

Block

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COMPARATIVE INDIAN LITERATURE-II

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Comparative Indian Literature II

Modernism is a dynamic and evolving concept that encapsulates within it various literary movements like romantic, feminist and so on. We will examine this concept in this Block and go on to talk about the centre-periphery relation/hierarchy: imperialism and its many but mutually related strategies of domination - economic, political, military, communication and cultural - by means of which alien nations, peoples and cultures are brought under a dispensation of “unequal exchange” and how Post-colonial studies of literatures, cultures and societies are concerned with subversion of imperialistic assumptions. Comparative Literature has its origins in struggles by writers to negotiate the ground between two cultures - which need not always be those of two separate cultures. They can be two strands of the same culture. The discussion of *Choma's Drum* brings out this element. Another unit will highlight the complementary statements on the feminine presence and the feminine psyche in *Godaan*, and ‘Andhey Mode Se Aagey’.



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UNIT 1 LITERATURE IN INDIAN LANGUAGES AND THE IDEA OF MODERNITY

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Idea of Modernity
- 1.3 Modernism in Literature of Indian Languages
- 1.4 Modernism After India's Independence
- 1.5 Postmodernism
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Unit End Questions
- 1.8 References and Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The intent of this unit will be to acquaint the student with the idea of literary modernity in Indian languages in its many aspects. Apart from the simple idea of modernity and modernism in literature as opposed to tradition, the emphasis will be on the many kinds and meanings of modernity.

This unit will discuss post-modern in a way that it helps understand modernity. The generally accepted method has been to contrast the earlier periods with the defining features of modernism. There is now the need for contrasting post-modern and modern in a similar way. Modernity will be explained not just in the context of tradition but also in the context of post-modernity and post-modernism. You will therefore be equipped to question the ideas and concepts of “modern” and “post-modern” and discuss these issues meaningfully with the literary texts in the Indian languages as a base.

The unit will have equal emphasis on the modern literary texts as well as on literary history, and you will be able to look at the older literary, including the canonical, texts to locate features that are associated with modern and post-modern.

You can then map the course of literature in Indian languages in a historical context. That is, the emphasis on modernity will help in tracing the development of new genres like the essay, the novel, free verse in the Indian languages.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning about modernism more than a decade after the year 2000 is quite different from doing so either in 1950 or even in 1980. The 20th century is fully behind us. Assuming that ‘modernism’ in India began sometime around the 1850s, we look back at a span of more than 150 years. It is a long period and we can see that ‘modernism’ passes through many phases. What ‘modernism’ was in the 1880s and 1890s is not the same as ‘modernism’ in the 1920s and 1930s. We also see ‘modernism’ taking a different shape after Independence.

As 'modernism' did not remain the same over a century, it also assumes different names in its different forms. So we have the 'renaissance' period, the 'nationalist' period, the 'romantic' period, the 'progressive' period and the 'experimental' period. Each one of the periods carries its own significance but all of them carry the 'modern' label as well. The writers who were nationalists, romantics, progressives and experimentalists considered themselves 'modern'.

Before you begin reading this section it would be a good idea to jot down your own views about what modern is.

1.2 THE IDEA OF MODERNITY

One of the important things we realise as we map modernism in the literatures of Indian languages is that there is no single definition of 'modernism'. It changes in shape and meaning as the 19th century ends and as different decades of the 20th century roll by. The Dalit poets of the 1960s considered themselves modern, and the feminist poets of the 1980s considered themselves modern.

One of the interesting and challenging things about studying modernism is the rich variety of literary movements. The progress of modernism also shows how the country and the world have changed and how they use the 'modern' label to describe and identify themselves.

There is however a need to distinguish between the 'modern' and 'contemporary'. A writer of the 1970s is a contemporary writer to his readers and fellow-writers of that decade. But he need not necessarily be a 'modern' writer. It is not enough to be writing in the 1970s and the 1980s to be considered a 'modern' writer. Most of the writers, whether they belong to the 1940s or the 1960s, identified for discussion under this topic are 'modern' and not just 'contemporary'.

It is also to be recognised that there is no single definition of the 'modern'. At one level, it could mean rejection of the past. At another level, it could mean the revival of the past in a new form, and this is called renaissance or rebirth. A third meaning of 'modern' is the celebration of the scientific and industrial civilisation. It could also mean the rejection of the scientific and industrial civilisation.

The study of modernism is interesting and exciting because it is not a simple phenomenon. It is not just literary or cultural. It has also to do with social, economic and political aspects of life. And each aspect influences the other. For example, the 'progressive' writers of the modern period would not have emerged but for industrialisation and urbanisation, and the emergence of the capitalists on the one hand and the working class on the other. There would have been no nationalist writers if there was no freedom struggle against the foreign ruler.

It is therefore necessary to know the time and location of a particular kind of modernism to understand the literature of that particular period and phase.

1.3 MODERNITY IN LITERATURE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

The simple starting point will be to locate modernity in the 19th and 20 centuries, when the defining feature is the emergence of prose forms, the essay, the novel and the short story. The subject matter too changes, moving from characters of myth and fable and the historical past to the everyday reality of ordinary people in the

present. Uma Shankar Joshi, the Gujarati litterateur, sums up the advent of modernity in Indian literature lucidly in an essay, “Modernism and Indian Literature” (1958). He observes that the defining feature of modernity was the emergence of prose in the Indian languages. But there are larger connotations, which go beyond literary forms, about modernity as it impacts the Indian literary imagination. He writes:

“If we examine the literary output of a hundred years ago, the first thing that strikes our attention is the emergence of prose as a potent vehicle of expression. Prose has been sadly neglected in the past. With India’s coming on the periphery of the industrial civilization and the consequent increase in mobility, communicational needs increased considerably and prose was developed to meet these new needs.”

He identifies three periods of modernity in the literatures of Indian languages – Renaissance, Modernism and Experimentalism. In a bold interpretation of modern Indian history, he looks at 1857, which marked the First War of Indian Independence, as a turning point because the first Indian universities – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were established in that year. And it is the first graduates of these universities, which included Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who set out to write the modern Indian literary works with a deep awareness of the Indian tradition. He argues:

“The focal point of Indian Renaissance is perhaps 1857, the year of two great events, the attempt at overthrowing foreign rule and the founding of Universities at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The patriotism of the University men was directed into more sound and constructive channels. They were not completely swept away by the West as the preceding generation of reformers had been. Thanks to the teaching of ancient classics, their sense of self-respect was rehabilitated and the visionaries among them dreamt of a synthesis of all that was best in the East and the West. A period of consolidation of the cultural gains began as the first graduates came out from the Universities.”

Annada Sankar Ray, the Bengali writer and essayist, approaches the issue from a slightly different point of view and defines modernity in terms of “humanism”. In the essay, “The Meeting of East and West” (1958), he locates the advent of modernity:

“During the early years of the nineteenth century farsighted Indians led by Ram Mohun Roy realised that their country had been isolated not only in space but also in time. To bring India in line with the Modern Age they decided upon a western education and to link her with the rest of the world they defied the social ban on sea voyage. These two events had great importance in the history of our culture in the nineteenth century. A spirit of humanism entered our thought and found expression in our literature.”

Ray goes on to mark out the humanism that defines modern literature. In the same essay, he writes:

“Simultaneously Bengali and other languages entered upon their modern period, which was also their humanist period. They were no longer tied to theology, mythology and scholasticism. No gods and goddesses descended from the skies and played a part in human situations. The world revealed by western seers was an intensely human world of individuals striving against odds without a supernatural being suddenly appearing and warding off tragedy. Yet this had been the climate of our literature in the past and, for that matter, of the medieval literature of the western countries as well. This change of climate was not so much a western phenomenon as a modern orientation.”

He also observes that modern Indian literature at the beginning did not stop with the humanism of European Renaissance but that it also absorbed the French Revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality. Ray explores the contradictions that emerge when modernity is seen as a Western concept imposed by the British colonial rulers, and how Gandhi's "swadeshi" makes everyone turn away from western education and everything western. He notes that Tagore too realised the need to reject the materialism of the modern West and affirm spiritual values. Ray confronts the inherent contradictions in the idea of modernity.

Joshi and Ray offer interesting interpretations of the beginnings of modernity in Indian literatures. Their arguments might appear to be overlapping in some of the details, but their views remain distinct.

Activity 1

Try and find out whether you can think of a modern moment in Indian literary history before the 19th century and before the British era. For example, do you think that when poets began to write in their own languages like Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi instead of writing in Sanskrit, it can be called a break with tradition and the beginning of the modern period?

Joshi locates the emergence of "modernism" in the 1930s and makes an important distinction between "modernity" and "modernism". Modernity in literature can be seen as a response to the industrial civilisation, whereas "modernism" is, in a way, turning inwards, with an emphasis on the individual's feelings and his/her perception of the world. The poetic movement which has come to be known as "Chayavad" in Hindi can be termed modernist in this sense. On the other hand, Premchand with his realistic depiction of the middle and poor classes of people in towns and villages in his novels and short-stories represents in many ways the high tide of modernity. He is also identified with the progressive school with allegiance to leftist politics derived from Marxian ideas. Progressivism with its Marxist tint becomes pronounced in Urdu poetry of the 1930s and 1940s. In Urdu too, the 1930s saw the emergence of "progressive" poets and story-writers. There was also the modernist element represented by two poets, Miraji and N.M.Rashid (also known as Noon Meem Rashid).

Apart from Urdu, the leftist turn in literature became prominent in Telugu, where it lasted into the 1970s, rejuvenated by the Naxal movement of the late 1960s. There was an interesting development in Telugu poetry with the emergence of a group of poets who called themselves "Digambara Kavulu" or Naked Poets. This group sought to break with the leftist ideological rhetoric of the progressive group and declared an anarchist manifesto denouncing political ideology as such. Its poetry described the drab daily life of ordinary people which essentially was the state of not-so-well-to-do middle and lower middle class people. Some of the prominent voices of this group were Nikhileswar, Jwalamukhi and Nagnamuni. The Digambara Kavulu were in fact, responding to the explicitly leftist Viplava Rachayatula Sangham (Revolutionary Writers Association).

In Marathi, a group of Dalit writers, including Namdeo Dhasal, created a literary storm by using poetry as a vehicle to express the life of deprivation and despair of the Dalits. Dhasal attempted to translate this literary impulse by starting the Dalit Panthers party on the lines of the Black Panthers, which was created by Black activists at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. The political move was not a success but the poetry of the Dalit writers remains a turning point in modern Marathi literary history.

Modernism became *avant garde* (new and experimental) in Hindi literature with the publication of *Taar Saptak* (1943), an anthology of poems by a group of new writers led by Agyeya, and which included writers like Gajanan Muktibodh and Nemichand Jain. In the early 1950s, a similar experimental move was made with regard to story-telling that came to be known as “Nayee Kahani”, which had writers like Nirmal Verma among them.

There are however two interesting developments in Urdu which are worthy of notice. It is in Urdu that journalism emerged first, and there can be no better vehicle of prose to report and describe day-to-day matters than through the journalistic medium. The second development from the literary point of view was that of the epistolary tradition, or the writing of letters as an art form. The emergence of modern Urdu prose goes back to the writers at Fort William College in Calcutta who prepared textbooks in the language for the East India Company officials to learn the language of the people in north India for administrative purposes. Mirza Ghalib (1795-1869), considered the greatest Urdu poet, wrote letters spanning a 20-year period from the late 1840s to late 1860s which show how he freely uses English words and forges an informal and conversational style of writing. In the span of less than a century, Urdu prose came to be used extensively for diverse purposes including history, literary history and criticism. Some of the early works of history and literary criticism have been written in Urdu. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s account of the archaeological remains of Delhi along with brief sketches of the Delhi notables of his time, known as *Asar-us-Sanadid* (1847) is a major breakthrough. A close associate, Altaf Hussain Hali, wrote a literary biography of the greatest Urdu poet of 19th century, Mirza Ghalib. It was called “*Yadgar-e-Ghalib*” and it was published in 1898.

Activity 2

Identify the emergence of prose in any Indian language of your choice. What was it used for? Was it for writing an essay, a novel, a letter? Was it used to write about history, science, politics...?

In the first stage of modernism we see three phases. The first was the adoption of the Western literary forms – prose, novel. And it became an effective and appropriate mode of communications in keeping with the changed styles of life. The second stage was that of using the western literary forms to assert nationalist pride. The third phase was the experimental, when writers were seeking to explore new modes of expression. Each of these stages was generally represented by a generation, and it unwittingly turned into a battle of generations.

The post-Tagore group, known as Kallol, and which included Buddhadev Bose, Bishnu Dey, Amiya Chakravarty, Samar Sen and Jibanananda Das, felt a need to rebel against the domineering presence of Rabindranath Tagore. It was a complex act. And Das, who embodied “modernism” in its true Western sense – disillusionment with the modern era of industrial civilisation and nationalist conflicts - did not accept rebellion against Tagore as the only way out. Das speaking of modern poetry in Bangla says: “Poets are not born as a result of a conspiracy to overthrow the great poets preceding them... It is with the help of pointers from Tagore that modern Bengali poetry made a tiny start, and its development will not culminate in the demolition of the fundamentals of Bengali literature or of Tagore...” (Quoted by Chidananda Das Gupta, who translated Das’ poems into English, ix). But it was not an easy relationship between those who wanted to bring in the strand of modernism as against modernity. Das Gupta writes in his introduction to Das’ anthology: “...in his salad days the young Jibanananda would send his poems to Rabindranath Tagore, hoping for words of encouragement, only to be met with an embarrassed disapproval.

To Tagore elegance of language was as vital as richness of meaning, striking roots in tradition as important as being contemporary. Perhaps he could not stomach the young aspirant's lines like 'From the spittle, the blood and the excreta/the fly rises into the sunlight' or 'Turning the hydrant on ...The leper licks up water'. The patriarch admitted that the young poet had some talent but complained that he persecuted the language"(vii).

Vinay Dharwadker, confining himself to poetry, tries to provide a slightly different map for Indian poetry in the 20th century. In his essay, "Some Contexts of Modern Indian Poetry", he identifies the period between 1910 and 1930 as the nationalist phase, and he identifies Rabindranath Tagore (Bengali), Aurobindo Ghose (English), Shridhar Pathak, Maithilisharan Gupta and Makhanlal Chaturvedi (Hindi) as the poets who reflected the nationalist mood. This was followed by the Romantic period, lasting between 1920 and 1935, which was an echo of the British Romantic poets of the 19th century. The Romantic influence could be seen in the works of Lakshminath Bezbarua, Raghunath Raichoudhary, Jatindranath Duara (Assamese), Rayaprolu Subbarao and Devulapalli Krishnashastry (Telugu), Madhav Julian and the Ravi Kiran Mandal (Marathi) and Mahadevi Varma (Hindi).

Dharwadker argues that two other movements overlapped with that of nationalism and romanticism in the 1930s. The first trend was that of the Progressives, who believed in some kind of Marxist ideology, and it could be seen in many of the Indian languages and lasted into the 1980s. He describes the Progressive moment in poetry in the following terms: "Many of the Progressive criticised and rejected the patriotism and romanticism of their predecessors, and attempted to paint a bleak, often starkly violent, even "anti-nationalistic" portrait of Indian society, choosing invective, satire, and irony over epic seriousness and lyricism." Some of the Progressive poets he identifies are Raghuvir Sahay and Kedarnath Singh in Hindi, Vinda Karandikar in Marathi and Sunil Gangopadhyay in Bengali.

The other country-wide phenomenon that Dharwadker identifies in rather specific terms is that of "the Indian counterpart of Anglo-American modernism" which simply translated into "free verse". And what did this modernism mean in terms of themes and subjects? His answer: "...they concentrated on such themes as the disintegration of traditional communities and familiar cultural institutions, the alienation of the individual in urban society, the dissociation of thought and feeling, the disasters of modernisation, the ironies of daily existence, and the anguish of unresolved doubts and anxieties." The poets that Dharwadker identifies with this "Anglo-American modernism" are B.S.Mardhekar in Marathi in the 1940s, Dilip Chitre and Arun Kolatkar, again in Marathi in the 1960s, Nabaneeta Dev Sen in Bengali, Kunwar Narayan in Hindi and Ghulam Mohammed Sheikh in Gujarati.

An issue that Dharwadker raises is the important one of "foreign influences", especially the French connection. While talking about modernism in Indian literatures, it is assumed that all the modern ideas and influences derived from English literature. It is generally true as Dharwadker had himself noted while discussing modernism. But he rightly sees that there is another aspect of modernism which is not derived from English but from the French. He is of the view that Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and Toru Dutt in the 19th century showed French influence. But he sees more the explicit influence of modern French poets like Baudelaire, Mallarme, Rimbaud and Paul Valery. He identifies Buddhadev Bose and Nabaneeta Dev Sen as the two poets who worked out the influences of these French authors in their poetry. Dharwadker describes the French influence in Bengali poetry in the post-Independence era thus: "...its immersion in metropolitan culture,

its love-hate relationship with modernity, its simultaneous provincialism and cosmopolitanism, its zeal for revolutions – carry strong traces of French influence.” He also detects the influence of the Spanish language poet from Chile, Pablo Neruda’s influence in Hindi and Gujarati, Odiya and Malayalam.

An important assessment of modern poets in India is how some of them go back to the past and re-invent some of the older literary forms. He makes the acute observation: “Although all modern poets “reject” the past in order to become “modern”, they often end using the past imaginatively and constructively in a multitude of ways: many modern writers are, quite paradoxically, traditionalists and classicists.”

Activity 3

Dharwadker had identified “foreign influences” on some of the modern Indian poets. Following Dharwadker’s example, try and identify “foreign influences” in the modern Indian novel. Look for novelists who have used the “stream of consciousness” method following the example of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and those who have used “magical realism” following the example of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

It can now be claimed that the concept of modernity in Indian literatures has a beginning and it has an end, and that it can be studied like other literary periods — classical and romantic, ancient and medieval. It is quite likely that there would be greater unanimity as to when the modern age began in the history of Indian letters, though debates cannot be ruled out about this aspect as well, but there will be no unanimity as to when it has ended. There will be many who will argue that it has not ended.

1.4 MODERNITY AFTER INDIA’S INDEPENDENCE

An interesting question that a student of the idea of modernity in Indian languages faces is: After India gained independence in 1947, what is the status of modernity? In the political, social and economic spheres, it was felt that India has to go a long way to achieve modernity. In the political sphere, it was felt that institutions like parliament, educational institutions should help articulate people’s views in a democratic set up. In the social sphere, the emphasis was on equality and the liberty to express individual opinions. And in the economic sphere, the idea was to end deprivation and poverty which is an indirect affirmation of the idea of equality. It is natural then that in the literature of independent India, these concerns and ideas play a dominant role. This did not however mean that writers turned to socialist realism and that they did not do anything but translate the official agenda of national concerns in their writings. However, there were many who did that also.

Writing in 1999 in the Sahitya Akademi journal, *Indian Literature*, Kannada writer S.L. Bhyrappa had argued about the impact of independence, democracy and universal education on literature in the country. He wrote in the essay titled, “Abiding Values in Indian Literature”: “A new thing happened to the growth of Indian literature with the extension of universal education. Sections of society which hitherto could not even dream of expressing its experiences in written language gave rise to writers. Indian literature started to extend its boundaries.” He is also of the view that democracy in the country developed along caste lines, and that political groups and pressure groups developed within each caste. Bhyrappa then turns to the issue of how these trends have impacted literature: “Literature became more

and more socio-political than an activity of the imagination, of giving expression to the deeper experiences of the people.”

This is a controversial assessment by one of the eminent modern writers in the country. There will be many who will disagree with his view because he does not seem to think that the politicisation of literature is good or positive. A little later in the essay he hits out against the modernists, especially those propagating the progressive or Marxist view of modernity. He says: “If a talented young person publishes a few good poems or short stories or a novel, the moment readers compliment him or her, earn his or her gratitude and then din into his or her ear, ‘you belong to a suppressed community. Your forefathers and ancestors suffered indignities since five thousand years. It is your duty to express those sufferings, frustrations and anger in your creative writing and incite your community people to act against those who perpetrated these inhuman atrocities.’ The young writer falls victim to this preaching and is gradually frozen into a committed writer and is prevented from growing into a creative one. In the same way a talented young woman is forced to become a feminist writer.”

Some of the important books in the 1950s in the Indian languages pose a challenge to the critic, scholar and the reader because they do not fit the ideological mould as described by Bhyrappa but they do meet the criterion he has outlined for a creative writer. The writers we will mention now were pursuing the creative path as described by Bhyrappa: “A creative writer has a wider moral responsibility than the one propounded by a socio-political campaigner. In fact, every literary creation explores a new shade of moral light, though moral preaching is not the purpose of literature.”

Activity 4

Do you agree with Bhyrappa’s assessment? What do you think has been the impact of democracy on literature in India?

1.5 POSTMODERNISM

It is important to note that writers in different Indian languages were striking a new path of their own nearly unaware of the developments in languages other than their own. In 1951, Mohammed Vaikom Basheer wrote *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu* (My Grandfather had an Elephant), which is written in the dialect used by Muslims in north Kerala. Phanishwar Nath Renu’s *Maila Anchal* was published in 1954 and what marked the novel was the use of local dialect and not the standard literary Khari Boli. This was a departure from the norm. Mohan Rakesh’s play, *Aashaadh Ka Ek Din*, written in 1958, gives lyrical turn to the language and infuses the 1950s’ mood of ennui, which is of a philosophical nature, deriving from the then dominant philosophy of existentialism.

In 1964, Kannada writer Girnesh Karnad’s play *Tughluq* brought into play the interaction between political leader and history. Though it was seen as a comment on the tragic end-years of India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, it can now be read as a more universal portrayal. Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar’s *Shantata! Court Chaalu Ahe* (Quiet, The Court Is in Session), produced in 1967 explored sexual mores in the form of the rehearsal of a play in the play. But the more devastating portrayal of violence – both physical and psychological – in contemporary society and family came in his 1961 play, *Gidhade* (The Vultures), which was produced only in 1970.

It is in the writings of Basheer, Renu, Rakesh, Karnad and Tendulkar that one can see the glimpses of what can be called “post-modernism”. These writers were not struggling to break away from tradition or classicism as a modern writer would tend to do. They are moving beyond social portrayal or experimentation with literary form. Through their writings, they are trying to explore the aesthetics of experience as in Rakesh’s *Aashaadh Ka Ek Din* as well as the simple but subtle aspects of human psychology. Tendulkar’s plays look at the harsh aspects of life of mostly middle class families, though in *Sakharam Binder* the hero and the heroine belong to the working or artisanal class.

Post-modernism is a difficult phenomenon to identify as yet because there is no consensus on what the features of post-modernism are as we know the features of modernism like free verse in poetry or the description of the lives of ordinary people and the ordinary language they use. It would however be difficult to describe all the literary works written from late 19th century to early 21st century to be modern, a single phenomenon. Modernism had gone through many changes, and it appears that it has also ended at some point. The interesting thing would be to ask the question: When did modernism end? Did it end at all? Are we still dealing with modernity and modernism as we read a novel or a play or a poem written in the last decade of the 20th century and the first of the 21st century? We know the beginnings of modernism. Do we know the end of modernism? It appears that we may not have clear answers about the death of modernism. But it is necessary to ask the question. It will enable us to look at modernism from a different perspective.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

It is quite clear that there is a difference between being ‘modern’ and being ‘contemporary’. Modernity lies not just in the themes and perspectives but also the approach, the attitudes and the articulation of those thoughts and ideas. The term ‘modernism’ is not an all-inclusive term that describes a homogenous group nor is it restricted to a particular period or epoch in literary history. On the contrary, it is a dynamic and evolving concept that encapsulates within it various literary movements like romantic, feminist and so on.

The course of Indian literature in the various languages reveals modernist thought both before and after Independence and is marked by a self-conscious rendering of the contemporary milieu, a reflection of social mores and an attempt to express opposition or advocate a change from contemporary practices, whether social, literary or political.

The development of certain other features in literary thought, perspective and expression has given rise to the term ‘postmodern’ and critics are still debating whether the phase of modernism has ended.

1.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Do you agree with Joshi and Ray that modernism came to India because of the British and Indians getting to know European ideas? Or do you think that modernism would have happened in India even without the arrival of the British?
- 2) Is the modernity that came with the British a unique event, or is it the case that there are many moments of modernity in history as well as in literature?

- 3) Write your response to Dharwadker's view that not all nationalist poets were romantics, and that not all romantics were nationalists.
- 4) Do you agree with Dharwadker's thesis that some of the modern poets are traditionalists and classicists? Find examples in your own language of poets or novelists who are both modern and traditional (Dharwadker has given the example of Hindi poet, Mahadevi Verma as being modern and traditional).
- 5) Read the works of writers mentioned in the unit and identify postmodernist features as distinct from the modernist ones.

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UNIT 2 THE CENTRE AND THE PERIPHERY

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit you will read about the multiple dimensions and uses of the ‘Centre-Periphery model’ as a conceptual and analytical tool in the study of literature and literary history. What could the ‘centre’ mean in the reading and experience of literature (say, a novel)? Has it something to do with what we call the “point of view”?

By the end of this unit, you will acquire a useful grasp of how European imperialist expansion has controlled and affected the colonized peoples and societies around the world. You will also see how in addition to the colonial or imperial Centre’s political and socio-economic domination, the peripheries (i.e. colonies) have been subjected to much deeper and wider consequences to their languages, their cultures and their identities. You will have a historical sense of the changes caused in the ‘world-view’ of people brought under foreign rule. You will also understand the great changes/shifts that have resulted from and since the arrival of ‘postcolonial’ theory and practice. You will be able to understand how it has been a two-fold development in India – of subversion and empowerment. While it has meant a rejection of the imperialist assumptions and values of the ‘Centre’ on the one hand, it has also led on the other hand, to a revolutionary emergence of women as well as huge sections of hitherto traditionally ‘marginalized’ native populations/cultures and world-views. They have broken out from the internal ‘peripheries’ of socio-political subordination.

You will also learn about the important role of translation, another major focus of post-colonial attention, which had for long been looked upon as a secondary activity. You will be able to see by the end of the Unit, how our understanding of literature, culture and society has changed in the last four decades or so.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonialism must have existed for ages, at least as a by-product of trade-related monopoly; but in the last five centuries, since around the time of the European

Renaissance, truly unprecedented changes overwhelmed the world of nature and of man. The expansion of European capitalism around the world led to Europe's imperial control over most parts of the world, which made Europe the virtual Master of the world by the nineteenth century.

Anti-colonial struggles and movements around the world, from late 19th century through the first half of the 20th century have led to most of the theorizing of colonialism and imperialism; and eventually also to the “decolonization” of the colonies. Concepts such as the ‘centre (core)-periphery’ relation seem to have actually emerged from studies in disciplines such as political science, economics and sociology. The use of this concept in the context of the study of literature has been recent - like the emergence of Post-Colonial studies of the literatures from former British and European colonies, after their decolonization, i.e. after these countries became independent from their respective colonial rulers, in mid-20th century. As applied to the literatures in English, the core-periphery relation will mean that which exists between British literature and the ‘peripheral’ writings produced anywhere outside Britain within the former empire: in India, The West Indies, or Africa and other countries of the ‘British Commonwealth.’ The USA was a British colony until 1776 AD, and American literature has been the first instance of the emergence of a ‘national literature’ outside Europe, which has also provided an early model of development of post-colonial literature. Our focus will be on literature written in English from these countries, as we take stock of the political and cultural domination of the peripheries by the imperial centre.

Activity 1

India was under British control for nearly two centuries. What influence has this had on the way we think about our society and culture today? How, apart from reading history books, can we learn about such changes? Make a note of your ideas and then compare them with what is said later in this unit.

2.2 THE CENTRE -PERIPHERY MODEL AND IMPERIALISM

Let us first look at what the ‘centre/core-periphery/margin’ relation means and what makes it relevant to the study of literature (post-colonial or comparative).

We know that several civilizations have existed in different parts of the world at strategic locations which we might call ‘centres’ or ‘core’ places surrounded by ‘peripheral’ regions. The centre-periphery relation may be understood basically as a map of how an empire or a prosperous civilization must organize and administer its economy over the length and breadth of its expanse to hold itself together as a powerful entity. The model or mode of marking or representing the ‘central’ parts or “heart-land” of an imperial domain and other relatively less important areas appears to be as old as civilization. We need to note that it is a hierarchical relation of mutual dependency. The empires of the ancient world, we learn, could either not sustain the core-periphery hierarchy or were destroyed by the ‘barbarians’ as the Roman civilization is supposed to have been. Interestingly, the so-called barbarians have everywhere been highly skilled nomads, who tamed horses and were masters of production and use of iron. Hence they could frequently reverse the core-periphery hierarchies; even form states of their own (Thomas D. Hall, 1991). The Mongols of Asia are one of the better known examples. Hence the centre-periphery relation works only as long as it is maintained by force. New centres and newer peripheries could come into existence from time to time.

Each of the world's civilizations or mighty empires of the past as well as our own modern, global or globalized civilization has had its 'power centres' which command and benefit from places, regions and territories which are controlled by it – the 'periphery'. The centre gains its surplus from its built-in inequality with the periphery; while the periphery, which must remain in eternal deficit, remains mere periphery in relation to the centre. They mutually regulate each other and reproduce their respective conditions of centrality and peripheral dependency. This condition of *dynamic but unequal* exchange is the precise pre-condition for imperialism to thrive on.

However, far from the limitations of ancient empires and regimes, modern (neo) imperialistic systems of core-periphery relation are more consistent and much more efficient in the changing, developing world of communication networks and technologies of speed and coverage. This makes modern-day imperialisms more subtle, stable and durable, unless challenged from within.

Activity 2

Read the following lines of W. B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer,

Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...

- 1) What is the relation between the falconer and the falcon like? Does the poem suggest any graphic image of it?
- 2) What happens if the falcon cannot hear the falconer, as the poet observes? Does it suggest to you that the poet is feeling or building up a profound sense of the world plunging into a terrible chaos or anarchy?

Now this conceptual pair (of the core and the margins) may in fact be used to describe anything from the 'centre and periphery' of a village, a city, a region and so on, including the most diverse systems of networking across vast territories and continents at the global level. But in each case, a crucial differentiation is necessary: the periphery is *dominated* by the centre in a reciprocal bind. Mostly used by economists who study the inequalities of development within or across nations, the centre-periphery hierarchy has become an important matrix in the context of the 'Third world'. Read the following description of it in *A Dictionary of Sociology*, 1998 (vide Gordon Marshall's entry/Encyclopedia.com):

The centre-periphery model...suggests that the global economy is characterized by a structured relationship between economic centres which, by using military, political, and trade power, extract an economic surplus from the subordinate peripheral countries. One major factor in this is the inequality between wage-levels between core and periphery, which make it profitable for capitalist enterprises to locate part or all of their production in underdeveloped regions. The extraction of profit depends on that part of the cost of the reproduction of the labour-force that is not met by wages being met in the non-capitalist sector. Thus according to proponents of the core-periphery model, the appearance that capitalism is developing traditional and backward societies by locating enterprises in underdeveloped regions masks the structural relationship by which capital develops and prospers at the expense (or progressive underdevelopment) of non-capitalist economies.

While only older, “imperfect, amateurish imperialism” had to rely on weapons and violence, modern professional imperialism is based on structural rather than direct violence” (Galtung 1971, p.91).

Activity 3

Read the preceding sections again. Now try to find examples of dynamic but unequal exchange that took place in any colonised society that you know of (India and Africa for instance).

Imperialism has thus evolved through several modes of domination, normally parallel and simultaneous, “depending on the *type of exchange* between the centre and the periphery nations,” always geared to profit the centre:

- 1) Economic
- 2) Political
- 3) Military
- 4) Communication
- 5) Cultural

You should read Johan Galtung’s “A Structural Theory of Imperialism” to understand how the different forms of imperialism are inter-connected. In addition to being dictated by the centre’s models, fashions and interests, the periphery ‘learns’ from the centre’s journalists “to see events with centre’s eyes”(p.93); the centre provides as well as trains the teachers while the periphery provides the learners. The centre transmits and dispenses a culture which reinforces and endorses the necessary hierarchy. Through text books and history-writing the core dominates the periphery’s own image, its racial or ethnic identity and culture. The history of India from mid-18th century provides a gigantic illustration of British imperialism in all its phases (the manner in which the events of 1857 have been termed, for instance).

The tremendous inequalities we see in the world, within as well as between nations, have been brought about and are being maintained by this structure in which European capitalism has invested since the 16th century. “The world consists of Centre and Periphery nations; and each nation, in turn has *its* (own) centres and periphery” and the inequality “in almost all aspects of human living conditions, including the power to decide over those living conditions *and* the resistance of this inequality to change”(p.81).

Activity 4

From the above account of imperialism, try and reason out

- a) The difference between ‘structural’ and ‘direct’ violence
- b) ‘Equal’ and ‘unequal’ exchange

It would help if you could relate them to real-life examples instead of just thinking about them in the abstract.

2.3 LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

While the Centre’s economic domination of its Peripheries illustrates the general nature of imperialism, the other types of domination may be considered a package

of natural corollaries to economic imperialism. However, it is important for students of literature to understand the subtle ways of *cultural* imperialism, which works through colonially sponsored agencies and institutions to produce and propagate world-views, judgments, tastes and values which promote the ultimate interests of the Centre. The well-known *Macaulay's Minute* (1835) (see **Appendix**) at the British Parliament, much before Queen Victoria was formally declared Empress of India (after the 'Mutiny' of 1857), clearly and blatantly announces the Centre's civilizing mission for Indians through English education.

The centre's "Eurocentric discourse" is imposed on the subjugated peoples with no apparent use of force, but makes that discourse the normal mode or idiom for the representation of all things. A good contemporary example of the power of persuasion of this discourse is the visuals and advertisements on television and their power to "sell." Hence the "occidental" or European way of saying or doing things becomes effectively the universal standard by which to judge the rest of the (especially non-Western) world. In this unequal bargain, everything "oriental" becomes not merely exotic but also inferior in relation to the occidental. Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) was perhaps the first and most influential work to examine the history and politics of European representation of non-Western peoples and cultures as Europe's "Others." Said's book helped shape and define an emerging new field of literary and cultural study, which came to be called 'Post-colonial Studies'.

Activity 5

Look at the advertisements aired/printed/telecast in our country on a daily basis. What sense of Eurocentrism can we get from these? Is this overt and blatant or covert and subtle? How do you think it influences the way we think about ourselves, how we should look and live, what we should eat, wear etc?

Post-colonial perspectives in theory and practice have, in the last four or five decades, attempted to return the Euro-centric gaze, and also to turn the former peripheries into new centres in their own right. Chinua Achebe, the great Nigerian writer, as early as in 1958, uses lines from W B Yeats' poem *A Second Coming* (referred to earlier) as epigraph to his novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe has seriously parodied Yeats' profound, apocalyptic horror of things to come, turning it into an insupportable sorrow for the destruction of an African culture. Nadine Gordimer, the South African novelist, provides an instance of the will to reverse the centre-periphery relation as an African writer when she proposes an African-centred consciousness: "...One must look at the world from Africa to be an African writer, not look upon Africa, from the world" (Susan Bassnett 1993 p.74).

Until these new perspectives became well defined and sharp, it may be observed that the study of literary 'works' appeared more or less to proceed on the strength of intellectual and philosophical assumptions and ideas. It was generally regarded that history, politics or economics was only secondary information, not integral to the content or vision of a work of literary art. Literary judgment remained a noble act of the finest mind and culture focused generally on the aesthetics of poetic and artistic form. Sociological, anthropological and other insights into art, culture and society, along with the knowledge of the work of capitalism and imperialism in the real world, produced new and revolutionary insights concerning literature as cultural production. The result was nothing short of a revelation: that literature and art are rooted in structures of power, dominance and control. Literary 'texts' began to be read 'against the grain' for exposing truths of structural exploitation and violence in terms of caste, class, gender and such other identities. This critical development is most certainly traceable to postcolonial perspectives which evolved in relation

to another more or less parallel development in Europe and America, called 'post-structuralism'. These developments with their respective discourses arrived a bit late in India as usual, but did make a lasting, probably irreversible, impact on our understanding of Indian traditions, society, culture and literature.

Activity 6

Read the novel *Things Fall Apart*. Make your own notes on what Achebe is trying to say to his

- a) own countrymen or Nigerian readers; and to his
- b) British or European readers.

Achebe uses the four lines of Yeats's *Second Coming* (referred to in Activity 2) as an opening epigraph to this novel. Why do you think he does that? What do you think connects the poem and the novel?

2.3.1 Colonial/Post-colonial/Postcolonial

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) argue through their book that the term 'post-colonial' is the most appropriate to mark the specificities of literatures from the colonies. They feel that it covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day... (it is)... a term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years, and for the discourse through which this is constituted" (p.2). By this description, the literatures of nearly three fourths of the world, including the USA - except Britain and Europe - are 'post-colonial.' The experience of colonialism of all these peoples must be encoded in their writings and in their arts, through which they assert their regional/national distinctions and their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre.

It suggests an anti-colonial practice of rejecting the 'master-narrative' of the West and seeking to replace it with counter narratives so that the colonized cultures could "fight their way back into a world history written by Europeans". Ultimately, the post-colonial agenda seems to have been to challenge Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values and to expand the literary canon to include colonial and post-colonial writers. This seems to have succeeded to an extent: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, G.V. Desani, Salman Rushdie and others, in addition to R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulkraj Anand - a large and growing body of post-colonial literature, criticism and theory - form part of standard academic study in Britain and the USA today.

Now the Eurocentric discourse imposed on the colonized peoples, and spread during the colonial era by various colonial agencies, systems of education etc, as well as all forms of cultural production which were shaped or determined by it have come to be characterized as colonial. By the same logic, all the political, artistic or rhetorical effort by individuals, groups or national solidarities and oppositional movements countering it are anti-colonial.

The primary meaning of post-colonial is the period which follows after political independence or decolonization, i.e. after the end of colonization. This signifies that it belongs to the period beginning with political freedom from the colonial/imperial power. But the more widely preferred use of post-colonial is to suggest the entire period since colonization to the present. There is yet another use of postcolonial (i.e. without the hyphen) which is frequently used as a more rounded,

inclusive and undifferentiated term in order to capture or evoke all the complex history and irrevocable change suffered by the colonized individual, society, nation and culture. Hence post-colonial literature in India should include all the literature produced in India (in English or the Indian languages) any time after the beginning of the process of colonization, i.e. from around the early 17th century to the present.

Activity 7

What world-view or *whose* “world-view” does *The Second Coming* represent?

What do you think the novelist is telling us through *Things Fall Apart*?

2.3.2 English and ‘Englishes’: Abrogation and Appropriation

The emergence of English as a privileged academic discipline in India was a development which kept pace with the growth of the Empire. The study of British literature as part of a liberal education with exclusive claims to the centre’s culture and values caused many to willingly immerse themselves in the imported culture, often even to the extent of denying their own origins. Gandhi draws an ironic picture of himself in his autobiography, of how as a young man who went to study Law in London, he invested his time and a substantial amount of money in ‘playing the English gentleman’ before he finally resolved to ‘be a student henceforth.’ It speaks volumes for the 19th century Indian fascination for the English language and culture, at the height of British glory on earth.

Let us now look at a significant distinction the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* (which has been considered a founding work of post-colonial studies), make between English and english:

In order to focus on the complex ways in which the English language has been used in these [i.e. post-colonial societies], and to indicate their own sense of difference, we distinguish in this account between the “standard” British English inherited from the Empire and the english which the language has become in post-colonial countries... British imperialism resulted in the spread of a language, English, across the globe... We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world. For this reason the distinction between English and english will be used throughout our text as an indication of the various ways in which the language has been employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world (Bill Ashcroft et al, p.8).

How did these englishes develop? The authors postulate a two-step process of abrogation and appropriation to explain the colonized writer’s relationship to the language of the colonized. The alien language of the colonizer, in which the colonized writer writes, imposes its own categories of vocabulary and grammatical restrictions. The writer finds that certain kinds of conceptualization and expression are acceptable while others, which could be crucial to his purposes, are shut out. That makes the colonizer’s language, say English, inadequate to express or explore his/her cultural experiences of an uncolonized past or even of his colonized present. Then occurs a process of abrogation: “a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or ‘correct’ usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning ‘inscribed’ in the words”(Bill Ashcroft et al, p.37).

And further, for creative use of language in communicating one’s own cultural reality, such refusal alone will not do; it needs the next step, of appropriation: it is

a process by which the writer makes the language 'bear the burden' of his own cultural experience. For instance, in multilingual post-colonial societies such as India, the act of appropriation brings the language (English) "under the influence of a vernacular tongue, the complex of speech habits which characterize the local language". Elsewhere in Australia or Canada, in a monolingual society, appropriation may mean evolving a variety of local English peculiar to the place. Raja Rao speaks of the challenge faced by the colonized writer in his Preface to *Kanthapura* (1938, p.vii):

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien', yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

Thus the post-colonial writer evolves through such a process an appropriate linguistic code for his/her purpose of authentic expression, rather than accept the variety of language imposed by the colonizer. It comprises various strategies the writer has to employ in order to produce "a culturally distinct (and)... appropriate idiom that announces itself as different even though it is English" (Bill Ashcroft et al, p. 76). Some of the strategies employed by the post-colonial writer using one of the 'englishes' are 'glossing', 'untranslated words', 'interlanguage', 'code-switching' and 'vernacular transcription' (ibid. pp.60-76).

There is another postulation by Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory* (1995): the terms *Adopt*, *Adapt* and *Adept*, signifying the three phases of the transformation achieved by post-colonial writers, which may be studied as a long process. Barry is concerned more about the genre or form inherited from the colonial masters (such as the novel form), but bent or reshaped by the colonized writers to suit their own purposes.

Activity 8

The English spoken in India is frequently referred to as 'Hinglish' as it has a lot of input from regional languages, specially Hindi. Look at the way in which English is used in our country for formal/informal writing/speaking. Is there a difference between the formal and informal versions? Listen to people making a presentation and having a casual conversation in English and note down the differences.

2.3.3 Major Shifts

Post-colonialism has come to be recognized as a great, paradigmatic shift in the academic practice of literature around the world, over the four decades (from the 1950's through the 1990's): "from the imperial centre of power to the dispossessed periphery." It has "decentered" the British *voice* and privileged the "Other", so far "marginal," voices. Further, Post-colonialism enables us not only to read "our own texts on our own terms," but also "interpret European canonical texts from *our* perspectives." But the terms of the discourse need to be generated by "our own"

cultures, and not to be determined elsewhere. Thus the periphery's right to self-determination seems to underlie the mighty post-colonial shift. But Meenakshi Mukherjee asks the inevitable question too:

...Is it possible, and desirable, that at the speed with which ideas and theories travel today, to leave out the 'world' and focus on 'one's own' culture? Will not the world condition *our* discourse? How different is this conditioning from the earlier hegemony of 'universalist' norms? In what way is post-colonial theory liberating?

Meenakshi Mukherjee and Harish Trivedi (1996) have drawn critical attention to the many cultures of multi-lingual India, whose 'post-colonial' texts far outnumber the discursive framework of English/english; and to the large number - both ancient and modern - of texts in the more than twenty indigenous languages of the subcontinent, and the particular contexts and histories of each one of them.

The label 'post-colonial' seems to be giving way to 'Comparative Literature' with newer and rigorous theoretical perspectives. The label could seem to be thrust on the 'post-colonial' world as if it were a mythical or primordial flood to reckon with to the end of the world; while the label 'Comparative' fails to invoke the global history of the phenomenon.

The 'Poly-Systemic' theory as the work of Steven Totosy as well as of Even-Zohar has been called, approaches literature as a dynamic 'poly-system', a component within the larger 'poly-system' of culture. It seems to present the promise of trying to restore focus on the due reading of literature, instead of frequently arriving via Cultural Studies, at "politically correct bundles of attitudes of resentment" towards the 'culture' of the society where you live. Comparative Literature and Translation Studies are now seen as developing as "trans-cultural, trans-national and trans-linguistic" disciplines.

Activity 9

Pick up any two pieces of writing with an Indian setting or Indian characters – a novel, short story, essay, poem, travelogue – one by an Indian and the other by a non-Indian writer. Focus on the 'voice' of the narrator, the perspective, attitude and perceptions and see how they differ.

2.3.4 Indian Languages and Literatures

In addition to the copious body of English writing, India has its own pre-colonial history and heritage as one of the ancient civilizations of the world. The mighty Sanskrit lore - which includes the Vedas, the Upanishads, the shastras, puranas, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* traditionally known as itihisas (but usually labelled 'epics' in English), texts of classical literature, linguistics, darshanas, and various other kinds of treatises on science, medicine and art - has of course been the interest of oriental study. How are we to regard this whole complex of millennial civilization and culture 'discovered' for us by colonial, oriental research? Except some pockets of traditional scholarship, which might be supposed to have remained untouched by the Orientalist reorganization, most pre-colonial traditional Indian works in Sanskrit/Arabic/Persian have been affected by European principles and practice of textual criticism and editorial effort since the *Oriental Renaissance* in the 18th century.

Apart from the Sanskrit literary traditions, there are the numerous indigenous languages of India evolved from various regional Prakrits—Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Mythili, Gujarati, Marathi, Konkani and others - besides the major five

Dravidian languages of Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Tulu, and their respective literary and cultural traditions most of which are more ancient than English (between 1000 and 2000 years old). Though most of the languages of the Indian subcontinent and their literatures have evolved side by side, generally adopting the Sanskrit model, there have also been efforts to become independent of the Sanskrit cast of form. The large presence of Sanskrit has rightly been compared to the presence of English in modern times in the midst of our many regional languages. But the parallel appears often to have been taken too far: especially in arguments that effectively render imperial English/english India's great liberator, and brand the Sanskrit culture look essentially reactionary. It may yet be safely hazarded that the regional language-literatures of India were generally guided by the theoretical principles established in Sanskrit poetics although their genres of poetry/prosodic forms belonged to regional traditions of practice.

Modern Indian literatures in each of our regional languages, however, are clearly postcolonial formations, having developed from 19th century translations from English and other European languages, in a general environment of exposure through English education to British and continental literatures. New writings emerged in the indigenous languages from curious as well as serious experiments with borrowed forms—such as the novel, the short story, the lyric, the sonnet and so forth - adapted to requirements of the native imagination in the last two centuries. Study of modern Indian literatures will need to rely largely on the criteria derived from Western critical theory - rather than our ancient poetics. But again, indigenous writing has frequently dug deep into India's own heritage and variety of styles and traditions of literary excellence, in an effort to make visible - through inter-lingual translations - a pan-Indian literary-cultural identity, 'pre' - as well as 'post' - colonial.

Beginning with the post-colonial 'decentering' or subverting of the imperialist discourse, the process has naturally been extended to the decentering of all manner of traditional social and cultural 'self-evident' foundations of caste and gender identities. This decentering, which is probably the most influential thrust of post-structuralist/deconstructionist theory in conjunction with Marxism and Feminism, seems to have become the primary and defining task of reading/writing literature in our times. In other words, important modern Indian writing is progressively becoming 'political' - preoccupied with many kinds of socio-political liberation movements within our social traditions and practices, focusing on caste, class, gender definitions and identities. It can be seen as a double gain: subversion and empowerment within Indian culture and society. Undeniably this has made possible the emergence of women in public life; has opened up political avenues for the hitherto traditionally oppressed and marginalized native castes, cultures and world-views from the internal peripheries of socio-political subordination. It has meant for them a progressive struggle against odds to take their legitimate places in India's present and future narratives - history, politics, literature, films and so forth. This socio-political reality does find ample expression in the modern, but gradually naturalized Indian forms of art and literature, in all of our regional language literatures.

Activity 10

Do you think there are some positive aspects of colonial impact on Indian literature and society? See if you can make a list of all this and how they have impacted Indian society.

2.3.5 The Role of Translation

Itamar Even-Zohar has noted that although translations have played a major role in the development of national literatures, historians of literature have ignored their function in the literary system. The English fifteenth century, Susan Bassnett observes, is “traditionally considered a fallow period in English literature because it produced no ‘great’ writers”, but points out there was a high production of translations during the period (Bassnett, 1993, p.152). We might add that this is true of the Indian 18th century too, of the ‘Oriental renaissance’, which set up a huge traffic of translations of Sanskrit works into European languages. For a century or more, there was intense translation activity from English as well as from Sanskrit into Indian regional languages. As Harish Trivedi observes, “the Indian literary space was a vigorously contested terrain”: on the one hand there was a growing impulse to welcome the new literary forms from the West, against considerable resistance in favour of older Indian indigenous forms. It was a series of ‘renaissance’ phases inaugurated in Bengal, which quickly spread through the rest of India, paving the way for the development of modern literatures in all the Indian languages, to the eventual hegemony of Western literary culture.

Even-Zohar has classified three social circumstances which make translation a primary activity:

- 1) When a literature is at its developing stage
- 2) When a literature is marginal or feeble or both
- 3) When a literature contains a vacuum or finds itself in a state of crisis or at a turning point.

He argues:

Translated literature fulfills the needs of a young literature to put its renewed tongue in use in as many literary genres as possible in order to make it functional as a literary language and useful for its emerging public. Since, when it is young and in the process of being established, a young literature cannot create major texts in all genres until its polysystem has crystallized, it greatly benefits from the experience of other literatures, and translated literature becomes, in a way, one of its most important systems (Gentzler, 1993, p.117).

But translation has traditionally been considered a useful but marginal activity, and the translated work a mere shadow of the ‘original’. If we use the term ‘postcolonial’ in its comprehensive sense (as noted earlier), i.e. with its full theoretical implications, we can question the almost universal conception of translation as an innocent, apolitical cross-cultural activity. In doing so, we can also identify its socio-political dimensions rather than the merely literary or the linguistic. Maria Tymoczko observes that translation may be perceived as a metaphor for post-colonial writing: translation is actually ‘carrying across’ a writing from a former colony such as India - Indian literature written in ‘english’ - to the ‘Centre’ in order to make it available to an international readership. Hence post-colonial writing is also a translation of sorts. Straddling two cultures; addressing a cross-cultural readership and representing one culture to another through the writing, the post-colonial writer’s (as well as the translator’s) process must bear his/her ideological burden too.

We noted earlier the post-colonial writer’s strategies of appropriation such as the untranslated word, glossing and so forth, for conveying the peculiar, the untranslatably ‘other’ nuances of his/her culture; but most of the time he/she is actually ‘translating’ his/her experience, pandering to the pre-dispositions of the

dominant language. The Kenyan writer Ngugiwa Thiongo's refusal to translate Gikuyu words in his English novels, and later refusing to write in the alien language are, apart from being important gestures of protest, significant steps towards the "decolonization of the mind." The notion that "the colony (is)... a (mere) copy or translation of the great European Original" had more or less sealed the fate of translation. The translator's choice of strategy determines how he/she may invert the hierarchy of power between the two languages. Gayatri Spivak's translation for example, of Mahasweta Devi's "Stanadayini" into "Breast-giver," rather than the ready equivalent "Wet nurse" asserts Bengali by choice, in the face of the 'colonial' English. It makes the translated text retain the power to force the English reader to see the 'original' Bengali nuance.

Activity 11

Based upon your own experience of reading a translated work, note down how the presence or absence of a Glossary affects your understanding/appreciation of the work.

In the context of Indian languages, the Sanskrit word for translation *anuvad* remains the most common word for it in all the modern Indian languages.

Every one of the modern Indian languages possesses the standard versions of the two epics, "outstanding examples of literature as an accumulative endeavour," being *re-writings* of the Sanskrit original. 'Originality' is not denied to the 'translator' and they stand as autonomous creative work of the highest order. One of the best examples could be Tulsidas, regarded as the greatest ever Hindi poet, for having *re-written* *The Ramayana* as *Ramacharitmanas*. From this new perspective which has emerged in the recent past, even Shakespeare as well as the Authorized Version of The Bible may be considered 'translations' or 're-writings' in the appropriate sense.

Activity 12

There are many writers in Indian regional languages. Do you think that writing in a certain regional language should be translated into other regional languages? What purpose would that serve? What about their translation into English or a work in English being translated into a regional language? Put down your thoughts on the necessity of such an activity.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

We began with reading the famous opening lines of the poem *The Second Coming*. Did you note the poet's horror at the way the good old order of the world is losing its hold on Man - which God alone should restore? If He comes again after 20 centuries, as the poet visualizes, it shall be in a terrible form, completely unlike Jesus Christ! While it reflects a spiritual world-view, the poem also offers us a palpable sense of a 'centre-periphery' relation, valid in a God-centred world in universal, traditional, religious terms. Does it not express the poet's vision of the troubled state of the world of Man in modern times?

As part of the opening activity, we also looked at Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Do take up the novel for a close reading, if you have not done it already. You will find it most illuminating on the subject of cultural imperialism and a powerful post-colonial response to European imperialism.

Then we moved on to learn about the more practical and real form of the centre-periphery relation/hierarchy: imperialism and its many but mutually related strategies

of domination - economic, political, military, communication and cultural - by means of which alien nations, peoples and cultures are brought under a dispensation of “unequal exchange.”

Focusing on cultural imperialism, we noted how “Eurocentric discourse” gradually penetrated into the colonies, affecting their cultures and life-styles and even their identities. Considering Indian literatures in English and in the indigenous languages of India, we saw how the “post-colonial” perspectives produced adaptive as well as creative strategies of “abrogation” and “appropriation” to forge new authentic “englishes” and “modern” forms of writing in the numerous languages of India. Post-colonial studies of literatures, cultures and societies are concerned with *subversion* of imperialistic assumptions - both the alien colonizer’s and the domestic traditional and internal modes of domination. A slow but clearly irreversible process has begun, of *empowerment* of women and the marginalized sections of the Indian society.

Lastly, we took a quick look at the role of translation, especially how the post-colonial perspective has re-discovered the much neglected but valuable historic role of translations in the development of literature; how today translation studies has emerged as a major discipline.

2.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Read the entire poem *The Second Coming*. As an Indian reader, comment on Yeats’ vision in the poem which he wrote when Britain was beginning to lose her hold on the Empire.
- 2) Write a note on the significance of “the centre and the periphery” model. Does it in any way enable you to read and compare literary texts?
- 3) Attempt a 1000 word note on “Post-colonial literatures of India”.
- 4) Write short essays of 500 words each on:
 - a) “Indian writing in English”, based on your reading of a novel/short story of your choice.
 - b) Any modern novel/short story in an Indian language (or translated into English) based on your understanding of a ‘post-colonial’ perspective.

2.6 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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APPENDIX

Excerpts from Macaulay's Minute

...All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic...But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia...

It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

...We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equalled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said, that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

... It is said that the Sanscrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement. Assuredly it is the duty of the British Government in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value, only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality, or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly pre-served. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are to teach it because it is fruitful of monstrous superstitions. We are to teach false History, false Astronomy, false Medicine, because we find them in company with a false religion.

... We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.



UNIT 3 *CHOMA'S DRUM*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Outline and Salient Features of the Novel
- 3.3 Contrasts and Polarities
- 3.4 Extended Usages and Application of the Drum Symbol
 - 3.4.1 The Dominance of Silence
- 3.5 The Exteriorising of Powerful Forces
 - 3.5.1 Choma's Attitude and its Consequences
- 3.6 Deeper Reasons Underlying Choma's behaviour
- 3.7 Hallmarks of the Spiritually Charged Man
- 3.8 The Finale of the Novel
- 3.9 Reassessing the Importance of the Drum
- 3.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.11 Unit End Questions
- 3.12 References and Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives are both general and specific. On the general level, the objective is to make the learner sensitive to the presence of sound within the written word. Sound is an intrinsic and prior component in all forms of communication.

Before learning to write the child learns to speak. Every piece of writing is heard, perceived, as well as read. It is seen by the ears, heard by the eyes reading the print! Among the objectives of this unit is to activate these multi-level, multi-sided areas of receptivity present in the reader, in the act of reading, and thereby bind the reader closer to the written text in question.

The drum in *Choma's Drum* is a means to this inner awakening. The in-depth analysis of its beats made in the unit, has thus in view the objective of drawing out the latent powers of higher understanding present in the reader, and thereby make the act of reading the novel—and all reading—a more enriching experience.

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Discern the presence of sound within the written word
- Understand how sound is an intrinsic and prior component in all forms of communication.
- Come alive to the richness of inner life possible even in the deprived sections of society as exemplified by Choma.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

When two cultures come into contact with each other, they either fight each other as they often do, or interact creatively with each other as they often do, also. Among

the creative manifestations of cultural encounters, it can be said, is literature: literatures produced by writers from both cultures. The East-West encounter in our own country, specifically the England-India encounter, for instance, has resulted in a novel like E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which is a story by an Englishman to touch the pulse of this country's sexual ethic. And it has also resulted in a novel like Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, which is the story of an Indian's attempts to free himself of the alienating powers of Western culture, without becoming hostile to it.

Comparative Literature has its origins in such struggles by writers to negotiate the ground between two cultures, create passages between them, build a two-way traffic. Two streams of thought and consciousness flow parallel to each other in comparative writings.

An important point to keep in mind is that the two streams need not always be those of two separate cultures. They can be two strands of the same culture. This is the perspective from which Shivaram Karanth's novel, *Choma's Drum*, the main text of this unit (*Chommana Dudi* in the Kannada original, translated into English by U.R. Kalkur), has been taken up. The denouement and the final outcome of the predicament of Choma, come from the re-union of the two strands. Secondly, this re-union is inevitably violent. It is this violence that highlights in a powerful way the comparative gist and make-up of the novel.

All About H. Hatterr by G.V.Desani, the second text we shall briefly consider in this unit conforms more to the definition of Comparative Literature as a product of the encounter of two cultures, the clash of two cultures. It is about the attempts of the main character, Hatterr, an Indian migrant to England, to live and let live, in white society.

However, for purposes of this unit, we shall be mainly considering only the symbol of the drum which comes in for powerful, even if brief, rendering in this novel too. In *Choma's Drum*, as is explained in the unit, it is the drum that highlights the novel's comparative make-up. The drum figures briefly but tellingly in 'Hatterr', highlighting its speaking power.

Activity 1

Briefly describe, in around a hundred or a hundred and fifty words or so, any experience of a hurdle you've faced vis-à-vis Western culture, or your own.

3.2 OUTLINE AND SALIENT FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

Before we begin to discuss the novel, let us take a brief look at the author, Shivaram Karanth. K Shivaram Karanth (10 October 1902 – 9 December 1997) was a Kannada writer, social activist, environmentalist, Yakshagana artist, film maker and thinker. Ramachandra Guha called him the "Rabindranath Tagore of Modern India, who has been one of the finest novelists-activists since independence". He was the third writer to be decorated with the Jnanpith Award for Kannada, the highest literary honour conferred in India. Considered to be one of the most influential Kannada novelists, he wrote, apart from his forty seven novels, thirty one plays, four short story collections, six books of essays and sketches, thirteen books on art, two volumes of poems, nine encyclopedias, and over one hundred articles on various issues. *Choma's Drum* is a translation of the Kannada novel *Chomana Dudi* which was later made into an acclaimed film of the same name.

Choma is an untouchable bonded-labourer in a village who is working along with his family for a landlord, as he belongs to a backward class.[2] Due to his social status, he is not allowed to till his own land, something that he desires most. Though he managed to rear a pair of bullocks that he found straying in the forest, he cannot use them to till the land. He comes in contact of Christian missionaries who try to convert him giving him the lure of the land, but Choma does not want to let go of his faith. He releases the fury that fate has beset on him, by beating his drum.

He has four sons and a daughter; two of his elder sons work in a distant coffee estate trying to pay off the debt. One of the sons dies of cholera and the other one converts to Christianity by marrying a Christian girl. His daughter, Belli works in the plantation and falls for the charm of Manvela, the estate-owner's writer. She is raped by the estate owner, who then writes off Choma's debt. She returns to Choma's home telling him of the reality. His youngest son drowns in a river, with nobody coming to save him because of him being an untouchable. He then finds his daughter in a compromising position with Manvela. With anger, he beats her and kicks her out of the house. To defy his fate, he starts tilling a piece of land and then chases off his bullock into the forest. In the climax, Choma shuts himself in his house and starts playing the drum till he dies.

The take-off point of Shivaram Karanth's novel, *Choma's Drum*, can be said to lie in the intense craving of Choma, a dalit, to become a landowner. By unwritten but strongly rooted, entrenched social norms, dalits are not meant to be owners of land. Landowners can only be from the upper castes. Dalits are meant to labour for and on the lands of the culturally sanctioned landowners. It is this chasm, considered uncrossable, that Choma is bent on crossing – leaping - and thus breach all norms set by caste injunctions.

So intense is Choma's craving that he has taken the leap mentally, and is preparing himself for the life of a landowner. He is rearing a pair of oxen for ploughing this land he is convinced, he will acquire one day. He is, in other words, living in a state of psychological imbalance. Rocked by emotional intensities set off by this imbalance, he is also ready to convert to Christianity, a religion free of caste divisions and with room for making his craving come true.

This decision of his, to convert to Christianity, is the climax of the novel and it is a decision that he gives up. He cannot bring himself to perform, what he is coming to see as an act of crass, cowardly desertion. His god, Panchurli, the god of the dalits, seems to be looking at him with eyes that are questioning: eyes that are sad, but not accusing, not questioning his right to leave. Choma revokes his decision to convert, purely from the upsurge of his own feelings of faithfulness and loyalty, risen above considerations of possession and material hankerings. It is an inner awakening. And in the force of its manifestation, all the distinctions and divisions of poor and rich, of this caste and that, of haves and have-nots, get subsumed.

However, none of the ills is denied. Caste, its injustices and tyrannies are not written off. Graphic pictures of the daily lives and caste specific, caste-backed ordeals of dalits are present in the novel. Guests descend in a continuous stream on Choma's hungry household and he cannot refuse them hospitality. One of his sons drowns in the river. The upper caste on-lookers on the bank could have saved him by jumping in and dragging him ashore, but their fear of physical contact with an untouchable overrides their sense of compassion.

Activity 2

Read the introduction in *Choma's Drum* written by U.R Kalkur in which he dwells upon the essentially non-casteist Karanth's bent of mind. Jot down your thoughts and impressions of Indian society in that context.

3.3 CONTRASTS AND POLARITIES

We see the operation of contrasts and polarities in the very first chapter of the novel, in its opening lines - Darkness and Light; Motion and Arrest; Sound and Silence: "It is pitch dark. The fearsome forest is dark (in) which even the fireflies do not twinkle anywhere to breach (it). In the dead stillness not a leaf stirs, not a worm (insect) rustles under the dry leaves that lie thick on the ground, nothing. Sound? Not even a token of it".

The quality of the sound and silence dimension is further broken down, making it one more strand in the comparative weave of the writing. The growl of the panther (a) the screech of the owl (b) the clamour of the night insects (c) are juxtaposed, placed alongside each other till sound seems a multi-dimensional presence – only to be declared a non-presence at the conclusion of the sentence – 'all are hushed'. Sound and the aftermath of sound in which both sound and silence ring are infused into that paragraph.

Sound and Silence, in other words, are simultaneous presences. They seem to form a special compound of the air of Bhogana village, the locale of the novel, as the story moves on.

How does this happen?

By the way Karanth projects the sound of Choma's drum, projects the beats of his drum as phenomena of shattering power and magnitude – seem risen from the very air of Bhogana village, and not just sounds made by Choma's hands on his drum. There is also the invoking of the idea of silence in the heart of the sound.

This is how he puts it, in this longish paragraph: "In this terrain every sound rolling back and forth from hillock to hillock, mingles with its echo and re-echo before impinging on the ears. Damadhamma, dakadhakka. It goes on for eight or ten minutes, sometimes slow like the fall of a hammer at a smithy, sometimes frantic like the pounding heart of an animal in its last gasp".

Let us examine those lines in some detail.

First, it is slow-moving: the writing is even-paced, not marked by any rush of breath to say it fast and bask in the writer's pleasure of an onrush of words. And because of the slow unfolding of the sentence there is a sense of a second presence as a throw off of the first. '... Every sound, as it rolls back and forth from hillock to hillock, mingles with its echo and re-echo before impinging on the ears', runs the sentence. In the slow unfolding of the sentence, echo and re-echo seem more than by-products of sound. They seem like siblings of sound, closely related to it, yet with distinct personalities of their own. And they seem to be in the background - the immediate background - yet distinct from it.

The second factor that captures and holds the reading attention is the verbalizing by the writer, of the beats of the drum 'dhamadhamma, dhakadhakka'. The double consonants 'm-m' and 'k-k' make you, the reader, pause and lay stress over them in an involuntary modulation of voice.

This vocal action is important. It has an inward pull, and the pressure inward activates your reflexes of pictorialisation, like a camera being clicked on. What you see on this screen of your mind, is a clearing, a stretch of space effortlessly insulated from noise, its fellow, perhaps its parent. This motionless yet seeing, aware entity, is silence, you feel.

This axis of sound and silence gathers presence and seems to become more real, in the concluding lines of that paragraph: "It (the beat of the drum) goes on for eight or ten minutes, sometimes slow like the fall of the hammer at a smithy, sometimes frantic like the pounding heart of an animal in its last gasp".

Again, the writing is in slow motion. The descriptive lines are definite and solid sounding, with similes that unfold into images straightaway. The duration of the beats, the quality of the beats, the sense of dread they rouse, none of this is left to the reader's imagination: each aspect of the beats is precisely set down.

This unhurried tone of the writing, along with the explorative quality of the similes, seems to exert its own pressure on the lines. They seem to fade from the reader's vision and suggest a reality that is the antonym of noise and sound. What else can this antonym be but silence?

It is not named, but is inferable, strongly so. Two lines later it becomes more than inferable. It comes in for being stated as a fact. The drumming "stops abruptly". The cessation of sound is total. And this totality is so strong, so pervasive, that the idea and sense of silence rise in the reader's mind without effort. It rises on the heels of sound, seems a reality ever present behind the scene, breaking into view at the first chance.

Activity 3

Read the chapter discussed above. Do the beats of the drum 'dhamadhamma, dhakadhakka'

- 1) Evoke similar reactions from you?
- 2) Are you moved to saying them aloud?
- 3) Do the lines of the description of the beats that Karanth gives echo somewhere in your own ears as you recite the beats? Try and note down the phrases and images that flash or go up in your mind as you recite the beats

Let us now look at other polarities in the same chapter. From Bhogana village the scene shifts to an adjacent village, Panja, where the annual temple festival is going on. This brings in the factor of religious fervour into the folds of the novel. And this, in turn, brings in its own polarities. We see the contrasting states of religious stamina - or arousal - and the aftermath of the arousal when all the participants - priests and worshippers - are drained of energy. This arousal versus the dormancy of religious zest constitutes one more strand in the crisscross of comparitivism that marks the novel.

Let us examine this strand and the farther polarizations it leads to:

It is sub-divided along class lines. The worshippers are shown trudging back home after the festivities. The bulk of them are poor, though not landless, nor subject to chronic hunger. Theirs is not bare-bone living: it is a state just better than that.

But among them is also Sankappayya, the landlord. No details are given about him. Nor is there anything to suggest that there were others of his class in the crowd

returning home from the festival. But the word 'landlord' is enough to rouse a sense of distance and the demarcation of him from the rest. None other in the crowd is designated in any way. The polarization that springs to mind here is that of the vast, toiling and anonymous majority versus the non-toiling, ruling minority, endowed with personality.

This factor of personality and presence is another strand introduced by Karanth for bringing in yet another polarity in his story: the personality of the insecure, emotionally high-strung dalit, versus that of the composed, unflappable personality of the landowning upper class. This contrast comes in for vivid expression in the depiction of the crowd at the temple festivities.

We see that despite hunger, Choma's and his family's zest for temple-going is unaffected. And they go, hungry and famished, to dance for the god. Choma has hopes of seeing Sankappayya at the temple and conveying to him his dire condition and urgent need for relief. He runs into him there and "...his eyes and lips radiated a smile and he bowed worshipfully", hoping that his wish to rent land will be understood. Sankappayya absolutely does not read the desperation and the plea in his bondsman's eyes. He is pleasant, and that's all. It is not that he's not aware of this desperation. He has a giving heart – earlier, he has handed out rations to Choma before the due time to help him tide over the influx of guests in his house. Charity is part of his make-up. But it is a vein in his personality, a fad. And it is up to him to decide when to activate this fad, give it the green signal to come into play.

We can call it the freedom to be passive. It is a freedom not available to the dalit Choma. It is a freedom of choice available only to the high caste, non dalit, Sankappayya. Haven't dalits down the ages been passive about their state, one may ask. Yes, they have been, one agrees. But the dalits' passivity is not one of choice. Theirs is the passivity bred by a fatalistic acceptance of their lot.

It is this passivity of the dead-ended man, the born under-dog that Karanth draws upon for dramatic substance and weight to his novel. The passivity is transformed into a simmering state capable of erupting into a fury of destruction any time. The drum is the symbol of this arousable state.

Activity 4

Try to classify Sankappayya's behavior. Would you call his unwillingness to rent out land to Choma an act of a) class/caste bias, b) helplessness in the face of caste injunctions, or, c) simply an act of cowardice?

We shall make here a brief recap of the sequence of events that lead up to and create this mood of violence held in leash, for a more in-depth understanding of the events that follow. (See Chapter 1 , page 13, from para 3 to para 7, end of chapter.)

Choma goes back home after his fruitless meeting with Sankappayya. Hunger, not only his own but also his family's - of two sons and two daughters - is weighing him down. The aftermath of the religious ecstasy that had swept over him and his family is also unsettling him.

In this state of hunger and fatigue, of inertness and arousability he reaches for his drum, beats on it. Belli, his daughter sings to his beats: 'ley leyilley la', she sings. But a dance also seems called for: the beats demand it. Belli would like it too. But she's not the dancing sort. It is this compelling need for dance, not fulfilable in the circumstances that gives tether and footing to that whole interlude. The idea of

dance is built into it. Choma beats at his drum between bouts of sleep and weariness. Each time the beats gain in vigour. They build the sense of an impending climax, an explosive occurrence.

The last line of the segment sums up this idea of a presaging: 'The drum was to him what the damaru was to Lord Siva'.

Let us now briefly consider here the significance of the damaru.

The damaru signifies an event that is either impending, looming, or just over. It is firstly, a sign of warning, of caution. Secondly, it is a language: the language of sound with words latent in it.

The introduction of the symbol of the damaru by Karanth re-inforces and makes more immediate the sense of crisis and foreboding that the drumming of Choma creates. Both the symbols – that of Choma's drum and Siva's damaru - suggest words through the crash of sound, cast in an idiom of both the non-verbal and verbal. This axis of the nonverbal versus the verbal, is the backbone of the novel. The dhvani – resonance - of the drum/damaru axis is a bhasha, a language. And Karanth at this juncture lays the foundation of this bhasha, a bhasha that divides as well as unifies the novel, thereby giving it its comparative fibre.

Activity 5

The damaru re-inforces the symbolic strength of the drum. Would you agree? Make a brief note of your views

3.4 EXTENDED USAGES AND APPLICATIONS OF THE DRUM SYMBOL

Choma takes recourse to the drum not just on the occasions when words fail him from a state of extreme arousal, as we see in chapter one. The sense of a collapse within, of a loss of voice over and above the loss of words, like a chasm sprung within him, also drives him to his drum. We see this in Chapter 2. Belli, his daughter, gives him a sharp rebuke for his idea of asking Sankappayya to rent out to him a piece of land that he could cultivate, and see his dream of being a landowner come true (19).

A whole history of privation, denial and hopeless cherishing of hope gets evoked in that scene of sharp rebuke and choice-less acquiescence. It is this quivery voice of history that we hear in the flat monotone of Choma's reminiscing: "I had hoped", he says, "to be a farmer during my wife's life-time, but it was not given to her to see me so. Since her death, I have been hoping that my children will see me realise my dream. Should you now try to kill my hopes?"

The answer embedded in that question of Choma's is 'yes'. There are hopes that have to be killed. Belli is conveying that answer – reflecting it - in her own wide-eyed speechless state that overtakes her after her initial burst of sharp speaking.

3.4.1 The Dominance of Silence

The rest of that interlude consists of reflex actions and behavior set off by history. Speech is totally absent in telling, meaningful contrast with the charged, eloquent body actions of Belli and Choma.

The drum here is the instrument, the medium, for communicating this cut off between inner silence and bodily turbulence. If, in the earlier instance, the drum evoked the nexus of sound and silence, in this instance it evokes the continuum of silence – the silence of history and its answering silence within the hearts of the drummer, Choma, and his daughter, Belli.

This latent yet dominant presence of silence continues in chapter 5 of *Choma's Drum*, in practically the whole of it. We sense here a face of society that can be called a face that is concerned yet essentially non-activist, non participatory, as it watches the scene being played out before it. And the scene, what is it? The mass migration of people from familiar environments to unfamiliar environments: a migration which is an uprooting: an uprooting forced upon them by their hand to mouth existence, the endless search for a living that this condition imposes upon them, the nomadic life to which it subjects them.

It is a panoramic scene. We see thousands of labourers, all dalits, coming from all corners of South Kanara district, trekking through mountain passes and river banks, to a plantation in Kalasa to work as daily wage earners for a few annas a day. The whole journey is a cameo of life – not just the life of trekkers, but of life as a passage through time and space. Laughter and merriment, death and mourning take place in its course just as they do in the lives of everyone, everywhere.

And – to re-iterate the main argument of this unit - this vast impersonality carries within its folds the quality of silence. The narrative tone and thrust of the writer, Karanth, the rise and fall of his voice, are felt in the weave of the narrative. And they invoke the idea of an onlooker who cannot intervene or shape things but must remain an onlooker, an eye witness to events.

This non-speaking, non-acting, all-seeing presence is what gets suggested, evoked repeatedly, in Choma's drumming: we see this again and again, each time he rushes to his drum. It is a component of the comparative character of the novel.

Activity 6

Jot down in around a 100 words or a little more, your reactions to any crowd scene or mass movement you have either seen or heard of. Have you felt the voice of history, of historical precedents, in the scene?

3.5 THE EXTERIORISING OF POWERFUL FORCES

Powerful forces, however, do not stay on in the background as suggestions, however compellingly their presence is felt. They explode into the open, announcing themselves with tumult and fearsome strength. This exteriorization usually is the climactic point of a narrative, denoting its end.

In *Choma's Drum*, as we said, the factor of silence is a powerful force. And this silence asserts itself with re-doubled force when the thunder and fury of its emergence dies down.

How does this get borne out in 'Choma's Drum?'

To understand this we have to remember, first and foremost, that the conclusion of a novel is a re-statement of the basic point of view of the writer. Karanth, the writer, implies all along that human nature is a compound of opposites – of the collective

behaviour code set by tradition and streaks of individualism that lie below this code, breaking out in the push and pull of circumstances.

Secondly, implicit in this point of view is the askable question: when tragedy befalls the under-dog, couldn't he, to quite an extent, be held responsible for it? Take Choma's overwhelming desire to be a landowner. Even more than custom and tradition, sheer commonsense rules it out. He has debts to clear - to a planter, to whose plantation he will have to move if he doesn't pay his dues. He does have one way out; sell his oxen to Sankappayya, his present landlord, who was willing to pay thirty rupees for them, with which he could settle his debt of twenty rupees to the planter, and be left with ten rupees to burn. As for owning land, defer the desire, ways could present themselves; wasn't life a game of possibilities?

But this kind of everyday reason cuts no ice with Choma. He is a dreamer, gone blind to the plasticity of life, to its malleability. He has gone rigid with the intensity of his dream and the desire fuelling it. And Karanth implies that this rigidity is over-emotionalism.

Activity 7

In your view, can the act of going along with everyday practical reality be considered a legitimate means for realizing long term, idealistic goals?

3.5.1 Choma's Attitude and its Consequences

Let us, at this point make a short re-cap of the extreme situations that this hankering of Choma's and his refusal to part with his oxen drive him to and give rise to (95 - 103).

Belli, along with her brother Neela, is forced to go to the plantation to work there and pay off the debt, which she does - but at the cost of triggering off all the religious passions latent in the caste polarities inherent in the plantation atmosphere. The planter and his men are Christians and the coolie workers are not. Cross religion sexual relationships are common, and can easily become grounds for communal clashes.

Intimacies develop between Belli and Manuel, the planter's agent. It is not, cannot be, given the licentious atmosphere of the plantation, bound by any commitments to ideals of monogamy. Manuel loans her to Michael, the plantation owner. Belli, cut off from home, an ailing brother - Neela, who had come along with her to care for, sleepwalks into the situation. When she wakes up to the reality, she is horrified at the kind of woman she's become. Bundling up the ailing Neela, she flees the situation. The debt has been cleared up by now and she has nothing to fear on that score. And so, with Neela in tow, she treks back home, braving mountains, rivers and jungles.

But Manuel is not shaken off so easily. He returns to Bhogana village and his relationship with Belli gets re-established. It is in one of these intimate sessions of the two that Choma stumbles upon them. In a blind rage he kicks Manuel out of the hut, making him run for his life. Choma hugs Belli, rains blows upon her simultaneously, and throws her out. Eyes streaming, he tells her to stay out.

Activity 8

Would you agree with Karanth's veiled implication that Choma's refusal of Sankappayya's offer to buy his oxen was unwise in the long run?

3.6 DEEPER REASONS UNDERLYING CHOMA'S BEHAVIOUR

Choma's maniacal outburst is roused by reasons more deep-seated than just the sight of Belli and Manuel's intimacy. Let us see what these deeper reasons are.

First of all is his decision to drop his idea of converting to Christianity to realize his ambition of owning land: the church gives land to converts. This counter decision of his amounts to a re-discovery of himself. It is the rediscovery of a self over and above the self that hankered for land, hankered for the vainglory of being called landowner.

Secondly, this turnaround of his — from the act of relinquishing his religio-culture that he had contemplated - is very much of a threshold act, a borderline, cross-over act. He performs this turn-around at the threshold of the temple of Panjurli, the god of his community, the holeyas. And like all threshold acts it is a high intensity, spiritually charged act.

Look at the fall-out acts, or the by- product acts, of this parent act.

They signify the death of hankerings for material benefits, rendering the mind weightless, ready to absorb the profundities of not-wanting, not-hankering for.

Choma ploughs Sankappayya's fields in an act of farewell.

Then he burns the ploughshare.

Next he sets the oxen free into the woods.

He is no more the Choma who had hankered for land. No more the Choma who had clung to his oxen as symbols of good fortune in the offing.

Activity 9

Write a short note of around a hundred words about decorating the doorstep of the house with designs on the floor round it. Normally you either step over the design or walk around it if it is too wide to cross. Whether you negotiate it to leave the doorstep or enter the house, it is a special kind of passage in or out of the house. Can you describe your state of mind when you perform this act of passage?

3.7 HALLMARKS OF THE SPIRITUALLY CHARGED MAN

In the first place, the spiritually charged man is immaculate (free from sin, flaw or error). And immaculacy, as we know from the metaphysical forays of cultures the world over, is super repellent of impurities of any kind.

Sita was immaculate. Flames leapt out of her body and burnt to death any man other than Rama touching her lustfully.

Christ shook himself free of the embrace of death.

Choma, cleansed and aglow after his acts of penance, in a reflex action that is evocative of the natural deterrence of mythical characters, smells the impurity of the Manuel-Belli meeting - the impurity of the clandestine. His extra sensory perceptions and reflexes have become charged, acute.

These springs of behaviour are not articulated by Choma. And they are not articulated by Karanth himself. But they are contained in it, they stir in the rise and fall of the narrating voice.

The theme of purity, then, is one more among the other themes that shimmer and breathe in the body of the narrative: the theme of speaking without speech: of watching without motion, movement or judgment, a watching which is an action of the eyes, an act of cognition describable as gesture language.

Activity 10

Write a short note of around one hundred words on the idea of chastity/purity. Draw as much as you can from the Sita lore.

3.8 THE FINALE OF THE NOVEL

All the themes enumerated above, of course, converge in re-doubled, re-iterative force as Choma rushes to his drum in a final lunge. But a further dimension, that of nirvanic intensity, is added to these pre-present themes. Choma is shown as a man totally purged of caring - of all the instincts of concern for his offspring normal to a parent, of nursing the human anxiety and desire to know what befalls or will befall whom, when. This is how Karanth describes Choma's final state of mind:

"...What did he care who did what. Guruva went one way, and Belli another. Let Kala be worse! What did it matter to him? He let out a strange weird laughter, and began to play the drum, after partially shutting the door as though he did not wish anyone to see him in his bliss' (121).

These lines read like the rounding off of the theme of silence and a de-coding of the message contained in the non-speaking and all-seeing gaze of the silent presence – which, as we said, is a salient feature of *Choma's Drum*. Human action, human effort and endeavour are jokes, the eyes of the omnipresent non-presence seem to twinkle.

And the beats of the drum paraphrase, tattoo, the core words of Choma's thoughts in the section quoted. 'DhamaDhamma! What-did-he-care? Whatdidhecare? DhakaDhakka! Wh-at-mattered-it?/ Whatmatteredit? Whatmaatteredit! Whatmattered it?'

And from the sound-storm of the drum beats, from the words that the beats speak – a shape rises - the ventriloquist's face of the twinkle-eyed, all-present non-presence: 'See that? The joke called life? See the tragi-comedy it is? See the tragi-comedy of wanting, hankering, and the tragi-comedy of not wanting, not hankering, the one born of the other! See it?'

The non-participant, observer's face and voice fade, and the matter-of-fact voice of the narrator takes over. "Never before", the narrator says, "had he played the drum like that, the sound was like that of Lord Siva's damaru on the day of the Last Deluge" (last chapter.) The damaru, as pointed out before, is a charged, emotive symbol of warning, of the destruction and annihilation in the offing. But at a deeper level the sustained beats of the damaru also denote a bewailing of the obstinacies of human minds, obstinacies that seem woven into the human make-up. The beats become a lament for the human condition. 'Dhama-dhamma, Dhaka-dhakka...' 'there's no aa-nswer, there's no aa-nswer...' from the rise and fall of the thumps of the dudi –drum - the words rumble and voice the hypothesis of the narrative, of Karanth.

The drama of Choma's life concludes with his death. He collapses over his dudi. This is the picture that Karanth gives of Choma's standstill. He was, he says, "...sitting as in samadhi, in a fervid posture, with the drum still in his upraised hand. But Choma was no more".

The image and imagery of life present and life just over, of motion in arrest, and arrest in motion, throb in it. The raised hand seems both living and dead, become still, yet electric with latent energy. It seems to have incursed into the realm of the unseen, vibrant force with its ever-seeing but non-judging eyes, stationed somewhere in the stratosphere.

The word 'posture' contained in Karanth's description is a many-sided word. A posture is motion-in-arrest. It signifies a halt, a temporary termination, and it can, with equal vividness signify a total cessation. The word 'samadhi' in Karanth's description conveys this two-fold meaning of the word 'posture'. A 'samadhi' is both life-like and death-like. It is a state of the conscious-unconscious.

Activity 11

What does the word 'samadhi', stand for, in your understanding of it? Can you write 10 to 12 lines on it?

In addition to all these suggestions and significances contained in that portrait of Choma is, once again, the slow, unhurried pace of the writing in that segment. The details of the image, as said, are bold-etched. The stresses of the narrating voice fall upon them in proportion to their weight, moving in a compelling slow -motion.

The combined pressure of voice and image opens out to the major theme and symbol of Shiva's damaru that is a recurring feature and thematic plank of the novel. 'Yesyes. That's-howitgoes/thetragicomedyoflife/Tragicomedyoflife/Dhamadhamdhakadhak/dhakadhak/dhamadhak-hdhakadhak/dhamadhak-h...' the laughing/not-laughing voice of the being around and within the damru intones. It intones the finale of the novel, as well as the continuing, finale-less flow of life.

3.9 REASSESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DRUM

At the end of it all, one may ask, A) is the drum, strictly speaking, necessary for conveying the idea of the effortless invincibility of life? B) Isn't Karanth's unembellished prose style, forged from the smithy of his own thought and feeling, enough to establish this idea? Doesn't the idiom of his prose evoke, convey, the idea of a super presence?

It does, yes. But it does not evoke the quality of resonance which the drum does. The prose evokes the *idea* of resonance. But the drum *actualises* it. The evocation and the actualization co-exist in the novel, run as parallel streams in its veins. This joint presence of the implicit and the explicit, non-verbalism and verbalism, as has been stressed all along in this unit, is what makes for the comparative character of the novel. Without the drum, this composite character of the novel, the backbone of its comparative quality, would not be there.

The drum, perhaps, can be likened to the 'sutradhar' who features in a classic Indian play. The word 'sutradhar' means the man who binds the various strands of the play, highlights its linkage at deeper levels. The drum, in *Choma's Drum*, is a symbol

of thematic continuity at the visible, micro level of the text in print: and at the macro level, it is a symbol of the invisible text evoked by the former.

Activity 12

Do you think the beats of the drum and Karanth's prose style contribute jointly to the impact of the novel?

The drum, then, is one of the most persuasive, multi-purpose symbols of human life, both at the concrete and abstract levels. Its beats can give voice to all human emotions underlying real life situations: and they can express emotions stated or implicit in written texts.

One celebrated text in which the drum not only deep-reads the text but supplants it is *All About H.Hatterr* by G.V. Desani, one of the founding fathers of Indian Writing in English. This fade out of the text is felt when Hatterr describes to his friend, Banerji, the drum beats that go up in his ears when he is swept by memories of his dead mother: 'I am scared, old feller. I still hear the drums I used to hear when I was in the school. Sometimes, just drums. Sometimes, I see things. My mum, I see her. Sometimes, like I remember her. Sometimes, just her skeleton. Soft porous bones, like honeycomb and awful-smelling blood oozing out of them. The other night I saw her, like I remember her, but with lumps of raw meat hanging from her chest and her elbows. She had no eyes. Just blood-stained holes and filled with bits of pointed glass. Wounds, lacerations, and bites all over her. As if she had been savaged. Her head was split, just like an orange, same colour. She called me Baby. She was crying, poor, darling! Then I heard the drums. They seemed to be saying, 'Come to mamma! Come to mamma!. Then they beat faster. 'Cometomamma! Cometomamma!.....'(222).

The reader stops at this point. The context and all details of the situation fade from the attention. What occupies the attention, rouses the curiosity in a general, overall detachment from text and context, is the sheer vocable power of the drum. However, this vocable power of the drum is not carried to comparativist levels as Karanth does in *Choma's Drum*. But in both cases the articulative potential of the drum and the integration of this articulacy with the narrative are established.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

Karanth's novel, and his temper and outlook as reflected in the novel, can be described as one that views life as sad but not a tragedy. Tragedy implies an overall destruction – the destruction of the characters concerned: the nullification of the goals they had pursued. This kind of an overall breakdown is not any part of Karanth's perspective on life, as reflected in the novel. He does not have a tragic vision of life, in spite of the tragic outcome of the strivings of all his characters. None of the characters attains what he or she desires life-long and desperately. Choma does not get land, a possession and ownership he craves for. He never attains the status of landowner that he thought was bliss. His daughter, Belli, is doomed never to have a home of her own, with husband and children – the dream of many women.

Upon whom, or what, then, is the responsibility to be fixed for the total annihilation of Choma and his kin that gives the novel its dumbfounding explosiveness? Upon destiny. This silent, invisible and un-thwartable operation of destiny is a testament of faith in Karanth's view of human strivings.

He does not, in other words, subscribe to the idea of any exclusive human agency in the unfolding or denouement of human efforts. This delinking of the act and he who acts, gives the novel – perhaps his writings as a whole – its dimension of loftiness, a classic disengagement of him, the author, from the story he has authored.

The drum is a symbol, a means, a tool, for the dramatization of this no-man's-land between an event and the people immediate to it, affected irretrievably by it. It provides a continuity, a link, between the visible and invisible forces setting off the events chronicled in the narrative.

The devising of such a link – or some link— is important despite Karanth's view that action and actors are not bound by simple cause and effect principles. Holding a point of view is not enough for a writer, does not really make him a writer. He has to present it in objective, dramatized terms. Such an objectification is the essence of the craft of the writer.

The drum provides this nerve link between the stated facts and the implied factors that interact in the novel.

The implied factor, or the force behind the scene, is not a speaking entity. It makes its presence felt in the varying rhythms and volumes of the two percussion instruments that figure in the novel – the drum and the damaru. The first is visible and earthly, the other, invisible, with divine associations. It is never heard directly, but strongly invoked through the frenzied playing of the drum by Choma. Choma rushes to his drum each time the situations thrown off by the circumstances of his life are overpowering. So close to each other are the two happenings that the drum beats seem to echo –almost speak - the key words of the narrative at these sections.

But Karanth's narrative is not confined to the sphere of the spoken, the verbal. Non verbal speech – the speech of eye movements, the tremors and sways of the body, the abhinaya based upon and risen from non-speaking, are key elements in the narrative. All the strands of communication – the straight, verbal mode, the throw offs of the verbal mode as shown by the reverberations of Choma's drum, and the speechless, gesticulatory mode – or abhinaya - of the force stationed behind and above the turmoil scripted in the narrative, come together in the very last lines of the novel. This is a recounting as well as an image-inscribing of Choma seated and dead, drum in hand, the hand raised. He seems suppliant – suppliant of the unseen presence - as well as liberated. Word and image come together in a compound of the concrete and the abstract, of stillness and motion, which restates the primarily philosophic perspective of Karanth on the upheavals of life.

3.11 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Write a short account of the life of a plantation worker as it emerges from the novel.
- 2) How would you describe the effect that the drum beats have on the reader?
- 3) What effect do you think the beat of the drum has on Choma himself?
- 4) Manuel emerges as a man who seems genuinely attached to Belli, despite his action of making her available to the plantation owner. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
- 5) *Choma's Drum*, one feels, can be described as a novel without a villain figure, or anyone describable as a bad man. Would you agree with this proposition? Explain your answer.

3.12 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 4 *GODAAN*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Well-Springs of *Godaan*
- 4.3 The Speaking Power of the Unspeaking Cow
- 4.4 At the Feet of the Dying Hori
- 4.5 The Resurrection and Re-Birth of Dhania
- 4.6 Rajee Seth: Similarities and Dis-Similarities
 - 4.6.1 Dhania I, Dhania II
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Unit End Questions
- 4.9 References and Suggested Reading

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will discuss, discern and highlight the complementary statements on the feminine presence and the feminine psyche that mark the works of two writers who are separated by more than half a century. The works and their writers are a) *Godaan*, a novel by Munshi Premchand (b 1880); b) ‘Andhey Mode Se Aagey’ a story by Rajee Seth (b 1940).

Premchand would have been over 130 years old if he were living today. Rajee Seth, more than half a century younger, is a contemporary Hindi writer, very much a product of post-British, independent India.

By the end of this unit you will see the similarities and dissimilarities in the statements that the two writers, separated as they are by time and space, make and gain perspectives on whether the world has changed for women and if yes, how.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Godaan, the classic novel of Premchand’s, is more than the panoramic work on rural India it is generally seen as. It is vibrant with the author’s intense awareness of the feminine presence, or the feminine factor, and its operation in the trajectories and un-foldings of human life. This is the aspect of the novel which this unit will be exploring for the main part.

The story of Dhania, however, does not end with the story of Premchand’s Dhania. It gets continuity and retains relevance from the millions of real life Dhanias amongst us: Dhanias in various ways and styles of confrontation with their givens, with their decreed mentors.

Among these latter-day Dhanias is the protagonist of Rajee Seth’s story ‘Andhey Mode Sey Aagey’ (Past the Blind Alley), whose after-voice, rising from the body of the narrative does not remain private, muted and self-dialoguic: though it has the dimension of inwardness and interiority too. In this story that we shall be viewing as a comparative text to *Godaan*, this after voice echoes speech that is declamatory

of essence, in open, classic gestures of appeal –mudras of appeal— that resonate with speech.

Premchand's Dhania remains feminine. She remains so with a resoluteness that can override the demureness that is still a part of her personality, that she hasn't thrown to the winds: only casts it off when necessary. There is a classic feel to this latency. It evokes the demeanour of the goddesses of Hindu Mythology: a demeanour of calm and repose, transformable in a moment to fury unleashed.

I have taken the story 'Andhey Mode Se Aagey' as a representative story of Seth's fiction, and also as a contrast to the temper of *Godaan*. For Seth's 'Dhania', the slogan applicable to her when she breaks into her orgy of wholesale destruction, of razing to the ground the tainted comforts of her tainted life with two male chauvinists in succession, is Lady Macbeth's cry 'Come, Unsex me!', paraphrasable here as 'Unwoman Me!' She is the Durga latent in the figure of the Dhania of *Godaan*. She is her inverse.

This difference in the temper and make up of the two Dhanias is reflected not only in the prose texture but also the writing temper of the two writers.

Activity 1

Based on what has been said above, why do you think there is such a difference between the two Dhanias? Is the kind of feminism in the present times, as depicted by Seth's heroine more effective, in your view?

4.2 THE WELL-SPRINGS OF *GODAAN*

The well-springs or epicentre of *Godaan*, Premchand's classic, thus, can be said to lie in the author's urge to fathom the nature of the feminine factor in life. This urge stands out over and above his poetic, yet earthy, fact-filled portrayals of the rural milieu. His readings of the feminine psyche, his deciphering of its nature and make-up overshadow all these accomplishments of craft. The essence of these decipherings is that woman is the navigator of life. She is the one at its helm: the one who steers the ship of life and the beings in it from the waves of turbulence that threaten it time and again, to currents of smooth passage. Woman, in effect, is the buoy of life. She is a giver, conditioned both by her physiology and the psychology bred by it.

The epitome of this quality of sheer staying power, compounded of presence of mind, compassion for fellow beings — human or non human— and the guts to say boo to custom and convention when humanity demands it, is Hori's wife, Dhania.

Dhania is irrepressible. Jhunia, her daughter-in-law to be, is made pregnant by her son, Gobar, not yet wedded to her. The girl is thrown out by her father. But Dhania, notwithstanding her initial, gut reaction of rage and revulsion for the girl, is also driven, in the same breath, to take her in, give her the succour and shelter she is in need of. This is as much a gut reaction as the first one. 'Swept by anger, the same Dhania, who, just a while ago, had come down upon Jhunia with abuses of 'whore', 'street-walker', 'slut', 'trollop', she who had not so much as set eyes on a man other than her husband Hori, was now embracing this sinner with tender words of care and concern'. Dhania is a born upholder of life, a born celebrant of its 'celebratability'.

A further fact to note in Premchand's portrayal of Dhania as a virile and assertive woman is that he makes these qualities co-existent with the temper of home-making

– not of home-breaking, as they are generally seen. Dhanias rages and rebels, calls Hori an ‘idiot, spineless, writ for me’. (130). ‘My fate it was, my hobbling, drag-legged fate, that tied me to a man like you...’ (132) But after each charge sheet of rank idiocy and criminal neglect of family and kin, it is almost always, an interweave of self, hers and his, not a proclamation of separateness, that gets made. Here are the two after a war of words and the reckless hospitality to Jhunias shown by Dhanias.

- Hori: ‘Didn’t fall at your father’s feet, did I, for the pleasure of having you tied to my neck for life!’
- ‘That brainless father of mine! And not as if you were a great looker!’

Quarrel turns into leg pull, and leg pull to cosy domesticity, to confidential exchanges. ‘What’s the kid like? Who’s he taken after?’ Hori buzzes round her. Beaming away, all smiles, Dhanias replies: ‘The spit image of our Gobar, he is!’ Hori: ‘Healthy? Yes?’ (132).

The Hindi of that exchange, more redolent of the flavours of intimacy and common curiosity is worth quoting: ‘Hori ney poochcha, bachchaa kisko pada hai?’ Dhanias ney prasann mukh hokar javaab dia, bilkul gobar ko padaa hai, sach!’ ‘risht-pusht to hai?’

Activity 2

What quality of her personality is revealed by Dhanias’s conflicting reactions to Jhunias?

The sharp-tongued, compassionate and earthy Dhanias is Premchand’s medium and model for conveying his readings of the feel and essence of the feminine factor. On a more urbane, non-rustic level is his portraiture of Malati, a philanthropically inclined doctor, who treats the poor for free, and fleeces the rich all she can and who still has enough everyday wisdom to spot freeloaders, and show them the door. Malati, however, is not the major theme of this unit, just as she is not of the novel.

Its dramatisation of givens makes *Godaan* more a naturalistic novel, less a visionary-reformist work driven by the sight and operation of injustices in life. The voice or nerve of indignation is not strident in the narrative temper. It does ring louder at the very end where Dhanias, staring at the prospect of widowhood, is shown in an interrogative, near fighting state of mind.

But even here there is no hint of hard-hitting feminist confrontation/-ism in her examination of the do’s and don’ts prescribed for widowhood, for ‘vidhwadharm’. This absence of high-decibel, rebellious latencies in the inner make-up of this woman-centric novel *can* be felt keenly by readers today. With all its literary splendour *Godaan* is apt to be seen in present-day reading tempers as a stage - even a landmark - in the chronicling of the feminine component and essence: in its articulation of the feminine symbology of the cow but not in its registering of the downgrading of woman and the stark misogyny this breeds.

4.3 THE SPEAKING POWER OF THE UNSPEAKING COW

Before proceeding farther with the unifying and nurturing powers of Dhanias, and the archetypes of femininity they connote, we should take note of the implications

of the cow in the novel. It is a motif of unifying, of a pervasive feminine presence, of a synthesising aura. It/She is a human quadruped.

The speaking silence of the cow and the sense of a profound awakening within Dhania it presages gets re-invoked in the final section of the novel, showing Dhania at Hori's deathbed. We shall consider this final scene in detail later. What we have to note here is that the feminist awakening of Dhania is made poetic, taken beyond dogmatic rigidities, by the poetry and symbolism of the cow

The cow is a giving animal, without becoming food for eating. It has become sacrosanct with the mythology of giving, read and imbued into it by the human need for symbolic objects and for the catharsis of worship. The symbolism of the cow and its strong yet speechless strength for determining human relations is (a) sublimated and kineticised into the driven and articulated activism of woman. It becomes an energy that can have repercussions on the whole equation of gender relations, and thereby, on the character, quality, and future of human life. (b) As long as women like Dhania are present in society - the authorial overtones imply - the ills that afflict it and seem endemic to human nature - ills such as usury, one-upmanship, the instinct to exploit fellow humans whenever possible - will still not spell the doom of human continuance upon earth.

Godaan, thus, evolves from the story of the passive giving quality of the cow, to the deliberate, and hence, cerebral, acts of dissent, of protest, made by Dhania against the one-sided, anti-woman dispensations of society. The passive femininity of the cow is transformed into the non-passive, level-eyed statements of feminism made by Dhania. It is a feminism risen from the guts, sustained by the fires set off by autocratic, discriminatory down-grading of woman, of the feminine factor.

Activity 3

Would you agree with the statement that the symbol of the cow has been re-defined in *Godaan*?

4.4 AT THE FEET OF THE DYING HORI

The innate, never-say-die celebrative fibre of Dhania is shown giving way as Hori lies dying, surrounded by grieving relatives. Custom demands the daan - ritual offering - of a cow as part of the rites of death. 'Collect yourself, Bhaabhee' (sister-in-law) 'Dil kadaa karo, bhaabhee', Hori's brother's voice rises from the bustle around, addressing Dhania. 'Dada's exiting. Make the godaan, don't delay'. (363). Dhania's reaction here lays bare and brings into sharp focus Premchand's thinking and outlook on the fighting feminine spirit. Here is his portrait of Dhania at this juncture:

Seated at Hori's bedside, he says, she has been clinging to hope, fighting hopelessness. Eyes streaming, limbs moving machine-like, she is ministering to Hori, rubbing unguents upon his limp body, spooning in liquids down his dry throat, fighting desperation at the lack of money for medical help.

Heera's alert about performing the Godaan ceremony, his injunctions to her - however well meant - to keep her emotions in check - propel her - Premchand - into grass roots questioning about herself vis-a-vis Hori, about the injunctions laid down for widowhood. 'Did she have to be told about her duties to her husband? He, who was her partner and playmate in life - did her duties to him consist only of lifelong rituals of mourning?' (363)

The phrase, 'partner and playmate' is 'jeevan ka sangee' in the text. The sense of simultaneity, of inter-changeability of feeling and emotion over and above the physical level that the phrase invokes, is pervasive in the Hindi. The idea of the oneness of the two gets conveyed persuasively in the lilt of the Hindi. This tonal facility and advantage is not present in the English: it seems irreproducible. But what the English term 'partner and playmate' has and projects strongly, is the sense of a sporty sparring of siblings. This kittenish give and take of blows and smacks, the bodily parrying, is accommodable in the philosophical overtones of the Hindi term 'jeevan ka sangee'.

One more way to evoke this wholly private sense of oneness with her mate she has is by casting those lines in the first person: 'How much more hard of heart am I to make myself? Are my rites for my husband to be taught to me by a third person? Are life-long tears and weeping to be my only homage to a man who was my comrade-in-life?' The direct mode, one feels, makes up for the formal stiffness of the term 'comrade-in-life'.

Activity 4

Do a short compare-and-contrast note of some 500 words on the evocative strengths of the Hindi and English phrases.

A whole ethos, a whole attitude to, and outlook upon, gender equations is being questioned in these lines by the author: more than questioned - indicted, damned. And it is this authorial/personal outcry against the monolith of orthodoxy that is infused into and made to reverberate in the last line of the novel which says that Dhanial fell down in a heap: 'pachchad khaakar gir padee'.

A short, graphic picture of the chronic want and poverty of the household precedes that line: 'Like an automaton Dhanial rose, brought out the twenty annas she had earned for the day, selling thread, and, putting the coins in the cold palm of her husband, said to Daataadeen standing before her: 'Maharaaj, neither cow, nor calf, nor money there is in the house. This is all there is. This is his godaan'. (363)

4.5 THE RESURRECTION AND RE-BIRTH OF DHANIA

In that general yet specific account of the chronic poverty of the house, and the aural impact of Dhanial's collapse reverberates the resonance of an as yet distant but unthwartable determination of Dhanial. This is to form her own equation with her widowhood, clear of social obligations and impositions, clear of pre-determinisms of any kind. It is a major breakthrough that she is shown making, relevant at both individual and larger social levels. Her sporadic bursts of humanism consolidate at this supremely climactic moment of her spouse's death into a frame of mind and pattern of thought that betoken a deeper change, one at the roots, at the level of character.

The crumpled form of Dhanial will be on its feet again. This newly risen Dhanial will live her widowhood in her own way: in a spirit that reflects her personal, her very own, ways of relating to her man and husband: a being who was her playmate, her alter ego, boon companion: not her boss. It is the ideal of a human bond of give and take, of the parity of giving and taking between husband wife, man and woman, that gets proclaimed in that tableau of collapse - a tableau pregnant with a sense of resurrection.

The author's voice and message get spelt out in that whole sequence and the proposition it makes. And it is not just the husband and wife combine that he has in mind in making that proposition. An overall, encompassing desire to make the giving and proffering impulses present in the human mind prevail over the taking, appropriating ones, rings in that authorial interceding.

Further inferences are possible from this singling out of a particular human trait. The deep rooted social vices of usury, the open, crass demand for return favours for favours done— even among close relatives and associates, the extreme amoralities bred in the extreme and chronic poverty of the rural milieu - all these become less stark, less conspicuous, less fore-grounded, by the right to privacy staked by Dhanias in her reactions to her husband's death.

As long as spirits like Dhanias last, are present in human society, human culture will also last, will hold out, Premchand says. And this life-sustaining figure has to be, can only be, woman's, he implies.

The sheer vocal power and dimensions of Dhanias's personality are particularly marked in this concluding scene of the novel. Her tone in these last lines of the novel she speaks is low, collected. But packed like thunder that can sound distant even when imminent, are the emphatic no's to her self- querying about the passive, mourning-for-life role designed for the life of widowhood looming over her.

No! Dhanias will rise again. She will resurrect.

Activity 5

Do you believe in the resurrection of Dhanias? Do you believe, in other words, that Dhanias's is a continuing story?

4.6 RAJEE SETH: SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES

Parallel/similar gleanings of the spurs to feminist behaviour provided by introspection and inner dialoguing are possible from the behaviour of the women protagonists of the short stories of a writer emerging so many decades later - Rajee Seth. A strong difference in the feel and quality of the feminism of Seth's stories vis-a-vis those of Premchand also emerges. But the prologues and monologues of introspection that precede the actions of both sets of characters give them a generic similarity.

Further differences in the gap between thought and action of the two Dhanias – Seth's and Premchand's - can be stated here:

The gestation periods of the two are different in duration and kind. Premchand's Dhanias's is longer. The definite, individualising act of hers comes at the end of the novel, after about over three hundred pages. And it does not have to its questionings the edged, 'to-hell-with-you' note of recklessness readable into those of Seth's 'Dhanias'.

Seth's feminism is more strident, in sync with the temper of the more assured and extroverted feminist temper of the times. It does not need the kind of author support and spokespersonship that Premchand gives to Dhanias. But despite this difference of mood and time, the prologues of soliloquy and inner threshing of the characters

preceding the exteriorisation of their feminist passions, make them apt material for compare and contrast studies.

4.6.1 Dhania 1, Dhania II

Let us consider, first, the quality of the 'I', 'me', 'mine' consciousness portrayed in the behaviours of the first Dhania, and then, that of the un-named protagonist - Dhania II of Seth's story, 'Andhey Mode Se Aagey' The awakening of the 'I', 'Me', 'Mine' factor in the first Dhania's field of consciousness and awareness is a luminous, wonder-filled moment, like the flash of daylight on the supine, imperious body of night. There is something bridal about it. The man, with whom she has spent her life, cried and laughed with him even as she berated him, is lying dead before her. But she has blue-printed a whole new way of being with him, of evoking his presence, creating a sensation of togetherness with him. By her resolve to abstain from the life-long rituals of mourning and penance prescribed for widows, she re-forges her ties with him, re-kindles the sense of wonder and elation that her bouts of passion used to leave her with. This mystery-filled state of elation and wonder is going to be with her for life, from her resolve to steer away from the rituals of a widowed life. She is going to be the sensually-fulfilled, wonder-struck bride all her life.

Dhania II, Seth's unnamed breakaway protagonist is far more strident. She emanates from the far more overt, articulate and hard-hitting feminism marking the time-scape of Seth's writings. In the course of her caterings to wedded spouse and office boss, she comes alive to a doctrinal and grassroots query of the feminist discourse: what is she in a man's sphere of being?

The inquiring voice is far more edged. The persona it voices is one that is done with the decorous passivity(ies) laid down for women by the arbiters of society. Driven by what dreams and expectations, what bubbles of soap, had she acquiesced in the ways she had? Dreams! Bubbles of soap! Magnetic! Many-hued! Captivating! Chasing them where, how, had she let slip her resolve to struggle for the truth within her? Now it is a blind alley fore and aft (former and present husbands), and facing her, the fixed, unblinking stare of the present! (117)

The low-key, as-yet-private, dare of Dhania I's monologue gives way to the open, full-throated, level-eyed interrogations of self versus society by the more out-spoken temper of Dhania II's feminism: a feminism astir with classic, activist energies: taut with kinetic urges. The kinetic urges find glorious and explosive expression in all the ensuing actions of this roused, raring protagonist.

In a frenzy of rejection, of tearing off from the pores of her skin the fungi gathered in them from all the padded living gifted to her through Mishra's swanky, self-pampering ways, she draws away the light-dispelling heavy curtains of their bedroom, setting their metal rings jangling: she throws open all the never-opened windows and side-doors of the air-conditioned enclosure; desists from switching on the air conditioner.

Hot blasts of air and sheer light come pouring into the room. And in this dismantling of the clutter and culture of air-conditioned living, she sees the road ahead for her. Off Mishra. Away from Surjeet. Single. Lone. Free. Willed. Saturated with a joy-filled weeping - weeping able to shatter the lifeless past and machine-made future of the room. Radiant with the warmth and light of self confidence. And, in a final act of rejection, of throwing to the winds all the junk of her life so far, she aborts the child within her,

The voice of dissent and rejective behaviour *is* louder here, more ringing, far more so. But the low, sub-surface murmur of her self-quizzing and reflections that precede her precipitate actions cannot be muffled in the din. The reader hears the two streams of sound in an orchestral sequence: as preludes that have to climax to a crescendo. They recite a story of arousal, introspection, renewed arousal culminating into action.

The same trajectory of cognition, cogitation and action is seen in the first Dhanias' behaviour. Its decibels are low - in fact, sound is not a component of her behaviour at all in comparison with that of Seth's protagonist's. But at the juncture of her resolve to abstain from the orthodoxies prescribed for widowhood, the drums of dissent beat clear. Her image at this point of inner resolve is of a woman of erect bearing, firm of foot, direct and resolute of look. But high decibels of sound lie packed in this icon of non-verbalism.

The high voltage, explosive feminism of Seth's protagonist and the reined in feminism of Dhanias are the same in their essentials, in their essence. Premchand's compassionate, fatherly concern and humanist identification with Dhanias' dogged demand for selfhood in her ways of relating to her husband - dead or alive - presupposes the same catalysts and detonators to overt feminist action as those underlying Seth's protagonist's.

The plucky, rustic and unlettered Dhanias is singing the same raga as the desperate, urbanised and fully-lettered heroine of Seth. Their *alaps* are similar. The feminism of Premchand, writing in the early years of the twentieth century is not different in its internal make-up and as prelude to action than the feminism of Seth, some fifty years later.

Activity 6

Would you agree with the conclusion that the underlying make-up of the two voices, that of Premchand's Dhanias and that of Seth's, is the same?

This exteriorizing of ideological fervour makes a person's name given to him/her at birth a minor factor, or even a non-factor, a circumstance of far less consequence than the churning of thought and outlook going on within him/her, reminding us of Shakespeare's question: what's in a name?

Dhanias impacts on the reader as an implosive/explosive force, stripped of all social appendages such as name or class. She is Shakti, who is of no history or origin, is an ever-presence, who has the power to become evident and proclaim her presence through the physicality of another - man or woman: is abstract and real both. We feel such a valorising of Dhanias: we hear the timbre of her voice, see the set of her face and body, see the taut precision of her body and face in the final section of the novel where she is shown poised for striking out on her own. 'Am I to spend the rest of my life shedding tears for he who was my playmate in life?'

We see her as a woman transcended of all the usual tags of identity - name, class and so forth. We see her as a type, a species newly culled without any given name, but possessed of bearing, and eloquence of gesture. A name will only be a tag of identity for her, will not contain in its sound and syllable the expansion of the faceted multifariousness in her. Typhoons and cyclones and other mega forces of nature are sometimes given names. Typhoon so and so, we read in the media, sometimes. These are always female names! The forces are real, the names are convenience: but the femaleness of the names, the unconscious gender-ising of the forces of fury is something other than convenience: it stems from a certain kind of perception.

This link between an ideology-inspired, psycho-physical, fury and the anonymising, the disappearance, of name, is taken to a peak in Rajee Seth's story. The face and form of the unnamed heroine stay sharp, fore-grounded, amidst the shatter and crash of the destruction she is wreaking on the abode of sin that her home has become for her. The crash of each item in it foregrounds a facet of the life of dumb compliance she has fallen into, in the course of her transplantations of herself from husband to office-boss: foregrounds the degradation of these perambulations.

An agonized, intense, introspective face and eyes rise in the reader's reading- scape. We know this face. It is the face of Everywoman. She doesn't need a name. Her face is a name in itself.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Godaan is panoramic in its narrative sweep. Its physical setting is restricted to the village Belaree, in the province of Oudh of British India, reflecting, one can say, Premchand's own origins. But it transcends geography in its portrayals of the emotional volatility and reverberative powers of the people of this region which is now called by another name. This transcendence of formal lines of definitive demarcation is a hallmark of all great writing. Hori, Heera, Bhola, Daataaden, Maataadeen, Jhunia, Dhania, Gobar – the whole gallery of characters shown inhabiting the village, and providing the wellsprings of the events of the novel, recede in the mind by its end. What the reader is left with are impressions of the latent yet ready-to-spring, powerful and compelling drives of human behaviour, risen above the boundary lines of specificities such as physical appearance and so on. After reading about the extortionist instincts of the characters, their impulses of back stabbing for gain, one is left with sheer horror at the criminal impulses present in human nature, ready to break out into action at the first chance: horror at the ease with which under-cutting is accepted as a fact of life.

The cow is an enabling symbol and factor par excellence of the feel of transcendence that pervades *Godaan*. She makes the reek of underhandedness and instincts of one-upmanship in human transactions highlighted in the narrative seem inconsequential. And, most importantly, she projects a dimension of the future in human affairs. Her all-seeing, all-absorbing eyes and her unspeaking mouth suggest a total cognition, seem to be deciphering – perhaps have deciphered already - the futures of her human masters. It is this feel of an evolution sensed and made imminent that pervades the concluding sections of the novel, which climax to the scene of the collapse of Dhania. That her collapse is not her end, that it is only a step backward for a full surge ahead is proclaimed by the strong retrospective quality of the lines.

Dhania's story is yet to end. Her strivings for establishing a private and personal wavelength with her husband, un-dictated by custom and tradition have developed into an explicit, self-conscious public struggle and movement for gender renaissance, gender parity: in other words, feminism.

And it is from the vortex of this highly vocal struggle that the protagonist of Rajee Seth's story takes birth. There is a strident, sharp-edged note to her charter of demands. So exteriorised are her thoughts, so vivid is her verbalising of them from her body stance that she needs no name. She is like Draupadi, standing disrobed in the court of Duryodhan. The act, the setting, and the weeping, outraged eyes of Draupadi figurate her, risen above the need for formal names. The pronoun 'she' – 'voh' gains an encompassing, resonant feel, making it seem a proper noun. She is

nameless but not faceless. She is like a book, the contents of which are felt beyond and over its title.

It is the same separation of thinking and thinker that we are impelled to make at the image of Dhania at Hori's deathbed. Dhania and her story is a precursor to the story of Seth's nameless protagonist.

4.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) The unit posits that between the feminist fury of Rajee Seth's character and the less activist, comparatively decorous behaviour of Dhania, there are parallels. Would you agree?
- 2) In Rajee Seth's story the protagonist is not named. Does this heighten her feminist profile, freeing her from the need for a specific name?
- 3) Do you think the feminine set of face and look of eye are more self assured today, in the twenty first century?
- 4) What would be your blueprint of ideal gender relations? Write a note of some seven to eight hundred words on the theme.
- 5) Women are being recruited for active combat duty in increasing numbers. What are your reactions to this trend? Can you link it to our own history of women warriors, such as Lakshmibai of Jhansi and some others?
- 6) The idea of gender equality should not blind us to the reality of gender difference. The difference is necessary. Can you elaborate on this idea?

4.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

- 1) Premchand, Munshi. *Godaan*. Saraswati Press. Allahabad. First Edition 1936. Edition used in the unit: 1970.
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- 3) Seth, Rajee. 'Andhe Mode Se Aagey'. Rajkamal Prakashan. New Delhi. First and Second Editions: 1979, 1983.