of the woman who entices Appanna away is unknown and it remains a mystery. Are these anecdotal explanations intended to justify that we as human beings are simply pawns in the hands of the divine, or that these events are inevitably caused by Karma?

## Complexity of Human Life

Girish Karnad uses a magical folktale to reveal the complexity of human life. In particular, he uses the folktale in the Indian context to reveal the social and individual relations.

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Man-Woman intimate relationships, the question of chastity being imposed on married women while their husbands have a merry-go-round with other women outside their wedlock, married women's earnest desire for the love of their husbands in spite of the shortcomings of their husbands, the throbbing of secret love that Naga demonstrates by his killing himself on the passionate and warm body of Rani, and, above all, the result of the sexual communion being a male child, the "son" lighting funeral pyre and so many other potent and hidden meanings, make this play a very complex play. The village judicial system also comes to be portrayed with ease, and with this the process of deification in Indian society also gets revealed. Demonstration of unusual power and tolerance is sure ground and an essential step toward deification.

## We Wonder - The Audience Is Alive, and Not Dead!

In the backdrop of a folktale, which includes flames, snake, avatars, performance of impressive ordeals, cremation of the dead snake, and the background chorus, Nagamandala comes alive with numerous symbols, hidden meanings, and explicit and implicit lessons, even as the play bewitches the captive audience, scene by scene. The play started with a curse of dead or non-responsive audience, but we complete reading the play certainly as active and live audience! At the end of it all, we still wonder whether it is the magic, characters, events, conversations, or simply the ambience that takes us far from our mundane life even for a few hours. A master piece, indeed, from a reluctant Master.

## Girish Karnad: Nagmandla-Themes

*Galaxy Identity Crisis in Girish Karnad's Nagmandla.*

Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman. It is a Chinese box story with two folktales transformed into one fabric where myth and superstition, fact and fantasy, instinct and reason, the particular and the general blend to produce a drama with universal evocations. The predicament of Rani as opposed to the name is deplorable than that of a maid. The name 'Rani' ridicules at the Indian ideal of womanhood as the Rani or Lakshmi of the household. As Virginia Woolf asserts in "A Room of One's Own": "Imaginatively, she's of the highest importance, practically insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, is all but absent from history."

The woman is portrayed as dependant in all three phases of her life-as a daughter (Rani's dependence on her parents), as a wife (Rani's reliance on Appanna) and, as a mother (Kurudavva's handicap without Kappanna). In Indian society, the woman is said to be complete only after marriage. However, paradoxically she neither belongs to this world or that: her parental home or her husband's abode. For the woman, the home is said be an expression of her freedom: it is her domain. However, Rani is imprisoned in her own house by her spouse in a routine manner that baffles others with the door locked from the outside. She does not shut the door behind her like Nora does in "A Doll's House", but God opens a door for her in the form of a King Cobra. The king cobra gets seduced by the love potion provided by Kurudavva to Rani to lure, pathetically, her own husband who turns a blind eye to her. The snake assumes the form of a loving Appanna in contrast to the atrocious husband at day. The climax is reached when Rani becomes pregnant and Appanna questions her chastity. Her innocence is proved by virtue of the snake ordeal that the village elders put before her, and she is eventually proclaimed a goddess incarnate.

'Appanna' literally means "any man" and points to the metaphor of man in general, his chauvinistic stance and towering dominance to the extent of suppressing a woman's individuality. Rani endeavours to discover her individuality by seeking refuge in dreams, fairy tales and fantasies to escape the sordid reality of her existence. At an age where the typical fantasy would be a Sultan or prince coming on horseback, Rani's flight of the imagination transports her to a seventh heaven where her parents wait for her. So much for her aversion to the institution of marriage. Critics show her body as a site of "confinement, violence, regulation and communication of the victimized gender-self". And they also point out how she later uses the same body to rebel, to subvert and to

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negotiate her space in society. Appanna poses her as an adulterous woman whereas he himself has an illicit relationship with a concubine. He and his hypocritical society questions Rani's chastity and side-steps the validity of Appanna's principles. This is just a miniscule cross-section of the patriarchal society that we live in. In Indian myth, a miracle has been mandatory to establish the purity of a woman, while a man's mere word is taken for the truth; whether it be Sita, Shakuntala or Rani in this instance.

The author also remarks of the identity of tales in general, about their reality of being and their continuance only on being passed on. The objectivity leads us to perceive the story as a concept with its own existence and identity; and to emphasize its individuality it is personified in the form of a woman. V. Rangan says "A story is born and grows; it has life. Each story has an independent existence, and a distinctive character. All story tellers are ancient mariners cursed of keep the story alive." The Story seems to echo that in order to live, a story has to be "told" and "re-told" i.e. the story has no role without the listener or perceiver. And one cannot help thinking whether the author is stressing the reader's role in constructing meaning or phenomenology. The reader-response theory questions the endurance of the author's viewpoint that has no existence without the reader's perception. Being "told" and "re-told" is nothing but "interpretation" and "re-interpretation". Therefore, any literary piece is only an object without the reader breathing meaning into it. So for the story to survive, it must be ultimately "passed on". The backdrop of the flames emphasizes the idea of 'passing on'.

Otherwise, the flames in the story were attributed with 'not having' the qualities of 'passing on'. However, this is what they were precisely doing at the outset. Therefore, 'passing on' has wider ramifications here, than merely physically transmitting.

Again the playwright is a man, and the story is personified as a woman. So does Man create Woman? However the playwright echoes that the story has an autonomous existence and lives by virtue of interpretation and re-interpretation. Likewise, a woman has her own existence and lives by virtue of meaningful procreation. Thus, the gist of the framework of the story runs parallel to the theme of the main story. As Rani's role gets inverted at the end of the story and Appanna turns into a mere "instrument to prove her divinity"; likewise roles get reversed as the playwright (a man who tells stories) "listens" to the Story (a woman).

## Appanna as a Split Personality

The playwright gets to the heart of the matter when he asserts at the outset that "The idol is broken so that the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified". Appanna is the king of his castle, a supreme egoist. He is the prototype of Indian masculinity that asserts itself by arresting the spouse's selfhood within the four walls of the house. Appanna literally cages his wife in his dwelling as she is subject to unmerited abuses and thwarted intentions. Naga or snake with all its phallic connotations, typifies the sexual side of Appanna. It is other side of Appanna which he himself cannot bring to accept for this would require the relegation of his ego, his perspective of masculinity.

Submitting to his sexual impulses, for him, is being submissive to his wife. Therefore, though these two aspects are completely disjoint, they are two sides of the same coin .Heads and tails; heads-the ego and tails -the snake following its instincts. That Naga is Appanna is indubitable from the very outset, the beginning of Naga's entrance.

Naga: You didn't. I am saying. Did it hurt…the beating this morning.

Naga: Locked up in the house all day. You must be missing your parents.

How does Naga revisit these facts? This offers ample proof that Naga is none other than Appanna, as Rani cannot and has no scope for communication with outsiders. Naga is Appanna minus his inhibitions. At night, he stoops to the limit of coaxing Rani for his own instinctual needs.

Coaxing truly: Now smile. Just a bit look, I'll send you to them only if you smile now.

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He renders himself loving and soothing at night. Paradoxically, he sets a watch-dog against his own self at night. This symbolically represents the guard he sets against his own instinct, that proves to be futile. Therefore the tussle with himself, he gets defeated without accepting defeat, and…"the scars remain". The husband who inflicts injury at day turns out to be the pharmakon at night. The spouse, who is the master at day, becomes submissive to his wife at night against his own will. B. T. Seetha states that instinct as a creative force reigns supreme in the plays of Karnad. "In spite of the reasoning it is the instinct that seems to win."

No, let's say that the husband decides on the day visits. And the wife on the night visits. I won't come at night if you don't want me to.

However, in the sub-conscious mind—the knowledge remains; the knowledge of the duality, the dissociative disorder.

Naga (seriously): I am afraid that is how it is going to be. Like that during the day. Like this at night. Don't ask me why.

He does not want to face questions as to the existence of his duality as it is something that he would prefer to deny than accept. A mirror to his split is too much for him to digest. The shielding of himself from the mirror connotes this fact. For Rani, this is a decisive point-the mirror stands for crucial point of self-realization that Appanna's exclusive interest in her is purely sexual. This is why she retreats and refrains from making love to him when she sees his reflection in the mirror. She comprehends that there is no element of love in his attraction for her. As for Naga, even while being Naga, we can find behavioural patterns of Appanna manifesting itself; like while asking Rani to adhere to unquestioning obedience

Naga:[..] When I come and go at night, don't go out of the room, don't look out of the window-whatever. And don't ask me why.

Rani likens herself to the whale but does not know why. She thinks herself to be a creature without any rational power only with basic instincts. She is not even attributed with the power to think and is caged like an animal. In short she does not possess any persona, any identity. Her singularity is defined in terms of her husband's whims and fancies. There are various references to animals to exemplify the pre-dominance of the instincts or impulses.

The death of the dog implies the death of his will-power and therefore infuriates Appanna. The dog that was initially brought for human-intruders proves to be futile. On the death of the dog, he buys a mongoose as a guard. Is a 'mongoose', a guard for human intruders? Certainly not! Therefore, it is for the snake or Appanna's sexual self that he sets a watchdog at the beginning itself. The mongoose is evidence enough. It says that the mongoose had given a tougher fight and because the mongoose had given a tougher fight, there was no sign of him for the next several days and when he does arrive, [..] his body was covered with wounds that had only partly healed.

Consciously, Naga is not aware of Appanna and Appanna refuses to acknowledge Naga. Perhaps self-awareness does not creep in at the climax when it most obvious to us.

Climax (She turns away. Naga takes a step to go. They both freeze. The lights change sharply from nigh to mid-day. In a flash, Naga becomes Appanna. Pushes her to the floor and kicks her.

Here the patriarchal hierarchy is explicit in expressionistic terms. For Appanna, the fact that his wife has committed adultery is more acceptable to his conscious mind than the fact that he himself is Naga. For outsiders, the snake ordeal is a test to prove the chastity of Rani. However, in reality, the test is for Appanna himself to ascertain whether he himself is Naga. When the test ultimately does prove positive, the truth dawns…Appanna = Naga. Therefore he had submitted to Rani. Therefore, she has triumphed over him and therefore is elevated to the status of a goddess. Hence, a more domesticated, humble Naga.

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My love has stitched my lips. Pulled out my fangs. Torn out my sac of poison [..] yes, this King Cobra is now no better than a grass snake.

The pride diminishes. Note the references to 'fangs', 'sac of poison' and 'Cobra' that point to full self-realization.

The playwright has proposed three endings:

1. In the first, they live happily ever after. Both Naga and Appanna fuse into one on self-realisation
2. Naga suicides. For one of the two selves to survive coherently the other must suicide-an emotional suicide.
3. Both Naga and Appanna co-exist. History repeats.

Finally, some critics question the identity of the play itself; that is, Nagamandala as a folk-play. Jose George asserts that there is indeed a marginal difference between the 'real' lore of the folk and the lore that is represented and constructed as folklore. He utilizes the term 'fake lore' to address the latter. He defines folk lore as that which represents the life of the people in close communion with nature, and that which is orally transmitted. Fake lore, on the other hand, is represented as folk lore by outsiders for a specific purpose. Therefore while folklore is the signifier of a signified, fake lore is the signifier of a signifier of a signified, "it is a fake drama in representation". It reminds one of Plato's Theory of Ideas as something twice removed from reality. However Karnad himself counters this when he says," Drama is not for me a means of self-expression. Drama can be production of meaning also. The story has an autonomous existence…."

The story therefore while it lives by virtue of interpretation, has a 'creative individuality' of its own.

### Self -Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) In Nag-Mandala there is the marital relationship between Rani and ..... .

(*ii*) In Indian society, a woman is not supposed to claim freedom and ..... .

(*iii*) Rani is a victim of severe repression and ..... .

(*iv*) The eagle answers-beyond the seven seas and the seven ..... .

## 14.2 Summary

- The present unit purports to examine the view of Girish Karnad towards the martial relationship between Rani and Appanna in Naga-Mandala. The conjugal relationship between Rani and Appanna is lop-sided and imbalanced where the latter ignores the existence of the former as human being. The position of Rani is analogous to that of slave and animals. She is subjected to various forms of deprivation, violence and torture, and left with no choice and voice. The playwright fuses energy in Rani to enable her to subvert the patriarchal value system which helps Appanna subjugate her on various planes of life.
- Girish Karnad's deep-rooted humanitarian zeal impels him to give voice to the silenced majority through his plays. His plays are filled with the deprived, dispossessed and down-trodden who are subjected by patriarchy or upper class hierarchy.
- In Indian society, a woman is not supposed to claim freedom and individuality. In such a situation, repression of individuality is inevitable. In tradition-bound societies like India, the women happen to be the worst sufferers as the social norms and moral codes have been so framed as to be particularly disadvantageous to them. In the twentieth century, psychological theories make the point that repression of the natural urges puts tremendous impact on the psyche of an individual.

**Notes**

- Rani, as a victim of severe repression and alienation, seeks refuge in the world of dreams and hallucinations. She fantasizes that she is being carried away by an eagle far from the world of Appanna.
- Girish Karnad uses a magical folktale to reveal the complexity of human life. In particular, he uses the folktale in the Indian context to reveal the social and individual relations.
- Man-Woman intimate relationships, the question of chastity being imposed on married women while their husbands have a merry-go-round with other women outside their wedlock, married women's earnest desire for the love of their husbands in spite of the shortcomings of their husbands, the throbbing of secret love that Naga demonstrates by his killing himself on the passionate and warm body of Rani, and, above all, the result of the sexual communion being a male child, the "son" lighting funeral pyre and so many other potent and hidden meanings, make this play a very complex play.
- In the backdrop of a folktale, which includes flames, snake, avatars, performance of impressive ordeals, cremation of the dead snake, and the background chorus, Nagamandala comes alive with numerous symbols, hidden meanings, and explicit and implicit lessons, even as the play bewitches the captive audience, scene by scene.
- Nagamandala is a folktale transformed into the metaphor of the married woman. It is a Chinese box story with two folktales transformed into one fabric where myth and superstition, fact and fantasy, instinct and reason, the particular and the general blend to produce a drama with universal evocations. The predicament of Rani as opposed to the name is deplorable than that of a maid.
- The woman is portrayed as dependant in all three phases of her life-as a daughter (Rani's dependence on her parents), as a wife (Rani's reliance on Appanna) and, as a mother (Kurudavva's handicap without Kappanna). In Indian society, the woman is said to be complete only after marriage. However, paradoxically she neither belongs to this world or that: her parental home or her husband's abode. For the woman, the home is said be an expression of her freedom: it is her domain.
- 'Appanna' literally means "any man" and points to the metaphor of man in general, his chauvinistic stance and towering dominance to the extent of suppressing a woman's individuality. Rani endeavours to discover her individuality by seeking refuge in dreams, fairy tales and fantasies to escape the sordid reality of her existence.
- The author also remarks of the identity of tales in general, about their reality of being and their continuance only on being passed on. The objectivity leads us to perceive the story as a concept with its own existence and identity; and to emphasize its individuality it is personified in the form of a woman.
- The playwright gets to the heart of the matter when he asserts at the outset that "The idol is broken so that the presiding deity of the temple cannot be identified". Appanna is the king of his castle, a supreme egoist. He is the prototype of Indian masculinity that asserts itself by arresting the spouse's selfhood within the four walls of the house.

## 14.3 Key-Words

1. Nocturnal : Active at night, having flowers that open at night and close by day.
2. Self-negation : To deny the existence, evidence, or truth of.

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## 14.4 Review Questions

1. What role is assigned to the Elders in the play Nagmandla? How far are they able to dispense justice?
2. Kurudavva represents a woman in three stages, daughter, wife and mother. Discuss her role in the play.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Appana (*ii*) Individuality
   (*iii*) Alienation (*iv*) Isles

## 14.5 Further Readings


1. Karnad, Girish. Two Plays by Girish Karnad. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
2. Rangan, V. "Myth and Romance in Nagmandla or their Subversion? " Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006.201.
3. Seeta, B.T. "Quest in Hayavadana and Nagmandla." Girish Karnad's Plays: Performance and Critical Perspectives. Ed. Tutun Mukherjee. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2006. 98.

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# Unit 15: Mahesh Dattani: Final Solution—Introduction to the Text

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know about Maheh Dattani.
- Discuss the play Final Solution.

## Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is a well known English playwright, actor and director of India. He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. He is an Indian director, actor and writer. He wrote such plays as Final Solutions, Dance Like a Man, Bravely Fought the Queen, On a Muggy Night in Mumbai, Tara and 30 days in September.

He is the first playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi award. His plays have been directed by eminent directors like Arvind Gaur, Alyque Padamsee and Lillete Dubey.

Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore. He went to Baldwin Boys High School and then went on to join St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. Mahesh is a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science. He is a post graduate in Marketing and Advertising Management. Mahesh Dattani, prior to his stint with the world of theater, used to work as a copywriter in an advertising firm. In 1986, he wrote his first full-length play, Where There's a Will, and from 1995, he has been working full-time in theatre. He has also worked with his father in the family business. He first shot into news with his debut film Mango Souffle. He also made the movie Morning Raaga.

He is described as 'one of India's best and most serious contemporary playwrights writing in English' by Alexander Viets in the International Herald Tribune.

Prior to his stint with the world of theater Mahesh used to work as a copywriter in an advertising firm. He has also worked with his father in the family business. In 1984 he founded his playgroup 'Playpen' and in 1986 he wrote his first play 'Where There's A Will'. Since then he has written many plays such as Tara, Night Queen, Final Solutions and Dance Like A Man. All the plays of Mahesh Dattani are based on the social issues. Apart from theater Mahesh Dattani is also active in the field of film making. His films have been appreciated all over the world. One of his film 'Dance Like A Man' has won the award for the best picture in English awarded by the National Panorama.

Besides being a playwright and a director, Mahesh Dattani adorns the mantle of a teacher with equal ease. He teaches theater courses at the summer session programmes of the Portland University,

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Oregon, USA. He also imparts training in the field of acting, directing and play writing at his own theater studio in Bangalore.

## 15.1 Final Solution: Mahesh Dattani

Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions was first performed on 10 July 1993 against the backdrop of demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. It was the time when the spectre of Partition appeared to have returned, hungering for even more corpses. It seemed to be India's fate to live, if at all, with a gash in its soul.

Dattani's powerful and subtle play shows the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations as not inherently insoluble. It suggests that the real problem could well be with the limitations of prevailing discourses about those relations. Each discourse affords a generalized and one-dimensional view of the problem and is unable to address its specific complexity. If discursive boundaries could be ignored in an effort to comprehend the complexity of the problem, solutions might not be really far away. Reaching beyond politics and the social sciences, the play thus performs the quintessential act of literature in identifying the problem as simultaneously historical and psychological, cultural and economic, collective and personal, cognitive and affective. It retrieves repressed histories and scrutinizes unexamined psychological motivations, makes taste and greed cross paths, notices the contamination of the religious with the economic (and vice versa), unseparates the collective and the personal, and affirms -through Bobby's transgressive final act- the power of visceral judgement and "pure" action.

Significantly, the play's theatrical negotiation of the complexity of its subject is equally complex. The conventionally linear narrative is overwritten with multiple temporalities and spaces, represented mainly by a split-level stage and an action that takes place in the 1940s as well as the 1990s. Reading the entry made in her diary nearly four decades ago on 31 March 1948, the old Hardika mumbles, "Yes, things have not changed that much". Both giving and denying the illusion of continuity, the multiple temporalities and spaces converge in the character of Daksha/Hardika and underline the deeply problematic genealogy of subjectivity. In thus locating the problem of inter-community relations in the genealogies of subjectivity, the play charts the arduous trajectory of the project of self-understanding before finally affirming the role of subjective agency in history.

The stage is so designed as to give the impression of being "dominated by a horseshoe- or crescent-shaped ramp". The implied evocation of powerful elemental forces through this particular spatial arrangement is reinforced by the suggestion of primitive tribal passions as the Mob/Chorus comes to occupy the ramp. The "crouched" position of the Mob/Chorus has a hint of leonine ferocity even as its black costumes (specifically explained as not alluding to any religious identity) suggest obscure ancient passions. The doubling up of the self-same five persons as both the Mob and the Chorus undoes the convenient distinction between the unthinking mob and the thoughtful commentator. What further complicates the seemingly marginal role of these faceless people in history (who yet command political action) is the changeability of their identities. The same five persons become the Muslim and the Hindu Mob by turns, by holding in front of them the respective masks of identity. The masks of identity turn out, paradoxically, to be masking deeper identities, those which a violent politics of identities would gladly inter. When Bobby advances to pick up the idol of Krishna, the Mob raises the Hindu and the Muslim masks together, affirming a transcendence of separatist self-identification as well as a deeper convergence of identities.

The shifting of roles between the Mob and the Chorus as also between the Hindu and the Muslim Mob manages to effectively foreground identity as a fluid strategy -or play- of subject positions. In fact, Hardika's crisis of identity (symbolized by the split between her past and present selves, Daksha and Hardika) arises from her failure to negotiate between two opposite subject positions, each of which is unable to recognize the other. The split comes out simultaneously as both sharp

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and invisible in the scene in which Ramnik Gandhi opens the door to let in Javed and Bobby. Hardika and Daksha alternately utter a series of questions and exclamations:

HARDIKA. Why did he do it?

DAKSHA. Oh God! Why do I have to suffer?

HARDIKA. Didn't he have any feelings for me?

DAKSHA. I just wanted them to be my friends!

HARDIKA. How could he let these people into my house?

DAKSHA. Oh! I hate this world!

HARDIKA. They killed his grandfather!

The alternating utterances emphasize the absolute change that Daksha has undergone. The girl who suffered because she was denied contact with her Muslim friend Zarine and her family has grown to be an old intolerant woman who cannot suffer the presence of two Muslim boys who have sought refuge in her house from a bloodthirsty Hindu mob. The change from the former to the present self comes under blazing spotlight in a remarkable juxtaposition in which Daksha sobs and begs to be let out whereas Hardika berates her son for letting the two boys in. The one who was once young and open to the world has now become old and closed to the world.

Her emotional intransigence reflects an identity which is partial and frozen because it would not recognize the past. And it would not do so because it does know what really happened in history. The moment she discovers what really happened, her emotional intransigence ends and she begins to keenly await the return of the two boys whom she had once wanted to be immediately turned out of her house. "Do you think . . . do you think those boys will ever come back?" she asks Ramnik as the play ends.

The wearing of Hindu or Muslim masks by the Mob, which translates instantly into "frenetic" reflexes, is an instance of the mask(ed) identity territorializing the entire being, almost taking it by force of violence. The distinction between them and us emerges then with a savage primordial force. Indeed, it has no logic but asserts itself as the logic, with its attendant off-the-cuff ethical formulation: "They who are wrong. Since we are right". The intransigence vis-à-vis the other is born of a circle of darkness that the self weaves not only around but also within itself. Hardika's long years of confinement, during which she has fed on resentment and hatred of the other community, is thus a form of exile from the self also. And it finds its parallel in Javed's exile from home which is motivated by a sense of profound grievance on behalf of his community. Hardika will breach the wall of inner darkness by understanding history; Javed will do so through disillusionment. Having glimpsed the other in the self, both will then be ready to recognize in the other a self in its own right, an other that is not a threat or nuisance to the self.

And yet, significantly, the passage to light happens to lie, in the case of each, through the conscious agency of another. Hardika sees light, which ends her (self-) confinement, with the help of her son Ramnik who tells her what had really happened over forty years ago. Javed sees light with the help of Bobby who notices his friend wavering on the edge and decides to prevent his relapse into old blind hatred.

Ramnik on his part understands the necessity of resolving the self-other dialectic, but even he requires shock treatment to shed his self-delusion. He knows that not all people in the other community are demons even as he understands that there are demons in his own community also. But the knowledge has not yet touched him to the core to shatter his vestigial inhibitions. It is Javed who would give him the shock treatment:

You don't hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think you are.

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Javed's words make him realize that his smug liberality is only a cover for complicity, an evasion of the sense of guilt. Indeed his failure to speak the truth to his mother can be seen as pointing to a deeper block: the inability to squarely confront the truth in its genesis. Until now he had been pacifying his troubled conscience by merely virtuously responding to the urge to protect and help Javed and Bobby. He had not really come to terms with his conscience in which the memories of injustice done to a happy Muslim family lie buried: the shop he has inherited from his father was actually snatched from the rightful ownership of Daksha's friend Zarine's father through vile stratagem soon after the Partition. Daksha never came to know of this; she only thought that Zarine's father, after his shop was destroyed in an accidental fire, had expected some help from her father-in-law, which had been refused. And she had rationalized the withdrawal and hostile silence of Zarine's family as an instance of resentment and arrogance. The memories of her father's alleged lynching by a Muslim mob in Hussainabad during the violence of Partition had reinforced the rationalization.

Deprived of the luxury of indulging her taste for Noorjahan's songs by listening to Zarine's collection of gramophone records at her house, she feels deeply hurt. Little does she realize that her deprivation is the consequence of her innocent taste crossing the path of her father-in-law's and husband's greed to posses the shop that Zarine's father owns. And those men, in turn, do not seem to comprehend either what they are doing: they hide, probably even from themselves, their real economic motives behind a screen of hatred of the other community. They do not understand that no rationalization can transform acts of vandalism and theft into acts of divine justice. The sins of the fathers are finally visited upon the son as Ramnik carries the burden of guilt and suffers quietly for years before Javed redeems him through painful self-knowledge. Redeemed, he has at last the courage to free also his old mother of her own burden of hatred and resentment. Looking back, one can now better understand Ramnik's hostility towards his mother for keeping back the complete truth and pretending not to know everything. He had transferred his own repression of truth to her and had been evading a confrontation with his own guilt by holding her guilty. Freed, when he announces the truth to her, he does it without any trace of hostility and without expecting her to be in possession of the complete truth. Rather, the few words he speaks to her are laced with earnest consolation ("You have to live with this shame only for a few years now").

The subterranean overflow between the personal and the collective strains the relationship between Aruna and Smita and between Smita and Bobby also. Smita challenges her mother's emotional investment in the security of religious identity and asks her to see the arrival of the two boys as an opportunity to leave behind a life lived in pettiness and false security. She refuses to be stifled any longer, but does it with tactful politeness. At the same time, she tells her father that she did not share her real feelings with him before because that would have pushed her mother into greater isolation. Smita has the strength and clarity of mind to see collective religious identities for what they are and she can also articulate her urge to be free from their oppressive hold. Listening to her, Bobby realizes he has been less well equipped in this regard. The finest uncomplication of the relationship takes place, thus, in the case of Smita and Bobby only. Smita is very clear, of course after having given it sufficient thought, that she does not wish to carry on her relationship with Bobby and that her decision to do so follows personal reasons. It is, hence, a freely made choice:

I am sure that if we wanted to, we could have made it happen, despite all odds. It is wonderful to know that the choice is yours to make.

Through Smita's free and happy choice, Dattani avoids the temptation of vulgar secularism and affirms the subjective agency of rational humanist individualism with full force. Subsequently however, in Bobby's transgressive final act the limitations of even this kind of agency are exceeded in so far as the act grounds agency in the far more fertile soil of phenomenology of relationships.

In picking up the idol of Krishna and placing it on his palm, Bobby is responding decisively yet viscerally to the ringing of the bell of prayer. The sound of the bell has left Javed stiff: he is battling

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with powerful feelings of resentment, humiliation and hatred. Bobby's entire effort to bring him out of his past will fail if he slips back into those feelings. Whatever progress has been made so far in the action of the play has been through reason and argument. Bobby's act is ostensibly sacrilegious, yet it is profoundly and luminously spiritual too. He reaches out with his whole being to a Hindu embodiment of Godhead and leaves his everlasting touch on God's body. The Hindu God does not mind a Muslim's touch, he proclaims. The Chorus supports his act with its "[we] are not idol breakers". Indeed, there is a profound and innocent reverence in his gesture. He has communicated what no argument in language could. It is a strange replay of what Krishna does to Arjuna in the Mahabharata (and the battle lines are not drawn, but to be erased). When language falters and reason fails, communication finds deeper resources in order to happen. Sheer gesture might be such a resource: the body, the common ground of humanity, can discover itself as a treasure, as it does in Bobby's case. To make the night memorable for everyone.

### Self -Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Mahesh Dattani is the First Playwright in English to be awarded the ..... .

(*ii*) Dattani's debut film was ..... .

(*iii*) Final solutions was first performed in ..... .

(*iv*) Ramnik Gandhi opens the door to let in Javed and ..... .

## 15.2 Summary

- Mahesh Dattani was born in Bangalore. He went to Baldwin Boys High School and then went on to join St. Joseph's College, Bangalore. Mahesh is a graduate in History, Economics and Political Science. He is a post graduate in Marketing and Advertising Management. Mahesh Dattani, prior to his stint with the world of theater, used to work as a copywriter in an advertising firm. In 1986, he wrote his first full-length play, Where There's a Will, and from 1995, he has been working full-time in theatre. He has also worked with his father in the family business.
- Prior to his stint with the world of theater Mahesh used to work as a copywriter in an advertising firm. He has also worked with his father in the family business. In 1984 he founded his playgroup 'Playpen' and in 1986 he wrote his first play.
- Besides being a playwright and a director, Mahesh Dattani adorns the mantle of a teacher with equal ease. He teaches theater courses at the summer session programmes of the Portland University, Oregon, USA. He also imparts training in the field of acting, directing and play writing at his own theater studio in Bangalore.
- Mahesh Dattani's Final Solutions was first performed on 10 July 1993 against the backdrop of demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992.
- Dattani's powerful and subtle play shows the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations as not inherently insoluble. It suggests that the real problem could well be with the limitations of prevailing discourses about those relations. Each discourse affords a generalized and one-dimensional view of the problem and is unable to address its specific complexity.
- Significantly, the play's theatrical negotiation of the complexity of its subject is equally complex. The conventionally linear narrative is overwritten with multiple temporalities and spaces, represented mainly by a split-level stage and an action that takes place in the 1940s as well as the 1990s.
- The stage is so designed as to give the impression of being "dominated by a horseshoe- or crescent-shaped ramp". The implied evocation of powerful elemental forces through this

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particular spatial arrangement is reinforced by the suggestion of primitive tribal passions as the Mob/Chorus comes to occupy the ramp.

- The alternating utterances emphasize the absolute change that Daksha has undergone. The girl who suffered because she was denied contact with her Muslim friend Zarine and her family has grown to be an old intolerant woman who cannot suffer the presence of two Muslim boys who have sought refuge in her house from a bloodthirsty Hindu mob.

## 15.3 Key-Words

1. Rascism : The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to the race, prejudice or discrimination directed against someone of a different race based on such a belief.
2. Horses hoe : It is a fabricated product, normally made of metal.

## 15.4 Review Questions

1. Briefly introduce the life and works of Mahesh Dattani.
2. Discuss Final Solution.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Sahitya Akademi award (*ii*) Mango Souffle
   (*iii*) 1993 (*iv*) Bobby

## 15.5 Further Readings



1. Ahmed, Aijaz. In Theory: Classes, Nation, Literature. New Delhi: OUP, 1992.
2. Viney Kirpal-The Post Modern Indian English Novel. Mumbai: Allied Publishers 1996. Chaudhary Asha Kuthar Mahesh Dattani. New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005.
3. G.R. Taneja and R.K. Dhawan (ed) Recent Indian Fiction. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997.
4. Indian Fiction of the Nineties, New Delhi Creative Books, 1997. Jasbir Jain and Avadhesh Kumar Singh. Ed. Indian Feminisms. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2001.
5. T.S. Anand. Ed. Humanism in Indian English Fiction. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2005.

# Unit 16: Mahesh Dattani: Final Solution—Detailed Study

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CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Know the life and works of Mahesh Dattani.
- Make critical appreciation of the Play Final Solutions.

## Introduction

Mahesh Dattani is considered as one of the best Indian playwrights and he writes his pieces in English. He is an actor, playwright and director.

After graduation, he worked for a brief period as a copywriter for an advertising firm. In 1986, he wrote his first play, 'Where There is a Will'.

After his first play, Mahesh Dattani began to concentrate on his writing and wrote more dramas like Final Solutions, Night Queen, Dance Like a Man, Tara, and Thirty Days. From 1995, he started working exclusively in theatre.

All his plays address social issues, not the very obvious ones, but the deep-seated prejudices and problems that the society is usually conditioned to turn away from. His plays deal with gender identity, gender discrimination, and communal tensions. The play 'Tara' deals with gender discrimination, '30 Days in September' tackles the issue of child abuse head on, and 'Final Solutions' is about the lingering echoes of the partition.

It was Alyque Padamsee who first spotted and encouraged Mahesh Dattani's talent and gave him the confidence to venture into a career in theatre. Dattani formed his own theatre group, Playpen, in 1984. He is the only English playwright to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award. He got this award in 1998. He also writes plays for BBC Radio and he was also one of the 21 playwrights chosen by BBC to write plays to commemorate Chaucer's 600th anniversary in 2000.

Mahesh Dattani's Play 'Dance Like a Man' was made into a film in 2003, directed by Pamela Rooks and starring Shobana, Arif Zakaria and Anoushka Shankar. This movie won the award for Best Picture in English at the National Panorama.

Mahesh Dattani himself directed Mango Soufflé in 2002. He also wrote and directed Morning Raga in 2004. Starring Shabana Azmi, this movie is about a Carnatic singer whose life has been traumatized by the loss of her son and her best friend in an accident. It earned Dattani an award for Best Artistic Contribution at the Cairo Film Festival.

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Mahesh Dattani is one India most successful playwrights and his plays are known for addressing issues that society tries to hide or turn its face away from. Besides being a busy playwright and director, he also conducts Summer Theatre Courses at the University of Oregon, USA. He also has his own theatre studio in Bangalore where he offers courses in acting, directing and writing.

## 16.1 Detailed Study—Final Solution

"Final Solutions" has a powerful contemporary resonance an it addresses as issue of utmost concern to our society, i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another. What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental in its appeal nor simplified in its approach.

It advances the objective candour of a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. Yet the issue is not moralised, as the demons of communal hatred are located not out in the street but deep within us.

The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family, Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the knowledge his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen.

Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu Samskar and the granddaughter, Smita, cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy. The pulls and counter-pulls of the family are exposed when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek shelter in their house on being chased by a baying Hindu mob.

Babban is a moderate while Javed is an aggressive youth. After a nightlong exchange of judgements and retorts between the characters, tolerance and forgetfulness emerge as the only possible solution of the crisis. Thus, the play becomes a timely reminder of the conflicts raging not only in India but in other parts of the world.

Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solutions' is that rare look at a socio-political problem that defies all final solutions….Arvind Gaur's competent direction… intense, topical and artistically mounted, Asmita's 'Final Solutions' brought back memories of Habib Tanvir's rendition of 'Jis Lahore nahi Dekhya' and Saeed Mirza's 'Naseem.

'Final Solutions' touches us, and the bitter realities of our lives so closely that it becomes a difficult play to handle for the Indian Director. The past begins to determine the outlook of the present and thus the earlier contradictions re-emerge.

No concrete solutions are provided in the play to the problem of communalism but it raises questions on secularism and pseudo secularism. It forces us to look at ourselves in relation to the attitudes that persist in the society.

Since it is an experiment in time and space and relates to memory, it is a play, which involves a lot of introspection on the part of the characters in the play and thus induces similar introspection in the viewers. I have attempted to experiment with the chorus. It has been used in a style, which I would like to call 'realistic stylisation'. The chorus represents the conflicts of the characters. Thus the chorus in a sense is the psycho-physical representation of the characters and also provides the audience with the visual images of the characters' conflicts. There is no stereotyped use of the characterisation of the chorus because communalism has no face, it is an attitude and thus it becomes an image of the characters. The sets and properties used in the play are simple. This has been done to accentuate the internal conflicts and the subtext of the play. Theatre for 'Asmita' and

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me is a method of reflection, understanding and debating the contemporary socio-political issues through the process of the play. We hope the play will also have a lasting impact on the audience.

## 16.2 Critical Appreciation

India gained Independence, people were jubilant; however, the moment of jubilation was associated with a horrible and ghastly experience of bloodshed that history has rarely witnessed. People, who had been living together for centuries, became blood thirsty and bitter enemies of one another, in the name of religion. The barbaric cruelty against the fellow human beings arouse communal sentiments, the venom of which is still not completely washed. Many people were rendered homeless, children became orphans, people lost their loved ones and there appeared a horrible number of raped and widowed women:

"Millions of people had to flee leaving everything behind, Muslim from India and Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan. Two great rivers of humanity flowing in opposite direction along the pitifully inadequate roads and railways. Jamming and clashing, colliding head on leaving their dead and dying littering the landscape."

The shocking events and the miseries of the migrants did not end here. The sad and dismal memories of their past haunted them. Instead of fraternity, communal hatred and bias lurked in their minds. India's secularism, could not wash this hatred, anguish and insecurity. Many strange issues confronted the country - looking after the newly acquired land, rehabilitation of the refugees, decline in political and human values, assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, rise of religionalism and the linguistic problems threatened and challenged the national unity and integrity. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri writes:

"For the Indian, the most important battle for the establishment of a distinctive identity within a territorial location lay in the partitioning of India. National identities were conceived and took shape in accordance with the ideologues that formulated these on the basis of religions (and later, linguistic, ethnic, caste), identities. The gruesome rioting and communal/religious disharmony that took seed in 1947 has continued to throw up countless such incidents in independent to secular India. Such incidents and communal violence in India between Hindus and Muslims was underscored emphatically by the brutal bloodshed in Gujarat in 2002. These were some of the issues that Dattani had actually dramatized in the form of Final Solutions earlier, dealing with the recurring rhetoric of hatred, aggression, the monetary and political exploitation of communal riots, in chauvinism and parochial mindset of the fundamentalists, in the context of the India of the 1940s interspersed with the contemporary India. In confronting and negotiating responses to the post-Babri Masjid demolition and the post Godhra Hindu Muslim communal violence in Gujarat, through varied discursive frames of history and theatre, Dattani subsequently explored issues of identity, memory, suffering and loss… within the larger political context through the various productions of this play (Final Solutions)."


Notes

Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi award for Final Solutions in 1998. The theme of the play is to highlight human weaknesses, selfishness, avarice and opportunism. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clashes between traditional and modern life style and value systems. The problem of minorities is not confined to only Hindus and Muslims, it eats the peace of any minority community among the majority.

Final Solutions has taken the issues of the majority communities in different contexts and situations. It talks of the problems of cultural hegemony, how Hindus had to suffer at the hands of Muslim

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majority like the characters of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad. And how Muslims like Javed suffer in the set up of the majority Hindu community. This all resulted in communal riots and culminated in disruption of the normal social life, and thus hampered the progress of the nation.

The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual, yet they meet into one seething whole as the politicians play on their fears. In this play, the chorus continuously sings sometimes under the mask of Hindus and sometimes under that of Muslims revealing their feelings of fear and hatred for one another. When the Chariot leading the procession is broken and the Pujari is killed the Hindus masks sing:

"How dare they!

They broke our Chariot and felled our Gods!

This is our land!

How dare they?"

The mob/chorous comprising five men and ten masks on sticks (five Hindu and five Muslim masks) is the omnipresent factor throughout the play. Now Muslim in masks sing:

They hunt us down!

They're afraid of us!

They beat us up!

We are few!

But we are strong!

In Act II, the mob/chorus squats haphazardly, and Hindu masks sing:

"Of what use is the curfew? (The chorus 3). When there is unrest in our minds! Have we to let them insult us? To close our eyes while they stab us".

The scenes of the play take place inside and outside Ramnik Gandhi's house where Ramnik has given two Muslim boys shelter from the violent mob outside. The mob is in the form of a chorus, changing its guise into Muslims and Hindus through masks and songs. Inside, a Hindu family is sharply divided over giving shelter to the unknown Muslim youths in the midst of communal frenzy and violence. Even after fifty years of Independence, people have not been able to forget their enemity and bias against each other, i.e. Muslims against Hindus and Hindu against Muslims.

In the play, two young men, Javed and Babban, are hired to disrupt social harmony while others like Hardika's parents - in-laws have secretly burnt the shop of their Muslim friend, with the selfish end of buying it at reduced price.

Final Solutions is based on the apparently friendly relations between Muslims and Hindus and the simmering currents of hatred beneath. The family unit comprises members of different age groups, symbolic of past and present, stretching the plot to over a period of half a century. Young people like Smita, Bobby and Javed, present the future and Ramnik and Aruna, the present while Hardika, the grand mother of Smita, is sometimes presented in Daksha (Past) a fifteen year old newly married young girl, writing her diary and then as her grandmother in her late sixties (present) teaching her children and revealing the family's past. Major events are presented through her eyes.

The play, Final Solutions, is also the story of a young baffled boy Javed, who becomes a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of 'Jahad'. He is trained for the terrorist activities and sabotaging. He is sent to a Hindu 'Mohalla' where a 'Rath Yatra' is taking place. Javed is so over-whelmed with the fervour of 'Jehad' that he throws the first stone on the 'Rath' causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the 'Pujari' and crashing down of the 'Rath'. Bobby a close friend of Javed, saves him from the violent mob and gets him sehtler in Ramnik Gandhi's house, where causes of Hindus and Muslims hatred are being discussed and strange secrets of terror, greed, avarice and communal hatred are being revealed.

**Notes**

The details of stage given in the play help the audience to experience the shifts in time, Dattani keeps shuffling the frames:-

"Within the confines of the ramp is a structure suggesting the house of Gandhi's with just wooden blocks for furniture. However upstage perhaps as an elevation is a detailed kitchen and a Pooja room. On another level is a room with the roll top desk and an oil lamp converted to an electric one, suggesting that the period is late 1940's. This belongs to the young Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen…. Hardika should be positioned and lit in such way that entire action of the play is seen through her eyes".

When the curtain rises, we find Daksha, the newly wed bride, going through her diary dated March 31, 1948. Considering her diary as her sole friend in the new environment of her in-laws, she is sharing her secrets, experiences and views with her diary. The diary begins with the shattered dreams of a young girl who wanted to be a singer like Noor Jahan, but who has been married and confined to four walls of her in-laws house. This suggests how most of us have to live a life of unfulfilled desires. This is a very lengthy monologue of Daksha but is written in the style of a spoken dialogue. She is narrating the horrible incidents of the Partition, which are still haunting her mind ever after one year.

"We… gained independence… My father had fought for that hour. He said he was happy we were rid of the Britishers… He said that before leaving, they had let loose the dogs. I hated to think that he was talking about my friends' fathers… But that night in Hussainabad in our ancestor's house… When I heard then outside--- I knew that they were thinking the same of us. And I knew that I was thinking the same, like my father".

The young girl immediately changes into the old Hardika:

"I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl's childish scribble. And an old woman's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed much".

After fifty year of marriage, Hardika is advising Aruna her daughter-in-law: "Be careful I said. The dogs have been let loose". There seems to be no change even after so much education and development. It is sad that over after fifty years of Independence, the same things are happening, the whole story is presented in a series of scenes and memories, dialogues, images and sudden shifts in time.

Hardika's wounds caused by the killing of her father in communal frenzy during Partition become fresh again. She is terrorized when she finds two Muslims boys in her house. She does not like her son Ramnik giving them shelter from the mob outside. When she is alone with the boys, she asks them to leave India and go to Pakistan for good, as she still doubts the commitment of Muslims to the nation.

Hardika : Have you ever thought of going to Pakistan?

Bobby : No

Hardika : Why not?

Javed : I prefer Dubai

Hardika : There you can live the way you want without blaming other people for your failure like we did many year ago.

Her problems have no meaning for Bobby and Javed and their problems have no meaning for her. Hardika and Javed are easily excited and are kept in dark about the reality of the things. The death of Hardika's father at the hands of Muslims is of no concern for Bobby and Javed, and Javed's sister's safety has no meaning for Hardika. Their experiences are their own. Each of them is trapped in his/her own experiences.

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Hardika and Javed both have the bitter tastes of the minority community. Hardika's father was murdered because they were member of the minority Hindu community in Pakistan during Partition and Javed has become a terrorist because he is from the minority Muslim community in India. Javed explains to Ramnik his reasons for involving himself in terrorism and acts of sabotage on the Hindu procession (Rath Yatra).

"Anyone sitting at home, sipping tea and reading the newspapers will say that it is obvious that a minority would never start a riot, we are too afraid that it had to be politically motivated.

The selfish and petty politicians still play with the emotions of the young people like Javed and Babban, instigate them to create violence and use them for their own ends. Dattani has conveyed the same message in Final Solutions, where Bobby and Javed long to be amongst the majority section of the society. Javed tells Ramnik:

Javed : It must feel good

Ramnik : What?

Javed : Being in the majority

Ramnik : Yes, I never thought of it.

Javed : After feeling good you are in the majority?

Ramnik : No, about being the majority.

Javed : But Sir, it is in your every move. You must know. You can offer milk to us. You can have an angry mob outside your door. You can play in civilized host. Because you know you have peace hidden inside your armpit.

Javed, who became a victim of their plans, narrates his horrible experience:

It is a terrible feeling. Being disillusioned. (Pause) Don't we all have anger and frustration? Am I so unique? Now that I am alone… I hate myself. It was different when I used to attend the meetings. I was swayed by what now appears to me as cheap sentiment. They always talked about motherland and fighting to save our faith and how we should get four of theirs for every one of ours".

Javed explains how when he was following the Hindu 'Rath' someone at first put a stone in his hand and then a knife. Javed hit the procession hard. In the words of Babban, who was a witness to this all.

'… He was possessed!... He was insane.. I clung to him putting my arm around his waist trying to hold him back. I was dragged by his force… I pushed him aside just as the chariot began to keel over; we escaped in the panic and confusion'

Visualizing Javed under the spell at that time, Bobby says:

Why did Javed threw stone and climbed the Rath and hit the Pujari, because he was told that the Hindus were taking the procession of their Gods prodding them… to wipe us out of existence…"

However, there is a hidden human heart in Javed. Screaming with pleasure, Javed, in the Carnival, moves on the giant wheel. But soon his joy ride is over as the pujari looked at the knife in his hand, begs him for mercy. His frenzy is over and he wishes to be a normal human being. He is not able to kill the pujari. Explaining this Javed tells Bobby:

"I moved to the Chariot, pushing people away… I was in the carnival… screaming with pleasure. And I came crashing down, down. I wanted to get off but I could not! The pujari backed away, his last words were his god's name. He looked up at the knife… He begged for mercy but I couldn't hear him at all! There were screams all around and I was screaming too, but no longer with joy as fear came faster and faster confusing me! I got nauseous and cried. Whey am I here? What am I doing.

This is a brilliant piece of Dattani's dialogue, what Javed felt at that time can be experienced through it. It provides a vivid picture of human psychology. Javed's frenzy and change of mind at that particular movement, pujari's imploring for mercy and the mob's tumultuousness.

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Bobby seems to be wise enough to understand both Aruna and Javed's view points well. He reads out Javed's feelings to Ramnik and tries to convince Aruna that God is not biased by picking up the idol and grasp it in his hands: "you can not remove my smell with sandel paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to human being who believes, tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe that is the strongest fragrance in the world" by doing so, Bobby at the same time hurts the sentiments of Aruna, a Hindu woman, when, infact, the Muslim religion does not allow any women to ever enter their Mosques, showing open disrespect towards women; however, hurting Aruna's feelings can be a small offence on Bobby's part when Aruna, perturbed over this action cries "Oh! Is there nothing left that is sacred in this world". He tries to calm her by the logic of fraternity and forgiveness: "The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another nothing can be destroyed… And if you are willing to forget. I'm willing to tolerate". Later on Aruna herself admits to god's oneness. Through dialogues and reflections like these, Dattani makes a strong plea for humanism, love and understanding.

Smita, Aruna's daughter, is a young college student. She is content with whatever her mother has taught her at home, she follows her directions and obeys her by performing all the rituals, till she meets Bobby, a Muslim boy and for a short while, falls in love with him. When she comes to know that Bobby is engaged to Tasneem, she is disappointed, her own experience forces her to introspect and question the rituals she has been blindly performing. Aruna, the mother, is shocked at the queer behavior of her daughter, she declares that she respects all the religions:

"Please try to understand. We have nothing against you. It is only that we have our own customs and - And… we are equal… All religion is one. Only the ways to God are many."

But Smita is ignorant of the rituals in Muslim religion so she ridicules her mother for not allowing the Muslim boys to be fed along with them or to let them fill water from the holy pitcher. And she shouts at her, "… you have to admit you are wrong". When Aruan asks her, 'Does being a Hindu stifle you? Smita bluntly replies. "No living with one does… Because you know they don't believe in all the things that you feel are true. Doesn't that make your belief that much more weak? Do two young boys make you so insecure ? Come on mummy. This is a time for strength! I am so glad that these two dropped in. We have never spoken about what makes us too different from each other. We would have gone on living our lives with our petty similarities?

Aruna feels hurt and asks her daughter not to be so cruel "you can stop being so cruel… . Smita replies, "I am not sorry. I said it… I am glad". She feels elated in saying so in the presence of two Muslim boys because she is having an inferiority complex. Here, her religious education seems to be shallow because she has not been advised on the necessity of the rituals. On the other hand, Bobby is so impressed with the fact that Smita enjoys more freedom with her mother than he does:

I never could express my feelings as well as you do. May be my religion oppressed me for more.

For Javed, religion is more stifling as Bobby says, "Javed finds the whole world stifling". Ramnik, who is not able to understand Javed and Babban's indulgence in acts of violence and sabotage, tries to teach the Muslim boys a lesson and gives them a good piece of his mind. And through this discourse, comes to light the hard facts of their lives. In the end, he praises the boys for their courage in fighting and questioning things.

Dattani is trying to show, probably how fundamentalism is born out of fear of marginality. He endeavors to show that it may turn towards closures and how closures do not facilitate or permit authentic debate.

Bobby has changed his name to Bobby from Babban simply because he does not like to expose his identity as a minority member. Ramnik, who seems to be quite liberal, intelligent and understanding stands exposed for his hypocrisy in the end. Ramnik knows it very well that his father and his grandfather had burnt the shops of their Muslim friends. He suffers from the complex and is

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willing to compensate by offering them jobs. But it never occurs to him that killing of Hardika's father could have happened to revenge. He praises Bobby for helping Javed, in doing away with his false pride and faith in his religion. Ramnik tells Bobby. "You are brave. Not every one can get off. For some of us, it is not ever possible to escape".

This goes on in Ramnik's mind and he wants to make penitence for it. No one in the house is familiar with this truth. The question raised by the young Muslim boys forces Ramnik to confess and lose his mind. In the end he tells Hardika that her husband had burnt his Muslim friend's shop because Ramnik knows that she had only few year to live now so they would not have to suffer long for it. Ramnik tells Hardika:

"I just can't enter that shop any more… I didn't have to face to tell anyone. For me there is no getting off. No escape. It is their shop. It is the same burnt shop we bought from them, at half its value. And we burnt it. You husband. My father. And his father. They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred… You have to live with the shame only for a few years now".

Ramnik finds it hard to keep all the secrets burning in his mind. His agony is with him only since he does not want his wife, Aruna, to suffer from the agony of this sin. That is why Aruna is busy with her daily rituals as usual, even after a fight with Smita over the rituals. She is shocked by the rude behavior of her daughter who is not willing to change her ways. She is very proud of her ancestral past and Ramnik does not want to shelter it. When she wants to know about Ramnik's anxiety, he simply says, "there are things, that are better left unsaid". He desperately wishes the boys to accept a job so that he can liberate himself from his pain and also absolve himself from a feeling of guilt.

In the character of Javed, Dattani has portrayed the pathetic life of a terrorist who is never at peace with himself or with others. Javed has an outrageous nature; his emotions are his revulsions make him a puppet in the hands of politicians. He used to be like a hero in his school; good in studies and cricket; 'smart and cocksure'. A minor incident changes his life and old fanatic Hindu man picks up the letter kept in his house by Javed, with the help of a cloth and also wiped the gate touched by Javed and that leads him to terrorism. The incident irritates and agitates him and the next day he threw pieces of cow meat in the backyard of the old man. Suddenly, his friends stopped talking to him, "And for Javed he was - in his own eyes no longer the neighbourhood hero" (FS Act III, 201). Such persons easily catch the eyes of selfish men who lure them towards more and more repulsive acts. Even his parents disown him. Smita tells her father: "They threw him out. He did not leave them, His father threw him out".

Still Javed has a warm heart. Such allegations about him make him sob and remorseful. Babban, a sincere friend of his, is always there to bring him back to normal life. But it is very difficult to rebuild the image of such persons in the society. When Bobby tells Ramnik, "He did not do it for money… They did not hire him. He volunteered". Ramnik says, "Doesn't that make him even more repulsive". Javed's own parents do not understand him let alone the outsiders. Hardika does not like him, though she does not have any complaints against any of the two yet for Javed she says, "I don't like the one called Javed, I hated him". It is a tragedy that people like Javed who once fall victim to terrorism cannot lead a normal life. Society refuses to accept them. And often they end their lives either in a fight or become target of police firing or commit suicide. In the 21st century they are rather prepared to die with their target like the suicide bombers. Javed tells Ramnik that no one from the police would come to arrest him and that he becomes a victim of mob's fury only because the trouble shooters along with him were not paid for overtime.

"May be they are not paid over time…. And they attacked us! They are not very systematic. Next time they should have a sound of introductions so that we don't end up killing each other. At least not unintentionally".

Abandoned by the family, discarded by the society, he resorts to violence. Smita again tells her father about them.

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They hire him! They hire such people and… those parties. They hire him! That is how he makes a living. They bring him and many more to the city to create riots. To… to throw the first stone".

They too, like others long for love and care. Javed loves his sister Tasneem very much. And he does not want Smita to come in the way of her love for Bobby. "To me, my sister's happiness means more than anything else". K. Satchinand comments on the problems of communalism.

"Communalism being the worst form of materialism divorced from being anything that is sacred and oriented towards worldly wealth and power, can truly be combated by a higher form of the sacred that combines the secular ideal of human equality, democratic awareness, identification with the suffering alleviation of by poverty to resistance to a deep inner inquiry and belief in the holiness of all forms of life, those who turn religion as mean to attain state, power and world status are indeed the most irreligious of all, for they profane the most hollowed on usurp even the last refuge of the spirit from a world where the best lack all the conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity by joining the ignorant armies that class might".

Dattani very successfully seeks to dismantle this assumption and to recover and reclaim the live of the people on the margins. Laying his hopes on the youth like Smita and Babban, Dattani finds the Final Solutions with them only. This play is a critique of violence. It is not overtly didactic but does make a forceful appeal for love and broader understanding, transcending the divides has rightly proved that the demons of communal hatred may not be out on the street, out they may be lurking inside us. They need to be exorcised.

### Self -Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Dattani started working in theatre from ..... .

(*ii*) Babban is a moderate while Javed is an ..... .

(*iii*) The Final Solutions is the story of a young baffled boy ..... .

(*iv*) Bobby has changed his name from ..... .

## 16.3 Summary

- Mahesh Dattani is considered as one of the best Indian playwrights and he writes his pieces in English. He is an actor, playwright and director.
- After his first play, Mahesh Dattani began to concentrate on his writing and wrote more dramas like Final Solutions, Night Queen, Dance Like a Man, Tara, and Thirty Days. From 1995, he started working exclusively in theatre.
- "Final Solutions" has a powerful contemporary resonance an it addresses as issue of utmost concern to our society, i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another.
- The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family, Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the knowledge his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen.
- 'Final Solutions' touches us, and the bitter realities of our lives so closely that it becomes a difficult play to handle for the Indian Director. The past begins to determine the outlook of the present and thus the earlier contradictions re-emerge.

Notes

- Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi award for Final Solutions in 1998. The theme of the play is to highlight human weaknesses, selfishness, avarice and opportunism. Woven into the play are the issues of class and communities and the clashes between traditional and modern life style and value systems. The problem of minorities is not confined to only Hindus and Muslims, it eats the peace of any minority community among the majority.
- The play, Final Solutions, is also the story of a young baffled boy Javed, who becomes a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of 'Jahad'. He is trained for the terrorist activities and sabotaging. He is sent to a Hindu 'Mohalla' where a 'Rath Yatra' is taking place. Javed is so over-whelmed with the fervour of 'Jehad' that he throws the first stone on the 'Rath' causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the 'Pujari' and crashing down of the 'Rath'. Bobby a close friend of Javed, saves him from the violent mob and gets him sehtler in Ramnik Gandhi's house, where causes of Hindus and Muslims hatred are being discussed and strange secrets of terror, greed, avarice and communal hatred are being revealed.
- The details of stage given in the play help the audience to experience the shifts in time, Dattani keeps shuffling the frames.

## 16.4 Key-Words

1. Gender discrimination : The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.
2. Prejudices : Pre-conceived opinion not based on reason or experience bias.

## 16.5 Review Questions

1. Discuss the role of Javed Ramnik.
2. Briefly discribe the play Final Solution. What does Dattani try to provide by this play.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1995 (*ii*) Aggressive youth
   (*iii*) Javed (*iv*) Babban

## 16.6 Further Readings


1. Manoher Malgonker, A Bend in The Ganges (Delhi : Oriental Paperback, 1994) 355.
2. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri. Contemporary Indian Writer in English: Mahesh Dattani (Delhi : Foundation Books, 2005), 77-78.
3. Mahesh Dattani. Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), 168. Subsequent reference are incorporated in the text-with an abbreviation, FS Satchinand K. Indian Literature: Position and Preposition (Delhi: Pencraft Internat.

# Unit 17: Mahesh Dattani: Final Solution—Plot Construction

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Introduce Mahesh Dattani as the best known Indian playwright.
- Discuss the Plot Construction.

## Introduction

One of the best known Indian playwrights writing in English, Mahesh Dattani is also a stage director, screen writer and film maker. His published works include Final Solutions and Other Plays, Tara and Collected Works published by Penguin India in two volumes.

In 1998 Mahesh Dattani won the prestigious central Sahitya Akademi Award for his book Final Solutions and Other Plays, the highest award for a literary work in the country. Mahesh is the first playwright writing in English to receive this award.

Today his plays are produced in all the major cities of India. His works have been produced in cities outside the country as well including London, Leicester, New York, Washington DC, Sydney, Colombo and Dubai. Most of his plays have been translated and performed in Hindi, Gujarati and Kannada.

## 17.1 Final Solution

Ramnik, the father carries with him the burden of the guilt of his father's black deeds, transferring some of the resentment to his mother. Hardika, Aruna, his Wife and Smita, his daughter both hit on at each other for no apparent reason. The entire family is of course, putted again the back deep of a root. Tom City Zarine and the other guests from the post make an entry in the dramatic device that Dattani uses to show his time-shifts-Daksha, the young Hardika whose voice will resonate through the play inter weaving the post with present. The play now assumes a wholly different perspective even as the familial tensions continue within the home and are set off by communal tensions outside. The outside (Babban and Javed) is in a sense allowed entry, after severe resistance from within (Aruna and Hardika) and then begins the extortion of the fragile familial ties. Several scenes establish the bond between Aruna and Smita, with Ramnik, the father often being made to feel isolated. But with the instruction of Babban and Javed, Smita reveals her true sensibility and fees herself of the 'stifling' prejudices of her mother, at the same time trying to be fair to her.

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Ramnik, too has never revealed the guilt of the post of his mother, saving her the weight of the burden than he has had to carry all alone.

The mob/chorus comprising five men and ten marks on stick five Hindu and five Muslim marks, is the omnipresent factor through out the play, crunching on the horseshoe shaped sump that dominates the space of the stage which is otherwise split up 4 into multilevel sets. The marks lie significantly strewn all over the ramp, to be worn when required. Dattani carefully uses the same five men in black to double for any given religious group when they assume the role of the mob, which they do in a stylized fashion. The living area is not furnished except for the realistic level that functions as the kitchen and the Pooja-room and another period room suggesting the 1940s where Hardika/Daksha are to revisit the past. The play infect begins with such a visit through the opening scene where Daksha sets beginning the process of recording lived history. Criss-crossing a whole gamut of memories that are to construct the character that she is to become- Hardika "After forty years - I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl is childish scribble. An old women's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed that much," Things have indeed not changed much. The space of the stage is thick with ominous cries that reverberate and the same hatred and intolerance for the other still sents the air stones had come crashing down on Daksha's records sheltering Shamshad Begum, Noorjahan, Suraiya, "Those beautiful voices. Cracked…" like her friendship with Zarina. Forty years hence, her son Ramnik attempts to sight a few wrongs taking in Babban and Javed and protecting them against the fury of the mob and meanwhile, the audience witnesses the dialogic rational of both the sides "should we swallowed up? Till they can not recognize us? Should we melt into anonymity so they can not hound us? Lose ourselves in a shapeless man? Should we? Can we? "What must we do? To become acceptable? Must we lose our identity? …oh what a curse it is to be losing in number!" "Why did they stay? This is not their land. They have got what they wanted. So why stay? They stay to spy on us. Their hearts belong there. But they live on our land." and soon. Until the distinctive identities vanish in the ambiguity of the mask less mob asking for blood, a threat to all parties. The work of Frantz Fanon, the influential thinker on the effects of racism and colonization may be found relevant here. In his analysis of the struggle of the Algerian population against their French put forward the idea of photogenic. Where he explore how mechanisms of othering influence the self. How does phobia the irrational fear of the other, grip one's mind? The inclination is to detach oneself from the other. Such a distancing is achieved through objectification reducing the other to on object upon which it is easy to inflict violence. At many places in the play Dattani would have us inflict pain on the other would be to look written oneself and recognize the fear for it is and hence resist the need to displace it. In the play Javed gives voice to the individual participating in such riots. "To short and scream like a child on the giant wheel in the carnival. The first screams one of pleasure of sensing an unusual freedom. And them - it becomes nightmarish as your world is way below and suddenly you come crashing down and you want to get off. But you can not. You don't want it any more. It is the same feeling over and over again. You scream with pain and horror but there is no one listening to you. Everyone is alone in their own cycles of joy and terror. The feelings come faster and faster and they confuse you with the blur created by them speed. You get nauseers and you cry to yourself why I am here? What am I doing here? The joyride gets our and you get off. And are never sure again". At this point we could also consider the forcibility of competing versions of history and the tensions between different communities. While the hatred is all too real it is also true that brutality and compassion co-exist and give resonance to one another. The riots saw people a faulting each other. But they also jeopardized their own safety to save the others. With in these inteve and remove pressures of clashing cultures are embedded pressures of a different kind. Time and spaces merge and intermingle, as histories are relived.

The mercenary gains that one party derives from the communal riots of the past is the baggage of guilt that Rammik has caused for long, this is revealed to a crushed Hardika, who seemed secure

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in her hatred of the other party, Sheltering her same of being in the right. It also explains the reasons for Ramnik's extreme tolerance. The smug and often parsimonies Aruna is Shaken out of her compliancy through Smita's out bur. St against her rigid and restrictive practices that have for long choked her. Dattani here manages to intricately interweave the individual strands of family identity into the larger picture. "It stifles me! Yes! I can see so clearly how wrong you are. You access me of running away from my religion. Would you have listened to me if I told you were wrong? Again, do two young boys make you so insecure? Come on, Mummy. This is a time for strength. I am so glad these two dripped in. We would have never spoken about what makes us so different from each other. We would have gone on living our lives with our pretty similarities. The diminutive Smita suddenly gains stature and individual identity. Unafraid to speak up for what she thinks is right maintaining that she had kept her silence only to remain non-partison, to both her parents. So does the initially unassertive Bobby (Babban). Who hides behind a name that conceals the identity into which he was born, and with which he has always been uncomfortable. Playing the role of a pace fest between Ramnik and Javed.

Dattani does explore some existented angst here what, this? A sandalwood garland? When my father died i used to put fresh flowers everyday for a whole month-(takes a final look at his picture) so then's it. That is how the world will remember me. Until my son locks me up in a trunk—"Now you are prowking me! How dare you blame your violence on other people? It is in you! You have violence in your mind. Your life is based on violence. Your faith is based-(He stops but it is too late) (Act Two) "Why did they stay"? "This is not their land". Their hearts belong there. Print they live on our land". "Drive them out". "Kill the sons of swine"! (Act one) The title of Dattani's play on communal violence and tensions in contemporary when India itself calls to attention. The apparent evolutionarily of this situation. Dattani interestingly sticks to the plural- 'solutions' which implicitly undermines the pooril of the meaning of the first word- 'final'. Are there any solutions for a cycle of violence. Which has continued in some form on the other even since most of us can remember? Is any final solutions horrible at all? When each community section clan of our society has its own solution to the crisis?

It is indeed this very search for the final solution. Which in many ways perpetuates the cycle of violence and hatred. The other interesting thing about idea that there are as many solutions as there are realities to choose from. Each one however turns out to be temporary. Final solution was actually commissioned before the destruction of Babri Masjid in 1992, but was performed only the following year in 1993. Written and performed only the in a period of high torsion and violence in When India! We look back at this tech more than 10 years late in 2007. Reeling from the after math of the Gujaret carnage and the smaller ripples of violence since all can ask is 'What has changed in more then a decade? Has anything changed at all? And the itself answers our question in the very fast scene …"Things have not changed that much" says Hardika reading her diary written 40 years before thinking back on the roots that exploded in 1947. When her father was killed. (Act one) Dattani places history as an active character in his play. Opening with the main figure of the Hardika as a young girl- then known as Daksha, the first scene shows us the wetting of history. Past and present are fused on stage through the figure of Daksha and Hardika. The play opens in fact with the young Daksha writing in her diary. This simple act, of a young girl creating a diary in order to use the fountain pen discarded by her father-in-law operates at varicres levels of representation unveiling the construction of history the manipulation that all written texts including allegedly personal ones go through. There is no need to be that honest… (Act one) Daksha's diary establishes the history of division the serve of 'us and them'. The link between personal experience and political belief/social hatred. A communal riot is invoked in the very first scene of the play a riot in which Daksha's father was pilled a riot which firmly creates for Daksha the them "that night in Hussainabad In our ancestral house… When I heard then outside…I knew that they were thinking the same of us". (Act one) History is present trenchant the action of the play. Sometimes repeating itself directly through statement made by Daksha/Hardika some times indirectly through

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situations of violence which have been enacted before and are all to frightening fanubor. History is also evoked and used by almost every character on stage as a justification/rationale/excuse for each fresh out break of violence. This justification may be overt by political overt by personal or thinly disguised between the two.

Dattani's characters also each have their own justification their own rationale for their actions. Daksha (now the grandmother) hates Muslims because her father was killed a communal riot and because her overtones of friendship to Zarine a young Muslim girl were rejected after other communal riots that razed Zarine's father's shop, and which incidentally was bought by Daksha's father-in-law. Javed, the young Muslim fundamentalist and member of a gang has long nursed resentment against the world because of the otherness and the deionization of his community and religious identity by the dominant community. Ramnik Gandhi, Daksha/Hardika is son is trying to atone for the sins committed by his father and grandfather and therefore is a conscious secularist. His wife, Aruna is an ordinary devout Hindu Woman/Wife/Mother/Daughter-in-law, implacably sure of her place in the home, in society. Secure in her unquestioning faith and sense of right and wrong.

There are also two other characters- Bobby (Babban) and Smita (Ramnik and Aruna's daughter) who are oppressed by their own sense of history, and seem desperate to escape from its clutches, to leave behind the baggage of social, religious and communal identities that seem to dog them in all their relationships and actions. As each character in vokes history as an objective witness to justify their own sense of oppression and victimization, it is this very sense of an objective past that Dattani undermines.

As has already been stated, in the act of re-writing her diary Daksha proves that history is constructed, and that the present is implicated in the ways in which we imagine our past. Reading from the diary written 40 years ago. Daksha/Hardika tells us abort the riots in which her father was killed, how and her mother took refuge from the flying stones in the Pooja room, and how her faith in God represented by the idol of Krishna was suddenly gone never to return. And as punishment for this loss of faith a stone thrown by the mob smashed all her gramophone records. Which she loved most. It was Daksha's youth her culture represented through the records of Noor Jehan. Suraiya and Shamshad Begum that was smashed that night. And as Hardika remember we realize that 40 years on indeed things have not changed that much as the play has opened in the midst of another riot, and a curfew is on in the small town of Amargaon where the Gandhi's live.

The set design of the play emphasizes Dattani's contention that the family unit represents society. The living space of the Gandhi family is shown through a barebones presentation with just wooden blocks for furniture (Act one). The only detailed sets are the kitchen and Pooja room. This is significant as really it is lonely through food habits and tattoos that we all draw the lines that separate us from each other.

There is a close relationship between food habits and religious beliefs and the obvious other men of different communities is manifested through differences in what/how we and they eat. We also make sharp distinctions where food and food related utensils etc are concerned. Which perhaps serve to emphasis reparation in a uniquely distinctive and deferred manner? Taboos are most clearly expressed in our relatives through these two particularized spaces in Dattani's sets the room for worship and the space where food is prepared.

The sets also position the family signified by the home in relation to society which is represented through the Mob/Chows (five men and ten marks on sticks) who more or less encircle the Gandhi home. The representation of the younger Hardika (Daksha) takes place on another level thus ensuring in front of us and can not be forgotten. As the play opens and the riot is established the two young men sought by the mob are sieved as member of the other community'.

'Naturally' this immediately makes them a threat as the aggression of the Mob heightens to a dangerous pitch. In times of tension even ordinary object take on meaning become symbols of a

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religious identity and markers of other men as Bobby and Javed are revealed through a handkerchief knotted to go over a men's head in lieu of a cap on other head covering. It can be argued that anyone may wear a handkerchief over their heads. However as the text establishes once the poison of communalism is in the air no rationalizing is possible. Ramnik Gandhi the secularist tries to assert a commonality in a conversation with his daughter's friend's father. "…You must visit us when you are in amargaon. Yes… Mr. Noor Ahmad, Mr. Noor Ahmad, I'm Ramnik Gandhi. I… (Distinctly speaking it crt) Ramnik Gandhi (making a joke of it). No relation to the father of the Nation of course. It is a common surname.…Why even in your own community…tells? (Act one) In this phone conversation he also makes it clear that despite not being overtly linked to the 'Mob' outside the idea of separation and difference is deeply enternalised with in most of us. A door separates the Gandhi family from the Mob outside and when Javed and Bobby knock on the Gandhi door seeking refuge Gandhi does save their lives and lets them in. Again however the action of the text undercuts the overt meanings of the secularist. As Ramnik lets the outsiders in his mother is thrown back into the post and all the injustices ever done to her are re-invoked. "Why did he do it? Oh G Why do I have to suffer? Did not he have any feelings for me? I just wanted them to be my friends. How could he let these people into my house? Oh I hate this world! They pilled his grandfather. (Act one) Aruna, unable to effectively stand up to her husband asserts her unquestioning belief in right/wrong if the men were being chased to be killed they must have done something wrong. This is a comfortable perspective from the center of society born of an assurance of security in being part of a dominant position is threatened that Aruna faces the insecurity of suddenly being de-centered of being part of a minority instead that this faith is Shaken. Rammik clearly acts of a personal motivation-his sense of guilt is the driving force behind his conscious and structured liberalism which becomes opponent when he blurts out to Aruna. "I have to protect them'. I need to protect them"! I need to protect them" [Act one] The subtext is clear - the home/family/society/Nateori are firmly Hindu, the two young men literarily and metaphorically the outsides, the transgressors. The daughter, Smita is immediately sent inside to her room by her father, the tolerant insider who alone has the power to save the two men from the intolerant outside. The construction of the other is emphasized also by the obvious image of the sexual threats posed by the 'other'- when Smita comes out of her room and greets the two by name, her entire family against is aghast. Ramnik despite his tolerant image is extremely uncomfortable by with the ideas of his daughter knowing the socially personally - Aruna : You- you know them? Smita : I know why they are. Ramnik : Why didn't tell us? Smita : I was too confused. Hardika : Where did you meet them? In college? Smita (unsure) well yes Ramnik: when done that mean Aruna: Stop her studies! From now on she can stay at home! Ramnik: Where did you meet them? Smita: I told you. Hardika: But they are not from here. What were they doing in your college? Bobby: It's all right. Let me tell you. Smita (angrily) No! Ramnik (sternly) For God's sake! Tell us how you know these boys! (Act two) Ramnik only calms down when Smita tells him that she knows the two because Javed is her friend Tasneem's brother and the Bobby is Tasneem's fiance. As Smita says "Bobby comes to college quite often to meet Tasneem. She … they used to go out quite often... there is no harm in that. They are getting married any way. Ramnik No, there is no harm in that. (Act two) Where is there no harm? In Bobby going out with Tasneem because they are engaged? Or because he is involved with somebody from his own community and therefore safe? The question remains unanswered.

Ramnik is a progressive secularist- not only does he save Javed and Bobby from the mob. He also forces his wife Aruna to serve them water a gestate she makes only when convinced that they would not actually drink it. After they do the contaminated glasses are picked up gingerly and kept separately from the other glasses in the kitchen. Ramnik also resents the alliance that Javed and Bobby built up in his home against him. Ramnik do not get so defensive 1st man (taken aback) I…. I am not being detersives. All I said was we are not thirsty. Ramnik: How dare you suddenly join forces? in my house. 1st man : I do not understand Ramnik you have finished college while

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your friend has dripped out of school. You made that destination very clear. 1st man only because we were being clubbed together unreasonably. But why do you feel I am being….? Ramnik: you resented being clubbed together. 1st man: well I am not a college dropout. (Pause) well- yes I resented it. Ramnik: yet when you were uncertain…. abort there cepts on you would receive. You clubbed yourself together unreasonably. You spoke for the two of you. (Act one) Actually Ramnik also is conscious of the difference as is his wife the distinction between them however is that Aruna articulates this clearly from her security of being part of the dominant group while Ramnik tries to snappers his prejudice. It emerges however as it becomes clear that there is a very thin live between tolerance and prejudice. When one is conscious of a divide. When Ramnik speaks of 'the trouble' he immediately refers to the Muslim families that live in their galli. "They've never bothered us, until now". Later, when he is told that Javed is looking for a job, he offers him one in his stop "You can handle these bohra and men and women who usually pen by our showroom you can stand outside and call them in; His guilt of the past surface directly. When he blurts out - "It will be give my pleasure to give that you. That shop is use to be… [Pause] take the tube. Please [Act Two] Ramnik's actions and deed arise directly from the guilt he feels about the action commuted by his father and the grandfather. It was his family that has caused zarine is fathers shop to be burnt in scoots after which they bought it a friction of its coats.

The 'emotive' cause of those particular roots in there clearly demonstrated to be at least party ceremony. Still not considering Javed is a simple a young man seeing him representative of those wavered by his ancestress Ramnik peewees that he is communal. In some ways as those on the other side ways of the door. And then he fund it only to easy to room the line between 'Tolerance' and fanaticism rerouting to the easy same start-ups that are circulated by there seeking to destroy. When it is discovered that Javed is one of those who were bought to be argon to Participate in the violence. In fact, to create the riots, Ramnik crosses that line between understanding and allocating flame. Ramnik; why do you destructs? Javed: Do you trust us? Ramnik: i don't go around throwing stones Javed: But you do something more violent, you provoke: You make me through stones Everetime I take to you, my fight rises: Ramnik (angry), now you are provoking me? How done your flame your violence to other people? It is in you? You have violence in your mind. Your faith is based... (He stops but it is too late) [Act two] Ramnik moves in single sentences, a single thought, from seeing the problem of violence as something could as solved by human understanding and compression, to an enidelluable, in hart truant in a whole community... anins allocable problem. Javed shows Ramnik that Ramnik is not as liberal as he would like to think of himself. As Daksha was shown by zarine that Daksha was not an in no sent as she thought of her self As long as we are silent as long we a accept that the majority does the mirrors a for our by tolerating then we participate in violence. Aruna tells the two men that they should be grateful that the grand her gave them shelter and Daksha felt that zarine should be grateful that she wanted to be Zarine's friend. But friend ship and tolerance can not be bargained on asked for. Javed has a strong belief in himself and his own faith it is the belief that has laid him on the paths of violence, it is his refusal to be apologetic for who an what he is that makes him demand acceptance , if it is not given to him. He does realize that his faith is taken advantage of by those who will profit by the riots, and he also realizes that when it comes to violence, we are all equally guilty.

Ramnik: you men that won't arrest you? Javed: Arrest me? When they have been the other way all along? How do you think we got into the street? In their vans. They will arrest me. Don't worry. To please people like you and a few innocent Muslim to people everyone. Ramnik: may be I should through you to the mole. Javed.... may be they aren't being paid over not. And they attacked us? They are not very systematic. Next time they should have a round of introduction so we don't killing each other? At least not unmentionably: Ha: you want to through me to the mole? I am a part of it. You have been protecting me from people like me. I'm no different from them. [Act three] An Unexpected Alliance in the play is that between Javed and Arena- they are both individual. Who have a strong belief? In their faith, in the thing of the shop their identities and

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their ideas a three slave's family forced to realize the partition of the other, they are also forced to articulate to respect and tolerance.

When smita clears her difference from her mother, and tells her that she does not shame her blue for her faith, Aruna is shattered even when so more Ramnik also his daughter why she his not articulated her feeling before, and smita tells him because it word have been a victory for him ever Arena suddenly, Aruna realizes the portion of an outsider. Smita; How easy it world have been to us for us to your forces and made her feel she was in the wrong. How easy to just push her over because you will have me telling her exidity what you wanted to tell her yourself to 'Arena' when would you have done? Shut yourself from us we would not have let you off so easily. We would've harmed you we wouldn't have let you forget that the spirit of liberalism now in your blood and you were the oddity... you were the out sides. What would wappents you them? How weak and fused traded would you feet you do get what i men don't you. Mummy? [Act Three]

It is this different prospective that makes Aruna actually change her stance on the 'Outsiders'. She remains silent when Smita asks her to help with the felling of the water, or else 'they' will help. In this tacit stretching of the taboos. Aruna is changed but not crushed - she remains stead fast to her faith. But changes with the times 'they' an help with the general water but 'not God's vessel' [Act Three] it is only Javed. The other believes who is able to recognize and accept Aruna's portion. In fact, he tells her so - 'you said the same thing to her. What I told Babban. You told her - you said you wouldn't listen to her criticism because she was not proud of her…. What did you call it? Inheritance, I said religion. Same thing. I suppose [pause] we are not very different. You and me. We both feel pride. "[Act Three] when Smita hands him the 'God's Vessel' to prove it wouldn't fly off into the heaven when he touched it. Javed recoils and refuses to 'fool around' with it. Finally allowing the 'other' religion the respect they demanded for their own. Javed and aruna make an unexpected alliance in this text, offering one possible 'final solution'. But how this is the live between respecting religion and denying another's faith? Bobby and smita are another such pair - they are similar is that they both reject their communal identities - smita because she feels stifled 'and bobby because he feels ashamed. This puts each of them in a weaker portion vis-à-vis the 'other - Javed and Aruna. This however, is another 'final solution' - to deny any context to attempt to live on your own terms, to reject the past and any other social framework of identity and self formation. How possible is this solution?

Smita rejects the possibility of relationship between her and bobby - "it was just one evening - a conversation that got a little personal. Nothing more". [Act Three] When bobby asks her if that was a personal decision or one of convenience, Smita's reply is that it was entirely personal "it is wonderful to know that the choice in yours to mala". [Act Three] This may be a truly 'humanist' solution. But the entire text has consistently subverted the idea of a distinction between the personal and the public and decision that is based on 'personal' consideration is shown to be at least partly motivated by 'the political' and vice versa.

These are not airtight categories as Dattani repeatedly reminds us, through the actions of Hardika, Javed and even Ramnik Gandhi. What then is the 'final solution'? Is one even possible? Would at be better for us to stop trying to find the final answer and just try to make our own peace with ourselves and those around us? Is it possible to atom for the past? Can the personal be separated from the public? Is Aruna's and Javed's faith the answer? Or does the solution lie in the rejection of bobby and smita? In the last scene, bobby picks up the idol of Krishna from the pooja room in the Gandhi home and holds it in his hand. He defies Aruna's cries and the anger of the Mob and arrests his faith in 'humanity'. Bobby : See Javed : He doesn't humiliate you. He doesn't cringe from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And he welcomes it! I hold him who is sacred to them but, I do not commit sacrilege. [to Aruna] you can bathe him day and night, you can splash holy waters on him but you can not remove my touch from his form. You can not remove my smell with sandal paste and attars and fragrant flowers because it belongs to

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a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human being behave that is the strongest fragrance in the would! [Act Three] But this final solution may remain just another possibility.

The very last scene, after bobby and Javed leave the Gandhi home, changed for ever, is still a bleak one. Ramnik finally tells his mother of the crime committed by his father - how they burnt the shop in the name of communal hatred. Because they wanted the shop. And when Hardika asks if the boys will come back - Ramnik's answer is what remains with us - "if you call them they will come. But then again - if it's too late - they may not." [Act Three] As John McRae in 'An introduction to the plays of Mahesh Dattani' puts it "This is theatre at the cutting edge. Holding the mirror up to the secretary it depicts, showing… the form and pressure of time". (Final Solution and other plays).

This play deals with anti-fanaticism concerns - not only religious fanaticism but fanaticism in all walks of life. And appropriately enough, Dattani demonsters this by showing the various ways in which most people. Overtly or coverthy are party to acts of fanaticism and are responsible for a good deal of the conflicts that exist written society - be it at the macrocosmic level of the nation - state or even the microcosmic one of the family. Thus we have the fanaticism of the Hindus and the Muslims in Amargaon clashing during the 'Rath yatra' the fanaticism of daksna in law that present her friendship with Zarine from progressing (Dattani shatters the of toned with that music friend the barriers between people).

The fanaticism of the older Daksha lie Hardika, Which is a rice chatting response to her Confinement, The fanaticism of Hardika daughter in law Arena who is the archetypal pious Hindu women and of course, the fanaticism of Javed that people him into journing forces with those who talked always talked about the mother land and fighting to save our faith" contrasted with such fanaticism is the doubtful pacifism of Bobby, the shake liberalism Ramnik and the escapism of Smita Arising from share evidence. Such fanaticism is not only self-limiting for each of these individual but so also the primary cause for the barriers that are constructed between them and the longer would in this context if Daksha, Hardika Writing in her diary (Even though free fly) can diary seen as attempt to can front and negotiable with the reality faced by her, The play final solution can be meta thematically to imply the next- not even this dramatic script by Dattani - can preside any final solution/s to the audience. Prophase the solution lie of each with us - we all need to come to tern with our people preludes and find of our solution and Bobby did. The play can only serve an as awaking. In making the mob/ chairs when that does not have a singular identity but an easily inter changeable. One who you are depend on which face you put your Hindu Make or your Muslim mark, In making Daksha and Hardika merge into each other. Dattani Seek to show that through from may change; paramecia, hatred and fear prevail. All through play the mob/ chairs Remains on stage charted on still lie sad portion. The fires who compose their mob on chairs wear a make which is atop a stick held before them. There are five Hindu and five Muslim makes the play right feels, ideally they should be wearing black. They do not belong to any religion but become Hindu or Muslim depending upon the make they done. The symbolic velvets the makes, the sticks, the black cloth, are what blamers refers to as the 'paraphernalia of ritual as slogans songs expire guests faster felling common identity sympathy written and ritual activity, such peripheries 'acquires' a sentimental liking the common feeling about the movement, there uses serves as a constant solving and reinforcement about these mutual feeling 'such paraphernalia gerents a serves of self importance and provide one of the mean by which people who parts apache in such a dramas see themselves an playing and certain role more then the defamation of rules and emotional epode.

Thus in act I when the chars. Wearing their Hindu make say that "the procession had proud through that lines/ Every year/ for forty year? and that "for forty years our chariot has moved through their mohallas". The procession and the chariot bearing the idols of the Gods are the

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symbolic paraphernalia used by the activists of Hinduism to reinforce their authority, the coercive authority of a power hungry 'majority' as Javed (and surely he is only a representative of his community, perceives it. Again, the 'bell' used by a neighbor for prayers in the incident narrated by Bobby that changed Javed life and transformed him from a have to a rebel out caste, the prayer bell used by Aruna towards the end of the play, the vessel that Aruna has earmarked for filling water to bathe the Gods - all these objects have an ingrained value to their possessors.

Thus Dattani underlines that though the power of a movement is ultimately the power of its collective of activists, the creation of that power is accomplished in no small measure by the use of ritual devices. But Dattani does not aim to be only descriptive on perspective. For he reveals how fragile are there 'paraphernalia' how easily they can be crushed and thus under mine the so-called power of the mighty. Because, the procession through forty years old can be easily disrupted - the chariots and the idols cab be broken.

The bell that is like a signal of sacredness sent out by Javed's Hindu neighbor cab be easily made perform by the meat and bones the own by Javed into his backyard. The poojari singing the bell loses his life to a knife wound. Smita offers the water vessel for the Gods to Javed - challenging her mother's contention (and this when she is an obedient daughter) that outsides contaminate the purity of the water used for such a holy purpose. And of course Bobby is daring move at the end when he picks up the Hindu idol to prove. Yours God! My flesh is holding does not mind. He does not burn me to the ashes! He does not cry out from the heavens saying. He was been contaminated. A little later, he continues…. I hold him who is sacred to them, but I do not commit sacrilege (to Aruna) you can bathe him day and night, you can splash holy waters on Him but you can not remove my touch from his form. You can not remove my smell with fragrant flowers because it belongs to a human being who believes, and tolerates, and respects what other human beings believe. That is the strongest fragrance in the world. One of the most surviving way in which Dattani subverts the kind of rustic elements that are used by a body/an organization to garner legitimacy as well as to built loyalties is the way he contests the commemoration of Independence day. Dattani choruses the path of demy deification and so Daksha wants with cold and devastating clarity in her dairy. May be I should talk about more important things. Like last year in August a most terrible thing happened to our country. We - (trying hard to read her hand writing) -gained independence. You should have seen it. Everyone was awake wanting for midnight - like children on the last day of school, wanting for the last bell of the last class before vacation. And then rushing out and screaming and shouting and fighting". Not only this Daksha consider it 'a most terrible thing. Through Javed's long narrative. Dattani carefully details the haws and whys of recruitment into a movement that sought to vanquish the Hindu night, by erasing? Its symbolic devices of power. Most political organizations indulge in the common practice of a ritual evocation of an emotional response within its initiates, to socialize them to the values and expectations that constitute the culture of organization. When Bobby tells Javed that it was only too evident to anyone that the people whom Javed had joined forces with were hired hood lumps. Javed unravels the process that snared him and blinded him to this fact. He says : "It is so clear, isn't it? Anyone sitting at home, sipping tea and reading the newspapers, a minority would never start a riot, we are too afraid, that it had to be politically motivated. Try telling it to a thousand devotees swayed by their own religious forever. United of their fantasies of persecution, constantly reassuring themselves that this is their land by taking out procession (looking at Bobby). Anyone could tell not what he has his delusion as well.

Delusions of velour and heroism. Of finding, a cause to give purpose to his existence 'The time has come' somebody would say 'This is jehad - the holy war! It is written! 'Yes! I would say 'I am ready. I am prepared". He speaks about his sense of belonging induced by the corentry liquor he consumes with his comrades and about how after sunset. Javed's experience is not exceptional as 'in the vans I was with several other youths like me'. It is this collective experience in fact, this

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bonding with the other youth who have undergone the same process of initiation as himself that keeps Javed attached to his group. Ritual far from always creating solidarity by reinforcing shared values, often produces solidarity in the absence of any commonality of beliefs.

The provocative speeches that Javed, like his fellow recruits, is privy to, serve precisely this purpose of legitimizing the conceptual principals of the organization through its emotional impact. Javed - It was different when I used to attend their meetings. I was swayed by what now appears to me as cheep sentiment. They always talked about motherland and fighting to save our faith and how we should get four of theirs for everyone of ours. By showing how Javed, the rebel-fanatic is created, Dattani unpeels the manipulative power of ritual activities that engineer such constructions. Dattani also emphasizes that ritual binds people together, often by common action rather than common thought. Javed : I felt a stone in my hand. Bobby : They were giving him stones! Javed : I hit them hard with stones! Bobby : I couldn't stop him! No one could. More people joined in throwing stones. Javed : And then I felt something else in my hand. Bobby : Oh no! He couldn't. Javed : I had power. To retrace this arguments. Dattani asserts that while rituals can engender solidity, they can also be a handicap if an individual wishes to break free. In an almost poetic-turn of phrase. Javed describes this phenomenon. I had permission to do exactly what I had been asked not to do all my life! Raise my voice in protest. To shout and scream in protest, to shout and scream like a child on the giant wheel in a carnival. The first screams are of pleasure of sensing an unusual freedom. And then - it becomes nightmarish as your world is way below you and you are moving away from it - and suddenly you come crashing down and you want to get off. But you can't. You don't want it anymore. It is the same feeling repeated over and over again. You screen with pain and horror but there own cycles of joy and terror. The feelings come faster and faster till they confuse you with the blur created by their speed. You get nauseres and you cry to yourself 'why am I here? What am I doing here? The joy ride gets over and you get off. And you are never sure again. [Pause] It is a terrible feeling being disillusioned. [Pause] Don't we all have anger and frustration? Am I so unique? Now that I am alone, I hate myself. When Javed finds the knife thrust into his hand during the rath yatra procession. Thrust with murderous intent, he experiences that 'terrible feeling' he has described. And he backs off "I got nauseous and cried. 'Why am I here? What am I doing here? Get Me Off! Want to Get Off! I was so close to him I could - I could have. I could…. I let go of the knife. (The Mob/Chorus stops humming). The knife fell to the ground. The joy ride was over. (Pause) I couldn't hear noises anymore. I watched men fighting, distorted faces not making a round. And I watched someone pickup the knife and piece the poojari. I watched while people removed a part of the chariot as planned. The poojari fell to the ground. The carnival continued. What would be regarded as an act be betrayal or even cowardice on the part of Javed, is commended by Ramnik who observes. You are brave. Not everyone can get off. For some of us it is not even possible to escape. For Ramnik, Javed appears to be lucky as he can not himself escape from the sins of his forefathers whose crimes arising from communal hatred haunt and torture him. In her essay, 'Final Solution' Angelia Multani speaks of the set design of the play as emphasizing Dattani's contention that the family unit recusants society".

Multani comments on the significance of the fact that only the kitchen and the pooja room are detailed as against the rest of the living space as- It is largely through food habits and taboos that we all draw the lines that separate us from each other.

There is a close relationship between food habits and religious belief and the obvious 'otherness' of different communities is manifested through differences in what/how we and they eat. We also make sharp distinctions where food and food related utensils are concerned, which perhaps serves to emphasize separation in a uniquely distinctive and defined manner. Taboos are most clearly expressed is our realities through these two particularized spaces in Dattani's sets - the room for worship and the space where the food is prepared. The sets also portion the family, signified by the home, in relation to society which is represented through the Mob/Chorus [five men and ten

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masks on sticks]. Which more or less encircle the Gandhi home? The representation of the younger Hardika [Daksha] takes place on another level, thus ensuring that the past always remains in front of us and can not be forgotten. The play 'Final Solution' begins with the silent introspective conversation of Daksha with her diary. Reflecting on the whole gamut of memories, examining the various course of events, she concludes, things have not changed that much". with the recollections of independence, the memory flashes how a stone hit her gramophone table and the entire collection of records broken "Shamshad Begum, Noor Jehan, Suraiya…." In the present, her consciousness is broken with the interruption of the sound of the members of chorus pouring out their aggression hatred and prejudice. Swayed by religious fanaticism and national prejudices, they are wild with contempt and revenge. One of them challenges… "This is our land". The collective voice of their slogans becomes a part of a crescendo. There is chaos in voice, uncertainty of identity and lack of organization in action. Smita, the grand daughter anxiety for the safety of her Muslim friend Tasneem who had been trapped inside the hostel in bombing. Dattani represents two communities through the change of masks.

This device of changing the mask is quite significant. Behind the mask each member of the chorus is a human being and here lies the roots of dramatic tension in the play 'Final Solution'. The mob frenzy of Muslims is vitalized in the second appearance of mob/chorus. Sacrificing their humanity and religious faiths, they make a mockery of God and Goddesses. They have such comments, "Their God now prostrates before us" and ridicules with an indention of vengeance "Doesn't their God have a warranty?" But in collective tone mentions, "We are neither idol makers nor breakers." Ramnik, the son of Hardika in spite of his sympathy for Muslims, is not convinced by the ideology of Hardika. With his liberal and dynamic attitude, he tries to sustain the values of faith and human love beyond communal disharmony. He gives shelter to two Muslim boys Bobby and Javed and protects them from mob fury. Being in panic they are apprehensive of their own security. Two unidentified members of the chorus assault them; snatch their watch with out knowing their real identity and portion. The irrational fury of chorus let them no opportunity to reveal their identity.

One of them doubts "something gives chase and some of their blows strike the two men who cry in pain. Ramnik Gandhi finally opens the gate and gives shelter to all of these two boys. Hardika's conscience suspends and turns back to the past. Chorus even invades the house of Ramnik crying "throw them out, we'll kill them." The irrational and unorganized behavior of the crowd is the external manifestation of prejudice that admits no rational justification of human thought. The gestures, the actions, the dialogues are all well coordinated to express the fury of the mob in the frenzy to kill Bobby and Javed. Ramnik is determined, "I have to protect them! I need to protect them." Dattani maintains the dramatic conflict and minutely records the reactions that are integrated in human pryche time and again, they erupt spontaneously chain of events.

Hence action in the play moves not in isolation but takes within itself the invisible clash of motives that are more true to the real life experiences. Aruna provides water to Javed but holds the glasses with her thumbs and index fingers on the sides. Further she places the glass of Javed separate from other glasses. The chorus from the outside warns them to be aware of their moves and motives, "They will stab you in the back! They'll rape your daughter - throw them out." The hesitation of Aruna coordinates with the thoughts of mob and makes a pattern of religious frenzy.

The play 'Final Solution' is divided in three acts. These three acts of drama mark a gradual development of action towards the solution. First act is the extortion, second is climax and the third is solution. In the second act, the social conflict merges in familial conflict. Smita, the daughter recognizes Javed and Bobby but her recognition of their identities, stirs a greater doubt and contempt in the mind of two. The consistently apprehensive mood of Aruna makes Javed irritates, "Thank you for your protection." Hardika fails to tolerate them in her home. As soon as a stone is hurdled, she looks at the stone and shouts at Javed. If Aruna is prejudiced. Javed is also not free

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from prejudice and the idea of being different is rooted in his mind. Even without the interrogative of Hardika Javed replies, "Those are our own people." The young Smita represents the dynamism of new generation and she behaves like the instruments of solution in the play. She is neither rebellious nor apprehensive. The third act in Final Solution can be appreciated as turning point in the play. Being disgusted with the apathy of Aruna, Javed admits that he is a professional 'rioter' and he is engaged in riots for the sake of money. Ramnik, who earlier offers him job, now doubts his intentions.

Dattani through the cross examination of Javed and Ramnik tries to reflect on the roots of motive behind the passion for communal violence. Ramnik survives in conflicting situation, his external and internal self divides. Earlier he presents himself liberal minded but he is too governed by the passion for religions fanaticism. He also doubts on Javed and his doubt anguish then the infliction of rioters. He admits, "You would have let the mob kill me. And you wouldn't have minded he had died as well. You don't hate me for what I do or who I am. You hate me because I showed you that you are not as liberal as you think you are."

Dattani treads the ground that the real problem lies in the attitudes. In the present scenario of communal tension Hardika's memory shifts to the past and she recalls her own past how she used to visit the place of Zarina, her friend. Simultaneously javed's helplessness assumes the proportion of resentment leading to destructive anger. He cries out. "Don't we all have anger and frustration? Am I so unique? Now that I am alone…. I hate myself. It was different when I used to attend the meetings. I was swayed by what now appears to me as cheep sentiments. They always tackled about motherland and fighting to save our faith and how we should get tour of their for everyone of ours." It is not a question of society and community but of the identity of the individual Javed's resentment is that every time, he is caught in suspicion and his best intentions are worst-treated. The different questions asked by chorus are the questions associated eternally with the national identity of the minority who have to take recourse to cornaival to protect their interest. In all vehemence, he interrogates- What must we do? To become more acceptable? Must we lose our identity? Is that what they want? Must we tolerate more? Does our future lie in their hands? Is there anyone more unsure more insecure than us, or what a curse, if is to be less in number."

In Final Solution, anger is not an expression of aggression but a method of self-defense. Javed offers his services to Aruna and tries to help her by filling the bucket of water but it was of no avail. Aruna tries to maintain balance with her modesty but her broken and incomplete statements, signify the conflict of her mind how it was different for her to compromise with Javed. In spite of her apparent sympathy she says, "We don't allow anyone to fill our drinking water. No outsider." "We bath our God with it. If has to be pure. It must not be contaminated." Smita is a foil to Aruna and she condemns the prejudice of her mother. She tolerates Javed and Bobby without any fear and doubt. Smita is the voice of true liberatism and irraticates her. She many not be a fundamentlist but is rigid and has no confidence to go beyond accepted ideologies. She is not ready to compromise with her sanskars. She accesses Smita. I shudder to think what will become of your children what kind of sanskar will you give them when you don't have any yourself? It's all very well to have progressive ideas. But are you progressing or are drifting? God knows, I don't want all this violence - for so many generations we have preserved our sanskar because we believe it is the truth…. I shall uphold what I believe is the truth." Smita, is confident that religion is a matter of personal faith and the conflict emerges out of prejudices. To sustain faith in religion. The power of soul is essential.

Dattani through Smita establishes that no religion can serve without the acknowledgment of faith of others. The solution lies in the recognition of similarities and not in identification of differences and discrimination. She exhorts, "We would never have spoken about what makes us so different from each other. We should have gone on living our lives with our petty similarities. The fanaticism of her mother was a burden to the spirit of humanity and compassion. Smita in order to restore the

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right spirit of true faith does not even revolt against the monotonous and irrational arguments of her own mother. She challenges. I tolerated your prejudices only because you are my mother. May be, I should have told you earlier, but I am telling you now, I can't bear it! Please don't burden me anymore, I can't take it. The burden of prejudice was unbearable not only for Smita but also for Javed and Bobby. Her enlightening arguments collectively contribute to take the action of the play towards a safe mooring. The issue of religion is associated with national identities, cultural identities and social identities. Smita seeks the solution of the problems in Indian ethics that teaches to respect all modes of religious creeds with an uncompromising spirit of tolerance.

Dattani sustains the identical spirit in Final Solution. Smita's anger shifts to her mother and she commands her, We would've horned you. We wouldn't let you off so easily. We would have hounded you. We wouldn't have let you forget that the spirit of liberalism ran in our blood and that you were the oddity - you were the outsider! What would have happen to you then? How weak and frustrated would you feel? You do get - what mean, don't you mamma? She does not care for her personal sentiments for Bobby for the sake of her friend Tasneem. She puts water pot in the hand of Javed. It was only a method of inculcating a better confidence and faith in Javed.

Dattani establishes that the love for humanity eliminates the dark shadows of prejudice. The solution lies not in external would but within man's own consciousness. She confesses." I wanted you to fill it. To prove that it is not going to fly off into the heavens with your touch, putting and external curse on our family." She suddenly splashes water on Javed's face and then on Bobby and all of three unite in a single laughter forming a chorus. Smita's vision subsides the fury of Bobby and Javed and encourages Smita to conclude, "may be we should all run away from home like Javed… so we can quickly gulp in some fresh air and go back in." They come back to home from ramp with new enlightenment. Smita propagates that through personal vision. One can sustain one's individual freedom, freedom wherever one may by "but immediately Hardika reacts. You are foolish, to think you can create your freedom." However, Bobby in order to break the ultimate shackles of blind orthodoxy determines to break the web of illusions. Images may be the matter of personal faith but not the ultimate realization of divinity. It is call of humanity that leads towards the realization of God. Bobby conquers his fury and becomes indifferent to the resentment of the mob and panic stricken reactions of Aruna. He proceeds towards the temple, picks up the image of Krishna and comes as a challenge to the fundamentalism of both Javed and Aruna, representing the two distinctive cults.

The comprehensiveness of his vision. Encompasses fear, anxiety, insecurity and uncertainty if human sentiments. He fearlessly declares - See Javed! He doesn't humiliate you. He doesn't cringes from my touch. He welcomes the warmth of my hand. He feels me. And he welcomes it! I told him who is sacred to them, but I don't commit sacrilege. (To Aruna) You can bath him day and night, you can splash holy water on him but can not remove my touch from his farms. You can not remove my smell with sandal paste and Altars and fragrant flowers because it belongs and tolerates and respects what other human beings believe - That is the strongest fragrance in the would. The convention of Bobby is a manifestation of Dattani's own religious tolerance against the venom of communal violence. For Aruna, her own God is sacred but this sacredness depends on personal faith. Dattani presents his own remedy of communal violence through Bobby, "The tragedy is that there is too much that is sacred. But if we understand and believe in one another, nothing can be destroyed. And if you are willing to forget, I am willing to tolerate. It is only the formula of forget and tolerate that can emancipate society that can eclipse stands on the edge of time with the perpetual question if one can really forget the bitterness of communal difference. Leaving the crowd on the ramp. She retires to her room with the desperate realization "and so those boys left. I still am not willing to forget. Days have passed since that night and not one of us has forgotten. One more memory? We don't speak to each other. We move in silence."

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The final revelation of Ramnik that remains hidden throughout the play is very significant from the point of view of dramatic presentation. The crises of resentment, anger and hatred is a continuous process in which no consolation is possible. What Ramnik was doing with Bobby and Javed was also an expression of anger what had already been done by his father. He survives with a sense of guilt that he wanted to compensate by providing jobs to Javed and Bobby. It is their shop. It is the same burnt shop we bought from them, at half its value an we burnt it. Your husband, my father. And his father. They had burnt it in the name of communal hatred. Because we wanted a shop…. I wanted to tell them that they are not the only ones who have destroyed, I just couldn't. I don't think. I have the face to tell anyone. It wasn't false pride or arrogance. It was anger.

In Final Solution, Dattani presents a socio-political issue with the vision of a part asks in the chain of events. Instead of taking the mechanical respond of the characters. He grips the two moil of emotions associated with them. The action is not imposed from outside but emerges from within and it is much assented to fill the higher conditions of drama. The integrated vehemence of passion, provides and additional force to action and the spontaneity of action bring it's nearer to the real life conditions. Each character in the play struggles at two levels personal conventions and the commitments towards society. Smita with her liberalism and Aruna with her fundamentalism frame a suitable concepts to explore the roots of communal violence existing in Indian society. Aruna is not ready to forget and therefore, Smita is not ready to tolerate her. Ramnik, no doubt is a complex character but his life represents evolution to self realization and this realization restores a balance of emotions, an elevation of human pryche where individual consciousness becomes a part of whole. For a social issue. Dattani seeks a philosophical ground. Man eternally can't escapes the burden of his own guild. All social and communal differences are generated out of individual difference and social apathy that has no rational ground.

The use of chorus with mask is suggestive of Dattani's affinity with the native tradition of drama. The change of mask by the members of chorus besides being a part of stage craft has profound relevance to declare divided consciousness of mob, in particular and humanity in general. It is only the mask that changes and behind the masks, there are human characters. It symbolizes that the awareness of communal disharmony and the passion for discrimination is only an external mask that covers the essential humanity that is 'One' and sublime. The characters roasted with hatred and violence appears only in the mask. The generosity of Smita and the realization of Bobby is the only possible, "Final Solution" to save society from the clouds of disharmony and violence.

## 17.2 Plot Construction

The Final Solution: A Story of Detection is a 2004 novel by Michael Chabon. It is a detective story that in many ways pays homage to the writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and other writers of the genre. The story, set in 1944, revolves around an unnamed 89-year-old long-retired detective (who may or may not be Sherlock Holmes but is always called just "the old man"), now interested mostly in beekeeping, and his quest to find a missing parrot, the only friend of a mute Jewish boy. The title of the novella references Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story "The Final Problem," in which Holmes confronts his greatest enemy, Professor Moriarty, at Reichenbach Falls, and the Final Solution, the Nazis' plan for the genocide of the Jewish people.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Dattani won the prestigious Central Sahitya Akademi Award in ..... .

(*ii*) Ramnik, the father carries with him the burden of the guilt of his father's ..... .

(*iii*) Babban and Javed is in a sense allowed entry after severe resistance from ..... .

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## 17.3 Summary

- Ramnik, the father carries with him the burden of the guilt of his father's black deeds, transferring some of the resentment to his mother. Hardika, Aruna, his Wife and Smita, his daughter both hit on at each other for no apparent reason.
- The mercenary gains that one party derives from the communal riots of the past is the baggage of guilt that Rammik has caused for long, this is revealed to a crushed Hardika, who seemed secure in her hatred of the other party, Sheltering her same of being in the right. It also explains the reasons for Ramnik's extreme tolerance. The smug and often parsimonies Aruna is Shaken out of her compliancy through Smita's out bur. St against her rigid and restrictive practices that have for long choked her. Dattani here manages to intricately interweave the individual strands of family identity into the larger picture. "It stifles me! Yes! I can see so clearly how wrong you are.
- Dattani's characters also each have their own justification their own rationale for their actions. Daksha (now the grandmother) hates Muslims because her father was killed a communal riot and because her overtones of friendship to Zarine a young Muslim girl were rejected after other communal riots that razed Zarine's father's shop, and which incidentally was bought by Daksha's father-in-law.
- The set design of the play emphasizes Dattani's contention that the family unit represents society. The living space of the Gandhi family is shown through a barebones presentation with just wooden blocks for furniture (Act one). The only detailed sets are the kitchen and Pooja room. This is significant as really it is lonely through food habits and tattoos that we all draw the lines that separate us from each other.
- Ramnik is a progressive secularist- not only does he save Javed and Bobby from the mob. He also forces his wife Aruna to serve them water a gestate she makes only when convinced that they would not actually drink it. After they do the contaminated glasses are picked up gingerly and kept separately from the other glasses in the kitchen. Ramnik also resents the alliance that Javed and Bobby built up in his home against him. Ramnik do not get so defensive 1st man (taken aback) I…. I am not being detersives.
- This play deals with anti-fanaticism concerns - not only religious fanaticism but fanaticism in all walks of life. And appropriately enough, Dattani demonsters this by showing the various ways in which most people. Overtly or coverthy are party to acts of fanaticism and are responsible for a good deal of the conflicts that exist written society - be it at the macrocosmic level of the nation - state or even the microcosmic one of the family. Thus we have the fanaticism of the Hindus and the Muslims in Amargaon clashing during the 'Rath yatra' the fanaticism of daksna in law that present her friendship with Zarine from progressing (Dattani shatters the of toned with that music friend the barriers between people).
- Thus Dattani underlines that though the power of a movement is ultimately the power of its collective of activists, the creation of that power is accomplished in no small measure by the use of ritual devices. But Dattani does not aim to be only descriptive on perspective. For he reveals how fragile are there 'paraphernalia' how easily they can be crushed and thus under mine the so-called power of the mighty. Because, the procession through forty years old can be easily disrupted - the chariots and the idols cab be broken.

## 17.4 Key-Words

1. Extortion : The act or an instance of extorting, illegal use of one's official position or powers to obtain property, funds, or patronage.
2. Inflict : Cause (something unpleasant or painful) to be suffered by someone or something.

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## 17.5 Review Questions

1. Discuss the role of Aruna and Hardika.
2. Explain the Plot, Construction of Final Solution.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) 1998 (*ii*) black deeds
   (*iii*) Aruna and Hardika

## 17.6 Further Readings


1. Manoher Malgonker, A Bend in The Ganges (Delhi : Oriental Paperback, 1994) 355.
2. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri. Contemporary Indian Writer in English: Mahesh Dattani (Delhi : Foundation Books, 2005), 77-78.
3. Mahesh Dattani. Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), 168. Subsequent reference are incorporated in the text-with an abbreviation, FS Satchinand K. Indian Literature: Position and Preposition (Delhi: Pencraft Internat.

# Unit 18: Mahesh Dattani: Final Solution—Theme

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CONTENTS



## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Analyse Life and Works of Dattani.
- Discuss the theme of the play.

## Introduction

'Final Solution,' first performed in Bangalore in 1993 foregrounds the Hindu-Muslim problems. In also tackles the theme of transferred resentments in the context of family relations. Alyque Padamsee says, directing Final Solutions in Mumbai. "As I see it. This is a play about transferred resentment. About looking for a scapegoat to hit out when we feel let down, humiliated. Taking out anger on your wife, children or servants is an old Indian custom- this is above all, a play about a family with its simmering under currents. In 1998, Mahesh Dattani won the Sahitya Akademi award for his Final Solutions and other plays. This is a stage play in three acts. The play was first performed at Guru Nanak Bhawan, Bangalore on 10 July, 1993. The Play upon with Daksha reading from her dairy. An oil lamp converted to an electric one suggests that the period is the late 1940s. Daksha is the grandmother of the Gandhi's. Who sometimes is seen as a girl of fifteen on the stage? Daksha thanks that she is "a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home". She says, "Last year in August, a terrible thing happened and that was freedom for India". The most whispers : "Freedom! At last freedom!" Daksha close her diary and now Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. A period of forty years is not a long period for a nation. But on the stage, the drumbeat grows louder and the Chorus slowly wears the Hindu masks. The words spoken by Chorus show the beginning of disharmony and painful period ahead. As long as the persons are on the stage they are normal but as soon as they are behind the masks, their thirst for blood resist. Whether we are angry with someone or someone is angry with us each out burst takes its toll on both parties. The Chorus with Hindu masks burst with angry words.

## 18.1 Final Solution—Theme

The central theme and its layered treatment in Final Solutions, the socio-political context of the play's early productions, its long history of performances in English and Hindi-Urdu, and the public attention it has drawn, make this play an immensely rich site to explore theatre's potential

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to serve as a platform for advocating religious pluralism in South Asia. In this thesis, I will examine Final Solutions both as a literary work and as a successful piece of theatre in this capacity. Through a detailed analysis of the text, I will first pinpoint the specific aspects of Dattani's play that make it a powerful tool for addressing religious communalism. I will also explore how political theatrical events, such as Advani's Rath Yatras, influenced the writing of Final Solutions. I will then turn to an examination of its prominent productions, again paying particular attention to how the communal tensions incited by the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign impacted them. This examination will also include a discussion of the audience's reactions to these performances.

I will next compare the Hindi-Urdu version of Final Solutions with the original English text. Here, I will explore the ramifications of the two languages for the play's effectiveness. I will ask if a play like Final Solutions should be written in English, a language not understood by the majority of India's population. Finally, I will compare the medium of theatre to the predominant medium of South Asian popular culture: film. I will consider whether a play like Final Solutions can have a social impact in a country dominated by the Hindi-Urdu film industry known as Bollywood. How does the play compare to films dealing with the same theme? I will explore this question by comparing the play to Mani Ratnam's Bombay (1995), a film made in response to the Babri Masjid demolition and the Bombay riots. Through my examination of both literary and theatrical aspects of Final Solutions, I hope to throw light on the potential of theatre to address the crucial social issue of communal violence in South Asia and contribute to the building of harmony in the region.

The most exciting thing in the book Mahesh Dattani's Interview is included which will help researchers, scholars, academicians and teachers to understand dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani. Vishwanath Bite in his well researched article on Thirty Days in September analyses the play through different perspectives. Anisha. N. in her insightful article, Representing the Other in Seven Steps Around the Fire, examines that Mahesh Dattani's hand touches the heart of the third gender through his vivid portrayal of the hijra community in his play Seven Steps Around the Fire. She further says that Dattani explains the term hijra through the words of Uma Rao, a research scholar in Sociology, by taking recourse to the Ramayana and also tries to explore the misery of the marginalized sections of the society. V. B. Chitra & T. Sasikanth Reddy's paper regarding Sexuality, Alternate Sexualities and Gender in Dattani's Bravely Fought The Queen, highlight the place of modern Indian theatre that is predominantly urban, manifestly influenced by Western traditions even as it tries to find its own feet, still evolving and searching for a distinctive identity. They state that the drama is part of the larger 'Indian theatre', decidedly influenced by, and drawing inspiration from many of its traditional forms. Kaustav Chakraborty in his article, The Inconsistent World of Gays: A Psychoanalytical Approach to On a Muggy Night in Mumbai/ Mango Soufflé, discusses the homosexual bond between the gay characters that seem to be fraudulent, as revealed through Dattani's play On a Muggy Night in Mumbai. He further says that we stigmatize the gay characters in Mahesh Dattani's plays/movies with polygamous infidelity; we must do it keeping their psychological struggle in mind as well as should not exclusively evaluate their appeal on the sole basis of their sexual behavior. Dipanita Gargava in her well-research article, Mahesh Dattani's Plays: a Mirror of Contemporary Society, states that Dattani's plays are reflection of the contemporary society. According to her, Dattani not only deals with common and ordinary people but the common problems of people in realistic terms. In many of his plays, he deals with various issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism and child sexual abuse. Dattani manages to delve deep into the hearts to recreate characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness. Anisha Rajan in her article highlights the theme of gender discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's play Tara. She says that gender inequality is a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Through this play Dattani brings out the root of gender discrimination by making the woman, the destroyer of another woman's life.

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### Theme of Communalism

Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solution' is a very serious and delicate drama on the well-worn subject of communalism. It is first staged in Bangalore in 1993 focusing on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the period of the post-partition riot. Dattani's purpose in depicting the post partition communal violence in India is not to convey the actual events that taken place but to present the psychological fear that inculcated on our mind. The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. Daksha is the grandmother of Gandhi family. When she closes her diary, Hardika appears on the stage. She feels that nothing changed much before independence and after. In between Hardika is telling her daughter that 'those people are all demons' which didn't like to Ramnik, a liberal minded person. In the communal riot, two muslim boys Javed and Bobby took shelter in Ramnik's house. When the chorus shouts: "Kill the sons of swine", nobody helps the boys. Finally Ramnik opens the door for the boys and protected them. For this protection, chorus calls Ramnik 'a traitor'. Even inside the house, every member of the family was against Ramnik but still he was stubborn with his decision and became a true descendent of Mahatma Gandhi. The play also presents the love that doesn't restrict religion, caste and creed, is evident from Smita's love for Babban, an outsider muslim boy. The love and the violence are two different matters are mixed together where violence is promoted and preferred in communal riot. The playwright at the end of the play wishes to stop this game of hatred and communal tension through the character of Ramnik. Even Ramnik accepts that his father has done the black deed so we should forgive offenders and forget the past. This is the final solution suggested by playwright Mahesh Dattani through the character of Ramnik. Chorus, an important element of drama is well used by Mahesh Dattani in the play 'Final Solution'. Flash back is another important technique adopted by playwright in his play which shows how the past moulds the present and how the present reinterprets the past.

There's no topic which has not handled by Mahesh Dattani in his plays. Therefore Dattani is like William Shakespeare in thematic presentation having universal application. Both used to write plays for performing on the stage. But Dattani's plays represent the contemporary society and its problem in the fashion of Ibsen's realism. Dattani has an array of themes to offer in his plays and the issues he chooses to project are the most topical as well as most controversial one. On the whole, Mahesh Dattani has created vibrant, new theatrical techniques and all kinds of socially touched themes which regards him as- 'a playwright of world stature in the contemporary Indian English Drama'.

### Self -Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Final Solutions highlights the ..... .

(*ii*) Daksha is the grandmother of the ..... .

(*iii*) The chorus with Hindu marks burst with ..... .

## 18.2 Summary

- Final Solutions' discusses the Hindu-Muslim problems. In also tackles the theme of transferred resentments in the context of family relations. Alyque Padamsee says, directing Final Solutions in Mumbai.
- The most exciting thing in the book Mahesh Dattani's Interview is included which will help researchers, scholars, academicians and teachers to understand dramatic world of Mahesh Dattani. Vishwanath Bite in his well researched article on Thirty Days in September analyses the play through different perspectives.
- Mahesh Dattani's Plays: a Mirror of Contemporary Society, states that Dattani's plays are reflection of the contemporary society. According to her, Dattani not only deals with common

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and ordinary people but the common problems of people in realistic terms. In many of his plays, he deals with various issues like homosexuality, gender discrimination, communalism and child sexual abuse. Dattani manages to delve deep into the hearts to recreate characters with authenticity and a sense of liveliness.

- Mahesh Dattani's 'Final Solution' is a very serious and delicate drama on the well-worn subject of communalism. It is first staged in Bangalore in 1993 focusing on the problem of communal disharmony between the Hindus and Muslims in India, especially during the period of the post-partition riot.
- The play opens with Daksha reading from her diary. Daksha is the grandmother of Gandhi family. When she closes her diary, Hardika appears on the stage. She feels that nothing changed much before independence and after. In between Hardika is telling her daughter that 'those people are all demons' which didn't like to Ramnik, a liberal minded person. In the communal riot, two muslim boys Javed and Bobby took shelter in Ramnik's house.
- This is the final solution suggested by playwright Mahesh Dattani through the character of Ramnik. Chorus, an important element of drama is well used by Mahesh Dattani in the play 'Final Solution'. Flash back is another important technique adopted by playwright in his play which shows how the past moulds the present and how the present reinterprets the past.

## 18.3 Key-Words

1. Thematic Presentation : Denoting a vowel or other sound or sequence of sounds that occurs between the root of a word and any inflectional or derivational suffixes.
2. Vibrant : Full of energy and enthusiasm.

## 18.4 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on the play 'Final Solution'.
2. Discuss the themes of Final Solution by Mahesh Dattani.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Hindu, Muslim problems (*ii*) Gandhi's
   (*iii*) Angry words.

## 18.5 Further Readings


1. Manoher Malgonker, A Bend in The Ganges (Delhi : Oriental Paperback, 1994) 355.
2. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri. Contemporary Indian Writer in English: Mahesh Dattani (Delhi : Foundation Books, 2005), 77-78.
3. Mahesh Dattani. Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), 168. Subsequent reference are incorporated in the text-with an abbreviation, FS Satchinand K. Indian Literature: Position and Preposition (Delhi: Pencraft Internat.

# Unit 19: Mahesh Dattani: Final Solution—Characterisation

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## Objectives

After reading this Unit students will be able to:

- Discuss about Mahesh Dattani.
- Make an analysis of various characters in Final Solution.

## Introduction

Mahesh Dattani maintains a low profile as a writer , but he is internationally acclaimed as the most outstanding playwright of recent times. The plays of Mahesh Dattani emerged as 'fresh arrival' in the domain of Indian English drama in the last decade of the twentieth century. His plays deal with contemporary issues.

They are plays of today sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time they are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama. His major plays are Dance Like a Man, 30 Days in September, Bravely Fought the Queen, Final Solutions, Tara, and On a Muggy Night in Mumbai Dattani's work probes tangled attitudes in contemporary India towards communal differences, consumerism and gender.

Dattani has treated each subject with a deep-seated identification rooted in everyday angst. Such charged emotions spare no one - neither the players and the director, nor the audience. Deep within platitude-ridden Indian society, his characters seethe and reveal, probe and discern, scathing their families and neighbours, leaving each reader or watcher with a storm within as the aftermath. An essential storm for our evolution as socially sensitive individuals.

Mahesh Dattani does not seek to cut a path through the difficulties his characters encounter in his plays; instead he leads his audience to see just how caught up we all are in the complications and contradictions of our values and assumptions. And by revealing the complexity, he makes the world a richer place for all of us. Where There's A Will is about the rift between the Hindu and the Muslim communities.

## 19.1 Characterisation

Final Solutions has taken the issues of the majority communities in different contexts and situations. It talks of the problems of cultural hegemony, how Hindus had to suffer at the hands of Muslim majority like the characters of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad.

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And how Muslims like Javed suffer in the set up of the majority Hindu community. This all resulted in communal riots and culminated in disruption of the normal social life, and thus hampered the progress of the nation.

The mob in the play is symbolic of our own hatred and paranoia. Each member of the mob is an individual, yet they meet into one seething whole as the politicians play on their fears. In this play, the chorus continuously sings sometimes under the mask of Hindus and sometimes under that of Muslims revealing their feelings of fear and hatred for one another. When the Chariot leading the procession is broken and the Pujari is killed the Hindus masks sing:

The scenes of the play take place inside and outside Ramnik Gandhi's house where Ramnik has given two Muslim boys shelter from the violent mob outside. The mob is in the form of a chorus, changing its guise into Muslims and Hindus through masks and songs. Inside, a Hindu family is sharply divided over giving shelter to the unknown Muslim youths in the midst of communal frenzy and violence. Even after fifty years of Independence, people have not been able to forget their enemity and bias against each other, i.e. Muslims against Hindus and Hindu against Muslims.

In the play, two young men, Javed and Babban, are hired to disrupt social harmony while others like Hardika's parents - in-laws have secretly burnt the shop of their Muslim friend, with the selfish end of buying it at reduced price.

Final Solutions is based on the apparently friendly relations between Muslims and Hindus and the simmering currents of hatred beneath. The family unit comprises members of different age groups, symbolic of past and present, stretching the plot to over a period of half a century. Young people like Smita, Bobby and Javed, present the future and Ramnik and Aruna, the present while Hardika, the grand mother of Smita, is sometimes presented in Daksha (Past) a fifteen year old newly married young girl, writing her diary and then as her grandmother in her late sixties (present) teaching her children and revealing the family's past. Major events are presented through her eyes.

In this play a young baffled boy Javed, who becomes a victim and a terrorist and is exploited by politicians in the name of 'Jahad'. He is trained for the terrorist activities and sabotaging. He is sent to a Hindu 'Mohalla' where a 'Rath Yatra' is taking place. Javed is so over -whelmed with the fervour of 'Jehad' that he throws the first stone on the 'Rath' causing chaos, ending up in the killing of the 'Pujari' and crashing down of the 'Rath'. Bobby a close friend of Javed, saves him from the violent mob and gets him sehtler in Ramnik Gandhi's house, where causes of Hindus and Muslims hatred are being discussed and strange secrets of terror, greed, avarice and communal hatred are being revealed.

Daksha is the grandmother of the Gandhi's. Who sometimes is seen as a girl of fifteen on the stage? Daksha thanks that she is "a young girl who does not matter to anyone outside her home". She says, "Last year in August, a terrible thing happened and that was freedom for India". The most whispers : "Freedom! At last freedom!" Daksha close her diary and now Hardika appears on the stage. She feels the things have not changed that much. A period of forty years is not a long period for a nation. But on the stage, the drumbeat grows louder and the Chorus slowly wears the Hindu masks. The words spoken by Chorus show the beginning of disharmony and painful period ahead. As long as the persons are on the stage they are normal but as soon as they are behind the masks, their thirst for blood resist. Whether we are angry with someone or someone is angry with us each out burst takes its toll on both parties. The Chorus with Hindu masks burst with angry words.

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Ramnik, the father carries with him the burden of the guilt of his father's black deeds, transferring some of the resentment to his mother. Hardika, Aruna, his Wife and Smita, his daughter both hit on at each other for no apparent reason. The entire family is of course, putted again the back deep of a root. Tom City Zarine and the other guests from the post make an entry in the dramatic device that Dattani uses to show his time-shifts-Daksha, the young Hardika whose voice will resonate through the play inter weaving the post with present.

The play now assumes a wholly different perspective even as the familial tensions continue within the home and are set off by communal tensions outside. The outside (Babban and Javed) is in a sense allowed entry, after severe resistance from within (Aruna and Hardika) and then begins the extortion of the fragile familial ties. Several scenes establish the bond between Aruna and Smita, with Ramnik, the father often being made to feel isolated. But with the instruction of Babban and Javed, Smita reveals her true sensibility and fees herself of the 'stifling' prejudices of her mother, at the same time trying to be fair to her. Ramnik, too has never revealed the guilt of the post of his mother, saving her the weight of the burden than he has had to carry all alone. The mob/chorus comprising five men and ten marks on stick five Hindu and five Muslim marks, is the omnipresent factor through out the play, crunching on the horseshoe shaped sump that dominates the space of the stage which is otherwise split up 4 into multilevel sets. The marks lie significantly strewn all over the ramp, to be worn when required.

Dattani carefully uses the same five men in black to double for any given religious group when they assume the role of the mob, which they do in a stylized fashion. The living area is not furnished except for the realistic level that functions as the kitchen and the Pooja-room and another period room suggesting the 1940s where Hardika/Daksha are to revisit the past.

The play infect begins with such a visit through the opening scene where Daksha sets beginning the process of recording lived history "Dear Dairy today is the first time I have dared to put my thoughts on your pages 31 March 1948". Criss-crossing a whole gamut of memories that are to construct the character that she is to become- Hardika "After forty years - I opened my diary again. And I wrote. A dozen pages before. A dozen pages now. A young girl is childish scribble. An old women's shaky scrawl. Yes, things have not changed that much," Things have indeed not changed much. The space of the stage is thick with ominous cries that reverberate and the same hatred and intolerance for the other still sents the air stones had come crashing down on Daksha's records sheltering Shamshad Begum, Noorjahan, Suraiya, "Those beautiful voices. Cracked…" like her friendship with Zarina. Forty years hence, her son Ramnik attempts to sight a few wrongs taking in Babban and Javed and protecting them against the fury of the mob & meanwhile, the audience witnesses the dialogic rational of both the sides "should we swallowed up?

"Final Solutions" has a powerful contemporary resonance as it addresses as issue of utmost concern to our society, i.e. the issue of communalism. The play presents different shades of the communalist attitude prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in its attempt to underline the stereotypes and clichés influencing the collective sensibility of one community against another.

What distinguishes this work from other plays written on the subject is that it is neither sentimental in its appeal nor simplified in its approach. It advances the objective candour or a social scientist while presenting a mosaic of diverse attitudes towards religious identity that often plunges the country into inhuman strife. Yet the issue is not moralised, as the demons of communal hatred are located not out on the street but deep within us.

The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family,

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Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine. Her son, Ramnik Gandhi, is haunted by the knowledge his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen. Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu Samskar and the granddaughter, Smita, cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy.

The pulls and counter-pulls of the family are exposed when two Muslim boys, Babban and Javed, seek shelter in their house on being chased by a baying Hindu mob. Babban is a moderate while Javed is an aggressive youth. After a nightlong exchange of judgements and retorts between the characters, tolerance and forgetfulness emerge as the only possible solution of the crisis. Thus, the play becomes a timely reminder of the conflicts raging not only in India but in other parts of the world.

### Self-Assessment

**1. Fill in the blanks:**

(*i*) Bobby and Javed, present the future with ..... and Aruna.

(*ii*) Hardika's daughter-in-law, Aruna, lives by the strict code of the Hindu ..... and the grand-daughter, Smita cannot allow herself a relationship with a Muslim boy.

(*iii*) Zarine, her son, ....., is haunted by the knowledge his fortunes were founded on a shop of Zarine's father, which was burnt down by his kinsmen.

(*iv*) Babban is a ..... while Javed is an aggressive youth.

## 19.2 Summary

- Final Solutions has taken the issues of the majority communities in different contexts and situations. It talks of the problems of cultural hegemony, how Hindus had to suffer at the hands of Muslim majority like the characters of Hardika/Daksha in Hussainabad.
- The scenes of the play take place inside and outside Ramnik Gandhi's house where Ramnik has given two Muslim boys shelter from the violent mob outside. The mob is in the form of a chorus, changing its guise into Muslims and Hindus through masks and songs. Inside, a Hindu family is sharply divided over giving shelter to the unknown Muslim youths in the midst of communal frenzy and violence.
- The play now assumes a wholly different perspective even as the familial tensions continue within the home and are set off by communal tensions outside. The outside (Babban and Javed) is in a sense allowed entry, after severe resistance from within (Aruna and Hardika) and then begins the extortion of the fragile familial ties. Several scenes establish the bond between Aruna and Smita, with Ramnik, the father often being made to feel isolated.
- The play moves from the partition to the present day communal riots. It probes into the religious bigotry by examining the attitudes of three generations of a middle-class Gujrati business family, Hardika, the grandmother, is obsessed with her father's murder during the partition turmoil and the betrayal by a Muslim friend, Zarine.

## 19.3 Key-Words

1. Communal riots : Violent public disorder, engaged in by a significant proportion of the community, and endorsed by a majority of the same community.
2. Candour : The quality of being honest and straightforward in attitude and speech.

Notes

## 19.4 Review Questions

1. Briefly describe the play Final Solution.
2. Discuss the various characters presented in the play 'Final Solution'.

### Answers: Self-Assessment

1. (*i*) Ramnik (*ii*) Samskar
   (*iii*) Ramnik Gandhi (*iv*) Moderate

## 19.5 Further Readings


1. Manoher Malgonker, A Bend in The Ganges (Delhi : Oriental Paperback, 1994) 355.
2. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri. Contemporary Indian Writer in English: Mahesh Dattani (Delhi : Foundation Books, 2005), 77-78.
3. Mahesh Dattani. Collected Plays (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000), 168. Subsequent reference are incorporated in the text-with an abbreviation, FS Satchinand K. Indian Literature: Position and Preposition (Delhi: Pencraft Internat.