

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Paper-VIII

(Option-i)

Section A & B

M.A. English (Final)

**Directorate of Distance Education
Maharshi Dayanand University
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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M.A. English (Final)
Indian Writing in English

PAPER-VIII

(Option-i)

Max. Marks : 100

Time : 3 Hours

Note: Candidate will be required to attempt five questions in all. Questions I will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test candidates comprehension of the texts prescribed. There will be one question on each of the units in all the four sections (in about 200 words each), one from each section. The other four questions will be based on the prescribed text with internal choice is one question with internal choice on each of the units. The candidates will be required to attempt one question from each of the four sections.

SECTION-A

Unit I	AUROBINDO Savitri
Unit II	NISSIM EZEKIEL Island The Visitor Poet, Lover, Bird Watcher Patriot Time to Change Night of the Scorpion

SECTION B

Unit III	MULK RAJ ANAND Coolie
Unit IV	ANITA DESAI Voices in the City

UNIT-I AUROBINDO: SAVITRI

Chronology

1872 August 15	Birth in Calcutta. Third son of Krishandhan Ghose, a physician in government service, and Swarnlata Ghose, eldest daughter of Rajnarain Bose, the head of the Adi Brahma Samaj.
1872-7	In Rangpur, eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh).
1877-9	At Loreto Convent School, Darjeeling.
1879	Taken to England. He and his brothers placed in the charge of Rev. Wiliam Drewett, a Congregational clergyman of Manchester.
1879-84	In Manchester. The two elder boys attend Manchester Grammar School; Aurobindo is tutored at home by Mr and Mrs Drewett.
1884-9	In London. Scholarship student at St Paul's School.
1890 July	Admitted as a probationer to the Indian Civil Service.
1890-2	Scholarship student at King's College, Cambridge. Studies simultaneously the civil services and classical curricula.
1892 May	Passes the first part of the classical tripos in first class.
1892 August	Passes the Indian Civil Service final examination.
1892 November	Rejected from the civil service owing to his inability to pass the riding examination.
1892 December	Obtained employment in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda.
1893 February	Returns to India.
1893-1906	In the Baroda State service, at first in various administrative departments, then professor of French and English in the Baroda College, then private secretary of the Maharaja, finally vice-principal of the college.
1893-4	<i>New Lamps for Old</i> , a series of articles on the Indian National Congress, published in Bombay.
1898	<i>Songs to Myrtilla</i> , a collection of poems, privately printed.
1901 April	Marriage to Mrinalni Bosse in Calcutta.
1902-3	Begins to organize a revolutionary group in Bengal and to contact advanced nationalist politicians in western India.
1902 July	'The Age of Kalidasa', an article, published in the <i>Indian Review</i> (Madras).
1905	Begins the practice of Yoga.
1905 October	Partition of Bengal takes place.
1906 February	Goes to Bengal, begins to participate in the anti-partition movement.
1906 August	Becomes principal of the newly founded Bengal National College. Begins to write for the nationalist journal <i>Bande Matram</i> .
1906 December	Active at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Cpongress.
1907 April	Publishes <i>The Doctrine of Passive Resistance</i> in <i>Bande Matram</i> .
1907 August	Arrested on the charge of sedition for articles printed in <i>Bande Mataram</i> ; released on bail.
1907 September	Acquitted. From this point comes forward as the leader of the Nationalist or Extremist Party in Bengal.
1907 December	A leader of the Extremists at Surat session of the Indian National Congress. Conflict between Extremists and Moderates ends in a violent clash.
1908 January	Met V.B.Lele, a Maharashtrian yogi. Has his first decisive spiritual realization.
1908 Jan- April	Delivers many speeches.
1908 May	Arrested as implicated in terrorist activities of a group led by his brother Barindrakumar; charged

- with conspiracy to wage war against the king. Until May 1909 an undertrial prisoner in Alipore Jail, near Calcutta; spends most of his time in meditation, has many spiritual experiences.
- 1909 May 6 Acquitted. His brother condemned to the gallows, later transported to the Andamans.
- 1909 May 30 Speech at Uttarapara, Bengal. Many other speeches delivered before November.
- 1909 June 19 Starts *Karmayogin*, a weekly political and cultural journal in Bengali. Writes most of its articles.
- 1909 August 23 Starts *Dharma*, a weekly political and cultural journal in Bengali. Writes many of its articles.
- 1910 February Goes secretly to Chandernagore, a French enclave north of Calcutta.
- 1910 April 4 Arrives by ship in Pondichery, the capital of French India. The same day a warrant is issued in Calcutta charging him with sedition for an article published in *Karmayogin*.
- 1910 November Article found not seditious. Announces his presence in Pondicherry and his retirement from active politics.
- 1914 August 15 First issue of *Arya*, a review of pure philosophy. Most of his major works brought out in monthly instalments in this journal before it ceases publication in January 1921.
- 1920 August Offered the presidentship of the Indian National Congress; declines the offer.
- 1926 November After a decisive spiritual realization withdraws from direct contact with most others. The community of seekers that had grown up around him put in the hands of the Mother.
- 1930-8 Extensive correspondence with members of the ashram and some outsiders.
- 1938 November Fractures his thigh. Limited contact with a few disciples begins; two of them record and later publish his talks.
- 1939-40 Revision and book publication of *The Life Divine*.
- 1940 Supports Allies during World War II. In 1942 recommends the acceptance of the Cripps Proposal offering India self-government after the war.
- 1947 August 15 Independence of India. His message broadcast by All India Radio.
- 1948 Publication of the revised version of *The Synthesis of Yoga, Part I*.
- 1949 Publication of the revised version of *The Human Cycle*.
- 1950 Publication of revised version of *The Ideal of Human Unity*.
- 1950 December 5 Death after a brief illness.

Life and Career

Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872. His father Krishandhan Ghosh was a man of medicine and was very kind to his patients. He had planned for great achievements of his children. The impress of English culture was visible in his home. Aurobindo was the third son of Dr. Ghosh. Aurobindo's primary education took place at a school in Darjeeling. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St. Paul's School in London in 1884 and in 1890 went from it with a senior classical scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where he studied for two years. In 1890 he passed also the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but at the end of two years of probation failed to present himself at the riding examination and was disqualified for the Service. At this time the Shrimant Siyaji Rao Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Aurobindo saw him, obtained an appointment in the Baroda State Service and left England for India, arriving there in February, 1893.

Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda Service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretariat work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity — for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time — and of preparation for his future work. Aurobindo started a lecture series "New Lamps for Old" on the request of his friend. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East. At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the public initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of Non-cooperation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the "Subjects Committee". Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politicians and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was self-help; it aimed on one side at an effective organisation of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-cooperation with the Government. Boycott of British and foreign goods and the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British law courts, and the foundation of a system of Arbitration courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram* of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande Mataram*, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding up in 1908 when Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentous existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surat in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipore Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipore Jail, he came out in May, 1909, to find the party organisation broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-handed as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in India to revive the movement. He published at this time to aid his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin*, and a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma*. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a time he thought that the necessary training must first be given through a less advanced Home Rule movement or an agitation of passive resistance of the kind created by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. But he saw that the hour of these movements had not come and that he himself was not their destined leader. Moreover, since his twelve months' detention in the Alipore Jail, which had been spent entirely in practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.

In February, 1910, he withdrew to a secret retirement at Chandernagore and in the beginning of April sailed for Pondicherry in French India. A third prosecution was launched against him at this moment for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed. Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up appeared to him and he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the

Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement. During all his stay at Pondicherry from 1910 onward he remained more and more exclusively devoted to his spiritual work and his sadhana. In 1914 after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the Arya. Most of his more important works, The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, Essays on the Gita, The Isha Upanishad, appeared serially in the Arya. These works embodied much of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture (The Foundations of Indian Culture), the true meaning of the Vedas (The Secret of the Veda), the progress of human society (The Human Cycle), the nature and evolution of poetry (The Future Poetry), the possibility of the unification of the human race (The Ideal of Human Unity). At this time also he began to publish his poems, both those written in England and at Baroda and those, fewer in number, added during his period of political activity and in the first years of his residence at Pondicherry. The Arya ceased publication in 1921 after six years and a half of uninterrupted appearance. Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five disciples. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of sadhaks had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left everything behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

Sri Aurobindo began his practice of Yoga in 1904. At first gathering into it the essential elements of spiritual experience that are gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realisation followed till now in India, he passed on in search of a more complete experience uniting and harmonising the two ends of existence, Spirit and Matter. Most ways of Yoga are paths to the Beyond leading to the Spirit and, in the end, away from life; Sri Aurobindo's rises to the Spirit to redescend with its gains bringing the light and power and bliss of the Spirit into life to transform it. Man's present existence in the material world is in this view or vision of things a life in the Ignorance with the Inconscient at its base, but even in its darkness and nescience there are involved the presence and possibilities of the Divine. The created world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion to be cast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvana, but the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this material inconscience is to be manifested progressively the Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest term yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the highest of which it is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-Consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine consciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, discover one's true self, remain in constant union with the Divine and bring down the supramental Force for the transformation of mind and life and body. To realise this possibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo left his body on December 5, 1950. The Mother carried on his work until November 17, 1973.

Aurobindo As A Nationalist and Revolutionary

Aurobindo tried to offer a new meaning to nationalism. He gave it a spiritual colouring and expected a feeling of dedication to the motherland, as of a son to the mother. Aurobindo projected the concept of land as mother and pleaded for emancipation from the shackles of foreign rule. He secretly published and circulated a pamphlet Bhawani Mandir when he was at Baroda. Through this writing he advocated for the establishment of a workshop of Bhawani and the institution of an order of Karmayogins who devote themselves to the service of the goddess. Through the use of spiritual symbols he explained nationalism and appealed to the emotions of the masses to enable them to join the freedom movement. Markendaya Purana and Bankimchandra's Anandmath are influences on the Bhawani Mandir as the terms and concepts of nationalism are taken from the former and the idea of land as mother seems to have been influenced by the latter. Aurobindo in a letter to his wife Mrinalini wrote: "whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as consisting of some plains, fields, forests, mountains and rivers I look upon my country as my Mother, I worship and adore her as mother. What would a son do when a demon is sitting on the breast of his mother and drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race; it is not the physical strength, I am not going to fight with sword or the gun, but with the power of knowledge. The strength of the warriors is not the only kind of strength, there is also the power of the Brahman, which is founded on knowledge."

Aurobindo dubbed colonial self-government as a 'political monstrosity'. He envisioned an ideal of 'unqualified swaraj' for India without which it was impossible for India to progress. He insisted that we do not seek absolute autonomy due to "hostility to the English people". To him it was the basic condition for development of India and realisation of

india's destiny. He gave his method of fighting for the cause of freedom. The two means of achieving 'absolute autonomy' lay through passive resistance which was to follow the two main theories Boycott and Swadeshi. In Aurobindo's mind revolution was not incompatible with passive resistance, for there was inherent in the idea of Swadeshi the right to resist any injustice or coercion.

Aurobindo was associated with politics barely for four years(1906-1910). Still in this short span he made a refreshing contribution in the struggle for independence. He set out to radicalise the politics and programmes of the Congress and advocated the boycott not only of the British goods but also of government-aided schools and the whole alien administration. His prose writings worked as heady wine to the young radicals of Bengal. He organized the Extremists, or Nationalists as they called themselves in the Bengal Congress, and promoted an alliance between them and their counterparts in Maharashtra, led by Balgangadhar Tilak. Aurobindo's approach was not negative; he postulated the necessity of Swadeshi with his theory of economic boycott. It was well thought and involved a critique of alien rule on all counts. When he postulated educational boycott, he put forward his views on national education; alongwith judicial boycott, he stressed the necessity of national arbitration courts; alongwith the administrative boycott, he underlined the importance of national organization and, as a sanction behind the whole boycott theory, he put forward the concept of a social boycott.

Aurobindo left Baroda in 1906, and thereafter he concentrated on widening the base of the revolutionary movement by encouraging alliance between the revolutionaries of the east and the west. His was a threefold action plan: first, education of masses through his writings; next, to work with other Extremists to capture the Congress organization from the Moderates and, finally, he would secretly help people prepare for a violent insurrection. All this resulted in a split in the Congress party. The Congress party's annual sessions witnessed noisy scenes in 1906 and 1907. Such was the influence of Aurobindo that the Bengal Government's assessment makes it plain: "He is regarded and spoken of by all as the disciples regard a Great Master. He has been in the forefront of all...But he has kept himself, like a careful and valued General, out of sight of the enemy. We cannot get evidence against him such as would secure his conviction in a Court".

Aurobindo was put behind bars for his alleged involvement in Maniktala bomb conspiracy case(1908-9). Imprisoned for a year, he was defended by C.R.Das and eventually acquitted. C.R. Das prophesied that Aurobindo would emerge as "the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity". Much of the time in his jail was devoted to yoga, meditation and study. Soon after his release, he brought out two publications Karmayogi and Dharma to take up his programme, attended the Bengal provincial conference at Hoogly and met S.N.Banerjee to work out a rapprochement with the Moderates.

Thereafter dubbed by government as undesirable, his activities came under close scrutiny. Minto, then Viceroy, tried to persuade Whitehall to deport Aurobindo, but no fool-proof case could be brought against Aurobindo. As to his writings, he had, in the opinion of his detractors, developed the 'art of safe slander' to perfection. On 25th May 1910, Minto confided in Morley, the Secretary of State, that Aurobindo was "the most dangerous man we now have to reckon with".

In the mean while, there was a marked change in Aurobindo's political ideals. He began to advocate 'spiritual and moral regeneration' as a prelude to political advancement and warned that the government was intensifying its efforts to round up revolutionaries. He later claimed to have received divine instruction to leave Chandranagore in February 1910 and a month later left for Pondicherry. With his departure ended the brief yet tumultuous phase of his deep and powerful influence on contemporary Indian politics.

Aurobindo: The Poet

Aurobindo is well known for performing diverse roles in a period of crisis long before India saw the light of freedom. It would be still a matter of debate as to how Aurobindo lives in the consciousness of Indians. For a brief span from 1906-1910 he was involved in politics of nation building and giving Indians the theories of passive resistance through boycott of alien presences and exploring swadeshi. He was instrumental in split in Indian National Congress and instilled a sense of self-respect in the struggle for independence. After giving up active politics and living at Pondicherry Aurobindo devoted his life to explore consciousness. In the living memory of masses of India it is not difficult to locate him along with the poets known as inspired poets Ved Vyasa, Valmiki etc. Aurobindo is a poet who has written an epic based on a legend of Mahabharata, but the language he used puts this epic beyond the understanding of masses. He certainly has managed to perform a formidable task. Aurobindo calls Savitri a legend and a symbol. The legend of Savitri is well known, but Savitri as a symbol can be understood in Aurobindo's poetry and his letters throwing light on the epic. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar feels that Savitri is a poem without a parallel in literature: "The Mahabharata story of Savitri and Satyavan is now rendered anew with scaffolding unimaginably vast and undertones of incalculable import,

written in blank verse but with a weight of thought and edges of articulation unattempted ever before. The poem with its 23,000 lines, spans earth and heaven, comprises life, death, and immortality. It is a modern Divine Commedia, in which paradise is lost and won. Man learns to exceed himself and Savitri, the girl-wife, becomes mother-might and vanquisher of death and also the creatrix of life divine on the terrestrial base. Sri Aurobindo often speculated on contours of future poetry partaking of the power of the ancient mantra and achieving the instantaneous communication between souls awakened and awakening. In Savitri he brought out such effects again and again, and criticism is almost dumb before a feat so stupendous and unique". Savitri then becomes a superhuman achievement in the tradition of poetry.

Poetry to Sri Aurobindo is a part of Sadhana, "a means of contact with the Divine through inspiration". In his opinion "much of the poetry of Tagore is the sign of such sadhana, a long inheritance of assured spiritual discovery and experience. But what is given whether directly or in symbol or in poetic images is not the formal steps of the Sadhana, but the strongly felt movement and the living outcome, the vision and life and inner experience, the spirit and power and body of sweetness and beauty and delight". Thus in Sri Aurobindo's scheme of literature, poetry is a means of spiritual expression. And when poetry becomes spiritual experience the form it will take will certainly have an impress of the spiritual. Aurobindo said: "Poetry rather determines its own form; the form is not imposed on it by any law mechanical or external to it. The poet least of all artists need to create with eyes fixed anxiously on the technique of his art. He has to possess it, no doubt; but in the heat of creation the intellectual sense of it becomes a subordinate action or even a mere undertone in his mind, and in his best moments he is permitted, in a way, to forget it altogether". The spiritual realisations of the poet are here understood to be more real, dynamic. The imaginative activity is carried far beyond the personal self and its private moorings, and what gets expressed is the intuitively experienced truth, the truth of the universal human soul. Poetry is the mimesis of human activity not as it is but as it can be in its ideal best. In Aurobindo's scheme the poet is a seer and a revealer of truth and addresses himself to the inner senses; he struggles for a heightened, meaningful psychic identity with his unrestricted imaginative range; he opens the inner sight in us and himself feels it intensely first.

A poet is a seer because he can envision and interpret experiences that may have external association but internal effect: vision and reason merge into one. Now when poet is placed in the position of a Seer the poetry that pours out from a Seer has to be uplifting, divine, spiritual. Aurobindo suggests that poem is a mantra. He is characteristically Indian when he attributes mantric quality to a poem and not understanding it as a representation, mimesis, instruction, moral criticism etc., poetry is not mundane as it expresses the ideal of the inner being. The self-effective language confers upon it, Aurobindo feels, a spiritual character when the sound and the sense conjoin and "there meets the unity of a divine rhythmic movement with a depth of sense and a power of infinite suggestion welling up directly from the fountain-heads of the spirit within us", when the poet reveals the truth of the spirit itself, capturing the effects in poetry of what the Vedic poets considered as Mantra, expressing their own realisation as well as the realisation for others, kindling the spiritual within and bringing out the effective vision in words "illuminated and illuminating".

Mantra is a vibration which descends from above or churns from within, from the occult depths. It is supposed to be received or held within and once it has gone through a period of incubation, it becomes alive, charged, it acquires a potency which may then be vocalised. This mantric view of poetry will naturally emphasise spiritual inspiration. Poetry as mantra is uniquely Indian. According to Sri Aurobindo, to be a mantric poet, one has to have a passive outer consciousness which is synonymous with ego consciousness, a receiving and transcribing brain which can be made into a spacious instrument or set through yogic sadhana. Aurobindo says in his Future Poetry "the most genuine and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and takes its true native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what is received from the godheads of the inner and outer spaces".

Aurobindo in his writings gives a critique of writers in the English tradition who at times were close to expressing spiritual truth in an inspired movement. He cites lines and passages from Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, which meet the test of mantric poetry. But the fact remains that mantric poetry has not been possible in the past and again as a seer Aurobindo predicts a future for poetry as mantra: "This poetry will be resplendent with the golden glory of new dawns; a perennial inspiration of ever-new unfoldings of the infinite Truth, the soul expression of the new world in the making". Aurobindo's conception of poetry as mantric inspiration draws on the idea of consciousness available in Indian philosophy especially Yoga and his own theory of Integral Yoga. In kundalini Yoga these levels of consciousness are represented as Chakras viz. Muladhara, Svadhisthan, Manipurna, Anahatta, Vishuddhi, Ajna, and Sahasrara.

Aurobindo's style in Savitri

The mere fact that the epic Savitri runs into more than 23,000 lines and it took almost a half century to compose this work makes us inquisitive about various other aspects of Sri Aurobindo's epic. According to P.K.J. Kurup, Aurobindo's vast volumes of verse of several kinds – lyrical, narrative, philosophical and epic – has great qualitative variation. Aurobindo's poetry is claimed to have a unique Indian sensibility and to have added a new dimension to epic poetry in English. On the other hand P.Lal and K. Raghvendra Rao suggest that the kind of poetry written by Aurobindo is vague, pompous and disembodied. Identifying "high-falutin mysticism" in Aurobindo's poetry they are of the opinion that Aurobindo's strain in poetry would certainly prove bad for Indian Writing in English. In this very strain Keki N. Daruwala discussed Aurobindo and said that "no other Indian poet was half as bad, none so nebulous or verbose or who thoroughly confused the inflated with the sublime".

Savitri is Sri Aurobindo's quest for new values at a time of crisis in the modern world. From time immemorial man has been in search of immortality and wisdom has been understood to be a means to achieve immortality. And the great sages who are wisdom apotheosised drank this elixir of immortality. Sri Aurobindo too shares the suffering of great sages, seers, and yogis who focused themselves to fight death. This fight against death never manifests as a confrontation with death per se, but it is continual and conscious warding off the process of ageing. If wisdom lies in staying young in body, mind and spirit, Sri Aurobindo's Savitri through the figure of King Aswapathy expresses man's yearning for immortality, his desire to become infinite. Now this is possible if one grows and explores the supramental.

Savitri's birth is the manifestation of "world's desire" to fight death and ignorance. Interestingly Savitri has to confront the fated death of her own husband. The challenge Savitri accepts is to bring down the Divine Power in herself and in nature to triumph over Death. In this epic he works upon a large canvas of history, geography, poetry, science, philosophy etc. Aurobindo here deals with the origin of man, birth of the universe, birth of the gods. The structure of Savitri can be viewed as made of three parts Aswapathy's yoga, Savitri's yoga and Savitri-Yama (Death) confrontation in which Savitri triumphs. The epic-action takes place in one single day, from sunrise to sunset. It begins in the darkness of night and unfolds through the day and culminates into silent night that will again be followed by a fresh dawn. Thus Savitri opens on a centrally critical point. The Book IV which opens the Second volume of Savitri is a depiction of the birth of Savitri, her growth, and her quest for eternal love. Thus confined to giving expression to the birth and growth of Savitri the Book IV deals with Nature in its various shades. Here the poet follows the convention shared by epic writers to catch the details of Nature.

Savitri, Sri Aurobindo's greatest odyssey of Spirit is an unparalleled vision in modern times. It is in the Mother's words "The Prophetic vision of the World history" including the announcement of the earth's future. When epic poetry is considered obsolete and modernists fail to achieve the epic stature in poetry, how a revolutionary, mystic and a seer manages to give an epic that runs into a bulging mass. Conspicuous by its absence epic poetry stages a comeback through the seer-poet Sri Aurobindo who maintains that epic poetry comes when a seer appears; to us Sri Aurobindo is a seer and Savitri is His vision of time and eternity. Savitri embodies the highest aspiration and the hope of a Humanity, that is emerging from a past which is crumbling and moving towards a future that is to be born.

"It was the hour before the gods awake Across the path of the Divine event."

That is how Sri Aurobindo begins his epic Savitri, which he started writing when he was in Baroda and worked upon for nearly fifty years, working upon it from the different levels of consciousness which he scaled during his long, long career of the Spirit. This simple story narrates the virtue of conjugal fidelity. Satyavan is one who carries the truth - satyam vahati iti. Satyavan, man carrying the divine soul, has descended into this kingdom of death. And Savitri the saviour is the daughter of Savitr, the Creator, the creative splendour. She is the divine Grace in human form. Her father Aswapathy is one who is the lord of Force, lord of spiritual power, strength and light. Aswa in the Veda symbolises life-energy. Aswapathy is the lord of life. Only one who has conquered the life-energies can father the divine Grace in human form. And Satyavan's father is Dyumatsena: dyumat is shining, sena is the host, the shining host, i.e., the divine mind full of the rays of the divine light. It is exiled from its own kingdom of light and comes to the earth blinded by ignorance. This is the symbolism Sri Aurobindo unveils behind the simple story of conjugal bliss. And he calls it a legend and a symbol: a legend about something that has taken place in the history of man and a symbol of what is going on and of what is going to be.

Sri Aurobindo worked upon it for five decades. Poetry was natural to him. He wrote his first poem in England when he was thirteen and it was a pastime with him to write poetry. But this particular poem, Savitri, he revised and rerevised, some portions as many as twenty-one times. When he was asked why he needed to revise when he had already received the overhead inspiration, he said that the revision also came from there. He explained that he was striving for a perfect perfection. He turns that simple legend of conjugal fidelity into a memorable story of the

conquest of death for man, for humanity, by the Grace, the divine Grace descended on earth, fighting the battle for man with the lord of Death. And in the process he describes his own spiritual odyssey and the saga of The Mother's spiritual adventure in working for the evolution of a new step in consciousness beyond the mind.

In this epic he works upon a large canvas of history, geography; poetry, science, philosophy. He deals with the origin of man, birth of the universe, birth of the gods - from different angles - from the religious angle, from the mythological, the scientific, the philosophical and the yogic. Again and again he takes up the same theme, but from different standpoints. In Savitri he recaptures the fundamentals of all religions, philosophies, yogic practices. He describes the cosmogony of the universe; from bhu-earth-bhuvah, swah, mahas, sat, chit and ananda-the seven planes of existence, the various grades of consciousness. He describes in vivid details and unveils the occult geography of the universe. That is perhaps the largest part of the epic.

And then he narrates how man has grown up from the pure physical man concerned with his creature comforts, how slowly he develops into the rajasic man and from the rajasic man into the sattwic man. He discusses the various parts of the mind, why life is maimed, why death enters at all into this cosmic scheme, why if ananda is the base, ananda the sustenance and ananda is the goal, do we feel so much of suffering, so much of pain. He also discusses the problem of free-will and determinism, what is Karma, what are the gods. The gods that we speak and read of in the Puranas, are they all myths? What is the truth behind the traditions of ardhnanarishwara, or Durga or Lakshmi or Saraswati? Are they all mental constructions? What are the chakras, what about the lotuses of which the Tantra speaks? Are they again just matters of faith or can they be experienced. He takes the whole life in one embrace. These are some of the themes he deals with at a leisurely pace in the twenty-four thousand lines in blank verse. He has a way of writing which may strike the modern mind as strange and difficult. He would state a certain truth in one sentence and then five lines would follow explaining how he has arrived at that truth. That will be followed by another approach to the same truth. He preserves the tradition of the Upanishads, the tradition of avritti, studied repetition. In Savitri you will find scattered here and there references to our current values and movements. He speaks of "Behind his vain labour, sweat and blooded tears", recalling Churchill's famous expression during the dark days of the second World war. He also speaks of the "magic television's glass", "phantom robot", "atomic parcellings of the Infinite", "stratosphere of the Superconscient", "necessity's logarithmic table", "calculus of Destiny", "unprovisioned cheques on the beyond, signed by the religions, on the credit bank of Time", "cowled fifth columnist." There is "smuggled godhead into humanity across the custom's line of mind and flesh", and so on. The posterity two hundred years hence will get an idea of what their ancestors thought, what were their concepts and practices.

Now, how did Savitri come to be born? Sri Aurobindo says:

A world's desire compelled her mortal birth.

She was not born just in the normal way; the combined need and aspiration of the Earth in evolution called for her birth. The Divine Grace manifests on different planes, but on this plane of death, to this field of mortality she was brought down by King Aswapathy who Sri Aurobindo describes was a colonist from immortality. He is one who has come by choice to colonise for God this field of death to pay god's debts to man and to earth. The whole poem Savitri he distributed in twelve books and they are:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. The book of beginning | 2. The book of the Traveller |
| 3. The book of the Divine Mother | 4. The book of the Birth and Quest |
| 5. The book of Love | 6. The book of Fate |
| 7. The book of Yoga | 8. The book of Death |
| 9. The book of Eternal Night | 10. The book of the double Twilight |
| 11. The book of everlasting day | 12. Epilogue |

NATURE IN BOOK IV

Book IV in the epic Savitri is 'The Book of Birth and Quest'. There are four cantos in it dealing with the birth of Savitri, her childhood, her growth, the ancient longing she experiences that entertains her for the quest, and the quest. Sri Aurobindo in *The Future Poetry* wrote: "all life is one and a new human mind moves towards the realisation of its totality and oneness. The poetry which voices the oneness and totality of our being and Nature and the worlds and God, will not make the actuality of our earthly life less but more real and rich and full and wide and living to men... To live in close and abiding intimacy with Nature and the spirit in her is to free our daily living from its prison of narrow preoccupation with the immediate moment and act and to give the moment the inspiration of all Time and the background

of eternity and the daily act the foundation of an eternal peace and the large momentum of the universal Power.” The whole epic is imbued with the realisation of oneness of life. Book IV depicts the birth of the Flame i.e. Savitri. This birth is no accident but gradual evolution of consciousness. It follows a design and is out there to impress all of us that all life is one:

*All time-made difference they overcame;
The world was fibred with their own heart-strings;
Close drawn to the heart that beats in every breast,
They reached the one self in all through boundless love.
Attuned to Silence and to the world-rhyme,
They loosened the knot of the imprisoning mind;*

Savitri too begins with a new human form and gradually begins to register the ways of the world. And soon she had to acknowledge the presence of an ‘all-seeing Eye’. The epic Savitri meets the ideals of poetry envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and a reading of Book IV conforms that ‘Nature’s great spiritual eye’ is always present making lasting relationship between humans, Nature, and Gods.

Here Nature is understood to be ‘a dream of the Divine’.

*A traveller from unquiet neighbouring seas,
The dense-maned monsoon rode neighing through earth’s hours:*

Spring season takes on the figure of a love God, an ardent lover who has made the earth a beautiful place. The birth of the Flame is to take place and the whole Nature responds to this birth anticipating and celebrating this divine birth of the Flame.

*And Winter and Dew-time laid their calm cool hands
On Nature’s bosom still in a half sleep
And deepened with hues of lax and mellow ease
The tranquil beauty of the waning year.
Then Spring, an ardent lover, leaped through leaves
And caught the earth-bride in his eager clasp;
His advent was a fire of irised hues,
His arms were a circle of the arrival of joy.
His voice was a call to the Transcendent’s sphere
Whose secret touch upon our mortal lives
Keeps ever new the thrill that made the world*

Spring season performed many roles simultaneously as it brought a happy change in the world. When the Earth lay still in repose and ‘three thoughtful seasons’ pass by brooding the birth of Savitri, Spring season leaps out through the leaves. He comes and spreads his net far and wide. His presence enchanted all and he infected everything with a pleasing desire. His kiss made the Earth beautiful:

*His grasp was a young god’s upon earth’s limbs:
Changed by the passion of his divine outbreak
He made her body beautiful with his kiss.*

Nature too rejoiced in his company as Spring worked as a contagion infecting everything with desire to celebrate. His arrival was attested with celebrations in Nature.

*Impatient for felicity he came,
High-fluting with the coāl’s happy voice,
His peacock turban trailing on the trees;
His breath was a warm summons to delight,
The dense voluptuous azure was his gaze...*

.....
*All sights and voices wove a single charm.
The life of the enchanted globe became
A storm of sweetness and of light and song,
A revel of colour and of ecstasy,*

*A hymn of rays, a litany of cries:
A strain of choral priestly music sang
And, swung on the swaying censer of the trees,
A sacrifice of perfume filled the hours.
Asocas burned in crimson spots of flame,
Pure like the breath of an unstained desire
White jasmynes haunted the enamoured air,
Pale mango-blossoms fed the liquid voice
Of the love-maddened coāl, and the brown bee
Muttered in fragrance mid the honey-buds.
The sunlight was a great god's golden smile.
All Nature was at beauty's festival.*

The Nature is imbued with the all pervasive divine. What seems to be matter without expression begins to communicate the moment the essential oneness of life is experienced. The changes in Nature then become the manifestation of the divine:

*A Mother-wisdom works in Nature's breast
To pour delight on the heart of toil and want
And press perfection on life's stumbling powers,
Impose heaven-sentience on the obscure abyss
And make dumb Matter conscious of its God.*

The Legend of Savitri

In the Madra country lived a righteous king Aswapathy. He was much loved by his subjects as he was engaged in doing good for his people. He enjoyed all kinds of pleasures but he had no progeny. In order to beget a child Aswapathy began a penance for eighteen long years and in the end Mother Earth, Supreme mother herself was propitiated. She appeared and offered him a boon. And so the childless King got a daughter from the Supreme mother. The female child was christened Savitri which means – she who has descended from the Sun, she who has descended from illumination itself, she who has come into earth life to bring light, she who is daughter of the Sun. Savitri grew up and her qualities as a female were impressing all and she was often likened to a divine presence. She was gentle and beautiful; she was intelligent, sensitive, and wise. Now her father Aswapathy was worried about her marriage as her beauty and intelligence and her character were so powerful that generally young men, her peers, were afraid of asking her hand. They felt that they were not worthy of her. When the King realised what a unique child he had, he asked Savitri, 'Why don't you go ahead and find the partner of your choice?' Savitri then took leave of her father to find her own husband.

She visits many places, and visits many kingdoms and hermitages. While she travelled from one place to another, she came across one hermitage in the forest, that of King Dyumatsena. King Dyumatsena was a blind king. When he became blind, several enemy kings attacked him, and so he lost his kingdom. But he had a son called Satyavan who looked after his parents in the hermitage. Satyavan in Sanskrit means – he who upholds the truth, he who is the vehicle of truth, he who possesses the truth or is the truth. Savitri was highly impressed and touched by Satyavan's strength of character and power of beauty. At once the truth dawned on her that she will lead her life with Satyavan. Savitri then returns home.

She then narrates her experience to her parents and expresses her desire to marry Satyavan. At this time the greatest musician and divine sage Narada was present and so Aswapathy consulted him about Savitri's decision. And Narada at once bursted out – 'It is unfortunate. Savitri had made a mistake. She was ignorant and so she had chosen virtuous Satyavan.' The king inquired – 'Satyavan who reveres his parents possesses the qualities of intelligence and valour?' Narada responded – 'the son of Dyumatsena is a minefield of virtues.' It was quite natural for Aswapathy to seek an explanation from Narada to know why the choice of Satyavan is wrong. Narada says – 'they are unmatched in intelligence, character and beauty, but there is only one problem, that in one year's time Satyavan will die'. This was heart breaking for the parents who resigned themselves to the great sorrow and grief in their hearts. They very happy at choice of a virtuous person by Savitri but were full of sorrow because in just one year's time Savitri will be without Satyavan. On the fated day Satyavan would die.

Savitri and Satyavan were married but the thought of Satyavan's death haunted Savitri. One year passed very quickly, and on the fated day, one year from the day of wedding, Satyavan said, 'I'm going to the forest to get some

wood for the sacrificial fire'. Generally Savitri did not go with him to the forest, but on the fated day she pleaded with Satyavan to accompany him to the forest. She followed Satyavan to the forest. Savitri haunted by the idea of death remains preoccupied with Satyavan in her mind and heart. Satyavan stopped after covering some distance and chopped wood for the sacrificial fire. Suddenly a piercing pain developed in his head and heart. He stopped his activity and fell on the ground. Not knowing what to do, Savitri took his head on to her lap. Then she saw Yama, the Lord of Death and guardian of Justice, standing before her with his noose. Out of respect for Yama, she said, 'I pay my homage to you, but how is it that you have come yourself?' Yama replied – You have a husband who has so much power of truth, so much character, that I had to come to take possession of his soul myself'. As Satyavan's body fell on her lap, Savitri saw his soul fleeing with the shadow of Yama. And so, even though it was the most unconventional thing to do, Savitri dared and followed Yama by engaging Yama in conversation. Yama told her - I do not talk to mere mortals. I have nothing to hear from them. My law is final and supreme, and I do not listen to human beings. But I am impressed by your intelligence, devotion and sacrifice. What is that you want?

She pleaded for Satyavan's life walking several miles with him. And she even offered her own life in place of Satyavan's. When Yama saw her unselfishness, her sacrifice and devotion, Yama's heart slowly began to melt. So pleased was he that he offered her three boons, but not the life of Satyavan.

Savitri then asked Yama to restore the eyesight of King Dyumatsena and restore his kingdom as well so that her father-in-law can live like the worthy king. Then Yama reminded Savitri that you have still one more boon. Savitri said – I want a hundred sons and grandsons for king Dyumatsena, my father-in-law. And Yama said this will be done. And in no time it dawned on Yama the import of the boon he had granted. After all, if these are the grandsons of Dyumatsena, it means Satyavan is also involved. Savitri cannot have those children without Satyavan. Crestfallen, defeated and angry, Yama said – I am a keeper of word. I honor my word and I cannot go back on it. Therefore, Satyavan will come back to life.

As Yama disappeared angrily, Satyavan came back to life rising from Savitri's lap. He tells his experience of being in so many different worlds. Since it was growing dark they decided to return to their home but as they reach home they find King Dyumatsena's eyesight and his kingdom have been restored. Savitri and Satyavan lived happily ever after.

The Book of Birth and Quest : An Introduction

The Book IV describes the country Savitri travels after taking leave of king Aswapathy her father. This part of the Epic **Savitri** is devoted to description of Nature. Following the tradition of writing an epic Aurobindo also attends to painting Nature in her various moods. Hailed as "one of the greatest passages in world literature", Book IV is a unique rendering of travel through various planes. Savitri is identified with the Flame who takes birth as a divine child. A beautiful description of the celestial desire gets articulated through the pen of Aurobindo before the Flame is born. The cosmic play so plays itself out that the whole universe dances to the tune of desire. Interestingly this desire for some yet unknown goal so takes hold of the Earth that it begins to follow the course of her movement in time and space, around the Sun whom "she must dare not touch". From the primordial state of Inconscience, Earth passes to a state of half-consciousness, and thence to a state of life and then to the state of thought and action.

And due to this frenzied movement of the Earth the seasons seem to present the rhythm of a dance. The summer is followed by Rain, Autumn, Winter, and Spring. At one such Spring when "All Nature was at beauty's festival" and the earth was full of yearning a celestial spirit descended on earth answering her cry for bliss. Savitri is born. The ancient Mother returns to her unfinished programme on earth. Mother is always present as wisdom in Nature urging for the growth of consciousness and happiness in life to impress the Matter of the Divine. This will take an earthly form in Savitri. A divine child is born. She has the protection of higher powers. As she grows up, the bond between her soul and body also becomes strong. She spreads love everywhere and her presence is acknowledged by everyone. She acquires education and learns various arts that are supposed to be essential for cultivation of the self. In words of M.P.Pandit Savitri's life "is one stream of Joy, Beauty, Love, Light."

Great influences take care of the child Savitri and she is nurtured in an environment conducive to her growth. She imbibes the learning but also becomes conscious of the inadequacy of it all and seeks to realise the higher glories waiting to be disclosed. She opens up to embrace all influences and tries to lift all towards God. No one was equal to her and there was no possibility of finding one. She was no less than a mother who was out here on earth to shower love on all and sundry. She learns a deeper solitude within as she fails to find her equal and mate. She is known to all, admired and adored from afar. So she had to stay alone till the fate arrives on time's wings.

On one bright happy morning a revelation dawns on Aswapathy and hears the subtle voice of unborn powers. The voice he hears from the heights of his being is visionary

“O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race, O petty adventurers in an infinite world
 And prisoners of a dwarf humanity, How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
 Around your little self and petty things? But not for a changeless littleness were you
 meant, Not for vain repetition were you built; Out of the Immortal’s substance you were
 made; Your actions can be swift revealing steps, Your life a changeful mould for growing
 gods. A Seer, a strong Creator, is within, The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your
 days, Almighty powers are shut in Nature’s cells. A greater destiny waits you in your
 front: This transient earthly being if he wills Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme. He
 who now stares at the world with ignorant eyes Hardly from the Inconscient’s night
 aroused, That look at images and not at Truth, Can fill those orbs with an immortal’s sight.
 Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts, You shall awake into the spirit’s air And
 feel the breaking walls of mortal mind And hear the message which left life’s heart dumb
 And look through Nature with sun-gazing lids And blow your conch-shells at the Eternal’s
 gate. Authors of earth’s high change, to you it is given To cross the dangerous spaces of
 the soul And touch the mighty Mother stark awake And meet the Omnipotent in this
 house of flesh And make of life the million-bodied One. The earth you tread is a border
 screened from heaven; The life you lead conceals the light you are.

Immortal Powers sweep flaming past your doors; Far-off upon your tops the god-chant
 sounds While to exceed yourselves thought’s trumpets call, Heard by a few, but fewer
 dare aspire, The nympholepts of the ecstasy and the blaze. An epic of hope and failure
 breaks earth’s heart; Her force and will exceed her form and fate. A goddess in a net of
 transience caught, Self-bound in the pastures of death she dreams of life, Self-racked
 with the pains of hell aspires to joy, And builds to hope her altars of despair,
 Knows that one high step might enfranchise all And, suffering, looks for greatness in her
 sons. But dim in human hearts the ascending fire, The invisible Grandeur sits unworshipped
 there; Man sees the Highest in a limiting form Or looks upon a Person, hears a Name. He
 turns for little gains to ignorant Powers Or kindles his altar lights to a demon face. He
 loves the Ignorance fathering his pain. A spell is laid upon his glorious strengths; He has
 lost the inner Voice that led his thoughts, And masking the oracular tripod seat A specious
 Idol fills the marvel shrine. The great Illusion wraps him in its veils, The soul’s deep
 intimations come in vain, In vain is the unending line of seers,
 The sages ponder in unsubstantial light, The poets lend their voice to outward dreams, A
 homeless fire inspires the prophet tongues. Heaven’s flaming lights descend and back
 return, The luminous Eye approaches and retires; Eternity speaks, none understands its
 word; Fate is unwilling and the Abyss denies; The Inconscient’s mindless waters block all
 done. Only a little lifted is Mind’s screen;

The Wise who know see but one half of Truth, The strong climb hard to a low-peaked
 height, The hearts that yearn are given one hour to love. His tale half told, falters the
 secret Bard; The gods are still too few in mortal forms.”

As the voice gradually ebbs away Aswapathy’s daughter spawns forth and he feels that she is the answer from the
 gods. Aswapathy’s physical sense withdraws and he sees in his child a divine Spirit. Possessed by the unseen powers
 he speaks to her. Aswapathy tells his child that it is time she should go in search of him with whom her high destiny
 lies. The words of father sink into her being and her consciousness is awakened to secrets of unknown realms. And
 so Savitri ventures out on her quest before the dawn of the next day.

Initially Savitri’s mind is occupied with the strangeness of the scenes as she drives her chariot. As she moves on a
 deeper consciousness dawns and develops in her and she understands all as her own. She learns *Smriti* and guided by
 the gods above she journeys through crowded cities, forts, gardens, and temples. Her quest continues and till the end
 of the Book IV her search remains unfulfilled. And in this journey of her she comes close to diverse life styles of
 Kings, King-sages, Seers, Hermits, and Mother Nature. By the ending of Book IV Savitri experiences the burning
 summer season.

Book Four: The Book of Birth and Quest

Canto One: The Birth and Childhood of the Flame

Word-Meanings and Explanatory Notes:

Maenad: a frenzied woman; a priest, priestess or a follower of Bacchus.

Inconscience: refers to that which has lapsed from consciousness into a nether-most, self-oblivious or self-absorbed swoon or trance.

Trance: a temporary mental condition in which someone is not completely aware of or not in control of oneself and of what is happening. In Yoga it is a stage reached by meditation.

Immutable: not changing, or unable to be changed.

Communed: got very close to someone or something by exchanging feelings or thoughts.

Ambiguous: having or expressing more than one possible meaning.

Whirl of time: a continuous and exciting period of activity that progresses in time.

Rim: the outer, often curved or circular, edge of something.

Spokes: any of the rods that join the edge of a wheel to its centre, so giving the wheel its strength.

Glamour: the special excitement and attractiveness of a person, place or activity

Hues: referring to variety due to difference in degree of lightness, darkness, strength, etc. of a colour.

Pageant: colourful and splendid show or ceremony.

Languor: pleasant mental or physical tiredness or lack of activity.

Pomp: splendid and colourful ceremony, especially traditional ceremony on public occasions.

Tyranny: Cruelty.

Torrid: extremely hot; involving strong emotions, especially those of sexual love.

Burnished: smooth and shining.

Swoon: a state of loss of consciousness due to excessive love or pleasure.

Clotted knot: thickened mass.

Lashed: a sudden violent rain.

Torpid: in a state of inactivity

Flare: a very bright light or coloured smoke.

Paramour: a lover.

Besieged: to surround a place.

Tempest: a violent storm.

Pronunciamentos:

Embattled: having a lot of problems or difficulties.

Dense-maned monsoon: monsoon personified having thick long hair on head.

Neighing: a long loud high call made by a horse when excited or frightened.

Emissary: a person sent by one government or political leader to another to deliver messages or to take part in discussions

Javelins: a long stick with a pointed end which is thrown in sports.

Sleet-drift: movement of partly melted snow.

Clamours: loud noise.

Throngs: a crowd or group.

Prone: lying on the front with the face down.

Trailed: marks left by a person, animal or thing as it moves along, in the poem marks left by water.

Dribbled: flowed very slowly.

Sagged: became weaker.

Dingy: dark and dirty.

Wallowing: lie or roll about slowly.

Sludge: soft wet earth.

Tarnished: that has lost its brightness here referred to glass.

Seeping mist: mist moving or spreading slowly out of something.

Swayed: influenced.

Bog: soft wet earth.

Reeking mud: unpleasant smelling mud.

Quagmire: an area of soft wet ground which sinks when one tries to walk on it.

Dismal: sad and without hope.

Dank drenched weeks: wet, cold and unpleasant time.

Dungeon sun: sun imprisoned in an underground cellar.

Vexed: difficult to deal with.

Sombre rest: serious, sad and without humour or amusement; dark and plain.

Gleams: to produce or reflect a small, bright light.

Deluge: a very large amount of rain or water.

Thrashed: hit or defeated.

Mire: deep wet sticky earth.

Subsiding mutter: lessening intensity of sound

Creep: slow movement.

Toss: carefree movement.

Repose: to rest or lie down.

Tranquil: calm and peaceful and without noise, violence, or anxiety.

Comrade: a friend, especially one with whom you have been involved in difficult or dangerous, usually military, activities.

Musing: careful thinking for a long time.

Ecstasy: a state of extreme happiness, especially when feeling pleasure sexual ecstasy.

Loitered: moved slowly around or stood without an obvious reason.

Felicity: happiness, luck, or a condition which produces positive result.

Kindled: to cause strong feelings or ideas in someone.

Lurked: waited or moved in a secret way.

Luminous: producing or reflecting bright light.

Splendour: great beauty which attracts admiration and attention.

Lax and mellow ease: relaxed and soft state..

Waning year: passing year

Ardent: showing strong feelings.

Clasp: a tight hold with your hand or arms

Transcendent: greater, better, more important, or going beyond or above all others.

Summons: an order to come and see someone.

Voluptuous: describes an experience or object that gives you a lot of pleasure because it feels extremely soft and comfortable or it sounds or looks extremely beautiful.

Azure: the bright blue colour of the sky on a sunny day.

Celestial urge: a desire of or from the sky or outside this world.

Sensuous: giving or expressing pleasure through the physical senses, rather than pleasing the mind or the intelligence.

Cadence: a regular rise and the fall of the voice.

Rapture-thrill: extreme pleasure and happiness or excitement.

Enchanted: affected by magic or seeming to be affected by magic.

Litany of cries: repetition of crying.

Choral: of (music sung by) a choir or a chorus.

Censer: a vessel on which incense is burnt.

Asocas: a tree that is believed to relieve one from sorrow

Crimson: deep, dark red colour.

Unstained desire: a desire that is free of any trace of the mortal world

Fragrance: sweet smell.

Yearning: longing.

Influx: the arrival of a large number of something at the same time.

Oblivious: not aware.

Transience:futility.

Aeonic: referring to a long period of time.

Fathomless: bottomless.

Fronted: faced.

Consanguinity: blood relation

Wager: a bet.

Cosmic: relating to the universe and the natural processes that happen in it:

Quivered: to shake lightly due to emotional intensity.

Sheath: cover.

Afflicting: causing suffering.

Stumbling: falling awkwardly.

Sentience: power of perception by senses.

Void: a large hole or empty space.

Subdue: to reduce the force of something, or to prevent something from existing or developing.

Brute: a rough and sometimes violent person; cruel.

Eternal: lasting forever or for a very long time.

Crumbing: to break, or cause something to break, into small pieces

Terrestrial: relating to the planet Earth.

Prophecy: a statement that says what is going to happen in the future.

Crescent horn: a curved shape.

Cradle: a small bed for a baby, especially one that swings from side to side.

Tenement: a large building.

Dubious: thought not to be completely true.

Rapt: complete attention or involvement.

Sojourn: a short period when a person stays in a particular place.

Bough: a large branch of a tree.

Emerald: green colour

Harmoniously: blending very well.

Sweet-toned content: a pleasing satisfaction.

Unison: together; at the same time.

Transmutingly: changing completely into something different and better.

Hushed felicity: quiet pleasure.

Occult godhead: relating to magical powers and activities.

Dryad: wood nymph.

Sustenance: emotional or mental support.

Epiphany: sudden feeling when one understand, or suddenly becomes aware of, something that is very important or a powerful religious experience.

Murmurous swarm-work:

Moon-orb: Moon in the shape of a sphere.

Solitary: all alone.

Nebula: something unclear or lacking form causing confusion.

Slumberous: causing sleep.

Inviolated: unharmed or undamaged.

Haloed: a ring of light around the head of a holy person

Chant: prayer.

Faery: imaginary small creature with wings.

Glimmering: weakly shining light.

Explanation

The Canto One of Book IV captures the cosmic desire that plays itself out through Earth. As if intoxicated with desire the Earth began its unceasing activity of revolving around the Sun. Sun is a flame that burns eternally and Earth infected with desire for the Sun turns round and round but dares not touch it. This speeding, hastening manifested in revolving around the Sun and towards it seems to be a journey towards an unknown goal.

In this swinging movement in the void on the bosom of Inconscience, a semi-awake consciousness develops life; slowly a finite world of action and mind comes into form against the background of the unchanging self-gathered poise of the infinite.

A deep and vast silence follows the earth in her uncontrollably rapid course; she is in communion with the Soul born in Space. Under the unfathomed stillness of the stars, the earth moves towards some event not yet unveiled, her rhythm measuring the revolution of time.

In this unending motion, day after day, come the seasons close upon one another, forming a dance, as it were, of the pageantry of the changing year.

As the advent of God, his revelation draws near, a sudden calm comes over the seeker. His mind, his vital surges, his whole being begins to get still. Such a calmness comes near as when the earth lies in repose after the passing of the rains. Both the earth and the sky are aglow with the spell of meditation.

In meditation one first clears away all the multitude of thoughts and movements that normally crowd the being, empties oneself before turning the whole consciousness towards the Divine in aspiration. As the meditation proceeds, in the fullness of time, there develops an identity with the Divine and with it its inalienable bliss. Such an identity and ecstasy fill the musing heart of earth.

The meditation figure continues. In the articulate mind of earth's Space some dream takes place and Time opens up its felicities; there is an exaltation and the rise of a hope. Her deepest self starts looking up to a newer height of heaven, her deepest thought sets active the hidden flame of aspiration, her inner vision regards in adoration a light, a sun, that is not patent to the physical eye.

Three deliberating seasons pass, one after the other, watching carefully each hour for the revelation of a flame concealed in the profound, heralding an awaited mighty birth.

The creative delight that brought this mortal world into being is ever fresh in spite of all the pain and suffering that characterises its life in Ignorance, because there is a continuous though unseen contact with the Transcendent Bliss above. The action of this Transcendent constantly shapes the ancient bliss into new moulds, preserves through time the responsiveness of the human heart to the attraction of Nature, keeps fresh and unchanged the thrill that ever springs at the touch of the old delight, keeps ever new beauty and rapture and the joy of life.

In this hour of spring, at a propitious moment, in response to the keen aspiration of the earth and her cry for bliss, some glory from higher spheres comes down. A silence makes itself felt amidst all the noise of Life on earth and reveals the secret potent Word. A mightier charge enters and pervades the unconscious matter.

Things are made ready for worship. The creative Word is uttered. Lifeless clay is turned into a sacred image by the mighty influx from above. A lamp is lit.

A ray has descended on earth bringing the yawning distance between man and God. It meditates between heaven and earth; it renders things of heaven into human form, its light connects the mortal in his transient state with the Unknown.

A spirit conscious of its heavenly origin comes down into the imperfect mould of the earth. It does not at all regret its plunge into mortal state, but regards all with calm, wide-seeing eyes.

The Divine Power that had struggled before with mortal darkness and pain is now once again back from her home in the Beyond and has reassumed the cosmic burden. She has again taken up the task left unfinished before. She who has survived death and the long passage of years is once more facing Time with her immeasurable heart.

The Divine Shakti manifests again and again in the course of the Earth's evolution to strive with the opposing elements and assure a safe path for man.

The age-old close relation between earth and heaven, veiled by the obscuring vision of the earth and cut off in the long course of time, is once again renewed and revealed. It is one reality with two ends: the human portion toiling here on earth and the still unmanifest and unbounded Force there above.

Once more the mystic attempt is resumed, the daring gamble of the cosmic game is taken up. Ever since consciousness first awakened on Earth-matter and life entered into material form forcing the Inconscience to stir into feeling, ever since the expressive sound broke forth from the bosom of the pervading silence, an Intelligence has been working in the heart of Nature mothering all.

This Mother wisdom is constantly at work imparting delight to all exertion and striving of the heart, urging the groping and stumbling powers of life to perfect themselves, imposing awareness on the obscurity of the depths of nescience, pressing mute Matter to grow conscious of its soul, the indwelling Spirit.

Even though the human mind fails to aspire upwards and the human system resists the pressure or breaks under it, the Mother wisdom in Nature maintains her will towards divinising matter. She is not depressed by failures nor affected by setbacks. She is not fatigued by the length of time taken in the process nor is she overcome by the gaping Void in Creation. The intensity of her force has not decreased with the passing of ages: she refuses to accept the verdict of Death or Fate.

This consciousness in the heart of Nature forces the souls to attempt the climb again and again, compels, by her infinite sway, the unconscious and inert elements to aspire. With all infinity to spend, she throws the seed of the Eternal's strength on a half-awake and failing mould of earth, plants heaven's delight in the turbid soil of the heart's passion, pours the seekings of the manifesting godhead into the undeveloped, unthinking physical form, conceals immortality behind the deceptive mask of death.

Death is not the end of things but only a process of immortality renewing itself in fresh forms.

The occult Will takes on an earthly shape once again, as it has done before, for furthering the Divine manifestation. A Mind charged with the original consciousness of Truth is formed for vision and interpretation of the vision. Other instruments too are designed superbly for the expression of divinity in earthly terms.

Under the pressure of this new divine descent a body is formed more lovely than any the earth has known before. It is still a hint, a luminous promise of what is to come, a bright arc of a magical whole yet to appear in full, that has come into the horizon of mortal life like the shining crescent of a golden moon setting in a dim-lit eve.

At first she lies passive in cosy sleep, glimmering like an idea not yet formed; she is lost in the vast swwon of Matter; a child heart of the profound world design of the Gods, she is rocked by the ecstatic Powers illumining and directing the Cosmos, in the cradle of the Inconscience that has come into being in the Divine's becoming.

Her body is still only half-awake. There is at work in it a specially charged Power from above nourishing and

preparing the advent of a glorious manifestation from the transcendent into this body specially made for the purpose. As yet things are only in seed-form.

The soul does not inhabit the body from the beginning of its birth. Especially if it is a developed soul, or a specially emanated one, it waits till the body grows enough to be able to bear and sustain its presence. Till then, some ray of it is present in the body or around it connecting it with the soul.

This link with the body of the child Savitri slowly grows stronger. The dim regions are slowly lit up with a self-aware light; what was a seed grows into a delicate and wonderful bud and this bud in turn opens into a unique bloom of unearthly beauty.

It looks as if she has already founded a race mightier than man's. The child has arrived on this globe which is new and strange to her; deep within she remembers the distant home from where she has come. She lives guarded and safe in the luminous chamber of her spirit. Though she dwells among humans, she belongs to a higher, diviner kind and hence in the midst of all she is apart and alone.

Even in her unformed movements as a child, one feels the proximity of a light that is not of this earth and which has not yet touched the earth, feelings that are natural to the eternity above but not to this world in time, thoughts that belong to the gods and not to human beings.

Her nature does not seek nourishment from others but is always at muse with itself. It lives apart in a strong air of its own like some strange picturesque bird that rests on a hidden branch laden with fruits lost in the green glory of the forest, or soars above divine unreachable heights.

She pours the felicities of heaven and earth and establishes a happy rhythm between them. Her days pass quickly in her natural delight; each minute is a beat of beauty; the hours are filled with her sweet contentment which demands nothing but royally takes as her right everything that life offers.

The spirit of the child Savitri retains its closeness to the radiant Light of God from which it has issued. Her soul maintains its connection with the Bliss of the Eternal of which it is an emanation.

When life first breaks out of the immobility of material Nature, it shoots up in delight to the heights of the Spirit above. It lives absorbed in its joyous impulsion, self-sufficient yet open to all currents around; outwardly, on the surface, it has no interchange with its surroundings but underneath there is a constant communion.

Throughout, there is an underlying oneness in life, not patent to external sight but existing nonetheless. Life requires no special instruments nor does it need to build new forms to express its oneness. It is one with all that exists and grows in that oneness. In its absorbed state it is in contact with all. In the merry waves of the sea it rises to meet the wind and the Sun and thrives upon them; in the plant creation it joys and yearns, vibrates and aspires in mute felicity.

An unseen godhead is the cause, the spirit and the soul of all this beauty, charm, sweetness and absorption. This deity lives within in an air different from the outer, bathed in a deeper light, subject to a different stress, quivering in a downpour from the mystic skies of the Spirit.

This all-pervading Presence is seen in Savitri also but on a higher level. Even when she bends down from her lofty heights to meet and mix with the common life of the earth, Savitri's spirit retains its godly stature; it stoops but does not lose itself in the dominion of Matter.

Her sparkling mind is a world by itself, occupied with wonderfully happy imaginations woven round nourishing spiritual truths glimpsed in dreams.

The Power within Savitri is aware of forms which the normal human eye does not see, conscious of presences which men cannot usually feel; it forms her senses- which mould the perceptions of contacts and objects- in greater depth than the usual surface senses of man.

An unseen light from above courses through her veins and floods her brain with celestial radiances that awaken in her a sight that is wider than any that the earth can have.

Formed in the purity of that radiance, even her childlike thoughts turn into bright patterns of the deep truth of her soul. Her very look on those around her is different from the usual ignorant gaze of man; it proceeds from a higher light and a deeper truth.

In this look, all objects are seen by her as forms of living souls. In each outer touch she awakes to a message from the gods. Each god is a power symbolising a deeper truth, an unmistakable flash in the rapid movement of half-grasped infinities abroad. Nothing is foreign to her or lifeless, nothing is without its significance or its own call. And this is so because she is identified with a Nature higher and wider than the lower, ignorant Nature that rules man.

Even as life blossoms in leaf and flower from out of inanimate Matter, even as thinking man emerges from the animal life, so a new birth takes place in Savitri. A mind of light replaces the human mind of ignorance; a life of harmony and effectuating force forms in the place of the usual disorderly, handicapped life. Her very body is instinct with a latent divinity and it images more and more the god that is coming.

The fecund passage of time, gathering days and growing years, pass by filled with rich delight, her limbs grow in beauty and grace. Her beauty is celestial. She is self-protected in the quietude of her innate strength. She is solitary, but on that account her greatness is not any the less.

The godhead deep within slowly presses forward; what was a hint in childhood begins to take firm shape. The hidden godhead rises to study the human scene. The strong inhabitant in her form turns to watch her field around; on her brow shines a lovelier light; her meditative look grows still more serious and still more sweet. In the far ranging glory of her eyes wake up the dormant fires, deep and warming in their nature which is at once human and divine.

Through her transparent eyes shines a will bringing a wide significance to life. From the pure and open expanse of her forehead radiates a lofty power of wisdom which regards in its light, the transient things of the earth.

Her aspiration is active and vigilant, and calls down the high density awaiting above. This aspiration is a power both silent and dynamic; unassailable by foreign elements, it keeps guard on the regal Truth throned in the citadel of strength that is Savitri's being.

Her heart of intense bliss is not demonstrative, yet it loves all. It does not throw itself out but keeps confined to its inner world of rapture. The wave of life that flows in her body is imperious, unobstructed and rapid, full of joy, like a running stream in Paradise.

In her dwell many great Powers as in one beautiful home. In spite of so many different Powers living within, her nature is a harmonious, rounded whole, like a perfect song composed of several tones. Her nature is like the universe – vast and multiple.

Savitri's body holding this celestial greatness seems to be very nearly an embodiment of the transparent light of heaven. It is lovely and its charm recalls many a thing seen in subtle vision: a golden bridge across an unearthly flood of waters; a lone palm tree standing on the bank of a lake, its top touched by the silvery moon, sharing its surrounding peace, wide and bright; a gentle murmur as of the rustle of leaves in Paradise when the Gods pass; a flame-bright horizon over the sleeping hills; a lone lifted head of stars in the Night.

In fact all these images represent what she really is. She is a spanning bridge, a towering peace; her movements are of celestial origin; her flaming light looms over the darkness of earth.

Book Four: The Book of Birth and Quest Canto Two: The Growth of the Flame

Word-Meanings and Explanatory Notes:

Leap: a big sudden jump.

Brooding: thinking or ruminating.

Reverie: dream

Grandeur: the quality of being very large and special or beautiful.

Harboured: kept in mind a thought or feeling for a long period.

Incarnate: in human form.

Millennial: at the elapse of 1000years.

Grandiose: larger and containing more detail than necessary, or intended to seem important or splendid.

Springing-board: a flexible board which helps you to jump higher when jumping or diving into a swimming pool.

Rent: tore violently.

Vied: competition to get something.

Ethics: study of what is morally right or wrong.

Glimpse: to see something or someone for a very short time or only partly.

Trodden: much visited.

Acolyte: any follower or helper, or someone who helps a priest in some ritual.

Labours: the last stage of pregnancy from the time when the muscles of the womb start to push the baby out of the

body until the baby appears; here used for hard work.

Ineffable: indescribable, beyond description.

Rend: to tear or break violently.

Yearnings: longing.

Rapturous depths: generating intense happiness.

Subtle: achieved in a quiet way which does not attract attention to itself and which is therefore good or clever.

Cast: to give a shape or form.

Scrutiny: the careful and detailed examination to find out information.

Mapped out: charted out.

Hazardous: harmful, toxic.

Tapped: harnessed.

Stepping-stone: a state that helps in achieving desired state; means to an end.

Conceive: to imagine something.

Forego: to give up.

Clutched: tried to take hold of her tightly, usually in fear, anxiety or pain.

Turbid: (of a liquid) not transparent because a lot of small pieces of matter are held in it

Communion: a close relationship with someone in which feelings and thoughts are exchanged; a Christian ceremony based on Jesus Christ's last meal with his disciples.

Presence: manifestation, appearance

Ardour: great enthusiasm or love.

Allegiance: loyalty and support for a ruler, country, group or belief.

Lured: persuaded by offering something exciting.

Repined: felt sad about or complained about a bad situation.

Enamoured: liking a lot.

Inapt: not accustomed.

Sublime: extremely good, beautiful or enjoyable or moving.

Orb aloof: a sphere all alone.

Apprentice: someone who has agreed to work for a skilled person for a particular period of time and often for low payment, in order to learn that person's skills.

Bardic: poetic.

Clay-kin: physical body.

Fire-intimations: shining messages.

Explanation

The child Savitri, the embodied divine flame, grows up in a land lavishly endowed by Nature, physically, aesthetically and spiritually. There peaks are as abundant as plains, racing rivers join calm seas, Silence and Action exist side by side, beauty, grace and grandeur are native- a veritable paradise on earth.

Ancient influences keep watch on the growing child. The godheads of the rich past of the earth – those whose work is over – look on her and see new godheads who are to fashion the future coming to the earth as if invisibly pulled by the magnet that is Savitri.

Earth communicates her occult wisdom to Savitri in the depths of her being. She soars in her thoughts and goes beyond the reaches of the human mind; she expands her consciousness and delves into the cosmic vastitudes. She thinks what is unthinkable by others, sees what is not seen by others. She forces the huge doors of the Unknown realms and thrusts back the limited horizons of man into the limitless.

By her presence and inner action human activity in that land gains an unlimited range; art and beauty begin to arise from the depths of the being, not from the mental or vital superficialities as they do in the common world of man. Not merely the soul, but nature too breathes and emanates a sublime nobility.

Human ethics are raised to resemble the verities of heaven. In the milieu of this developed culture the sense is refined and its range enlarged so as to hear what is normally unheard and see what is normally unseen; the soul is trained to aspire to things beyond the known and the familiar, thereby inspiring mortal life to heighten itself and break out of its limits in order to reach out to the unseen world of the Immortals.

Savitri's adventurous mind leaps beyond the safe and trodden tracks of human thought, crosses the wide expanses of the higher consciousness that are baffling to mental reason, and takes her to the peaks that are close to the Sun of Truth. There on these altitudes reigns wisdom on her eternal throne.

Every event in life, every circumstance and movement turn into openings for contact with the occult Powers with whom she has affinity of origin. For Savitri the whole life is a delightful sacrifice: she is at once the wise guide who knows the truth, the priestess who is initiated in bliss, the divine acolyte who is trained in the school of Nature; seized with the wonder of creation, she pours the oblation of her inmost contemplation upon the altar of the Wonderful, the Divine *adbhuta*. Her hours are unbroken successions of ritual worship in the eternal temple of her existence, her acts significant gestures in her sacrifice.

As for her speech it is a sacred power. Every word is a mantra charged with the rhythm of the higher worlds, a holy means for the liberation of the soul imprisoned in living Matter into communion with the Gods who are its native companions.

Vibrant with the rhythms of the supernal, the Mantra is a power that effects the release of the being from the holds of Ignorance and links it with the Gods above who are truly its companions in the Journey of the Spirit.

Or the Word helps in shaping new forms of expression for the Soul labouring in the midst of life to unveil the ultimate secrets of the Creation – the ancient Soul in creation ever in quest of the Reality that is unknown and unborn, instinct with a light from the Inexpressible.

In this land philosophies are not mere speculations weaving unsubstantial, narrow systems of thought leading nowhere. They are a force directing the aspiration of man on earth to God beyond; they are broad based as the universe itself – and as inclusive- and they raise the mind of the earth to peaks that surpass the human ranges.

Sculpture and Painting are not confined to their outer forms which may be pleasing to the eye but often conceal their true significance within. They direct the perceiving sense to the governing motif within; they make visible in form something of the invisible Reality; they exhibit to sight the occult plan of Nature or present the very Divine in a concrete form.

The wide and high architecture captures as it were the patterns that take shape in the brooding Idea of the Infinite in its mood for manifestation.

The music embodies on earth the aspiration for heaven. The song holds the melted heart absorbed in the depths of rapture and joins the human note of anguish and call to the cosmic cry.

Dance interprets in its movements the world and its significance; it renders thought and feeling into rhythmic movement and posture. Delicate crafts capture in their subtle patterns some inspiration of a rapid moment or they show in the lines of a carving, in the design of a cup, the plans of the Unseen Spirit underlying the creative movement.

Poems are cosmic in their sweep; their metres have the ring of oceans. They translate in packed splendours of speech the beauty and the greatness of the forms of Nature, the intensities of her moments and her moods – all originally contained in the unexpressed grandeurs in Nature. Thus do these Powers raise the human world close to the world of Gods.

Man is able to study the workings in the inner realms of existence – not merely in the outer physical; he discovers the law governing numbers, builds up the system of astronomy and erects the scheme of creation as far as it is perceivable. He doubts and questions the modes of his thinking, or outlines a theory of the functionings of mind and life.

Savitri assimilates with ease these contributions in the various fields of life and thought. But she is not content to rest with them. They do not satisfy her wide being. To her they represent man's seeking which is limited by the knowledge it has garnered; they are great steps indeed but only the early, risky steps of a youthful adventurous spirit which has yet to learn to see in its own proper light.

These are tentative feelings on the surfaces of the universe, stretchings of the venturing spirit to lay its hands upon the right instrument to discover the truth of things. All these attempts do result in a many-sided expansion. But not yet is the full vision of the soul; not yet the unlimited, direct close touch which yields the full knowledge by identity; not yet the art and wisdom that the Gods have.

There is an unbounded knowledge which cannot be grasped by the human thought; a happiness that is beyond the capacity of the human heart and sense to reach and contain. Both of these are imprisoned in the world and struggle to emerge. Savitri feels in herself their pressure for release. The glory in her waits the right time and means to manifest itself; it seeks for objects around which it can take shape, looks out for natures that are strong enough to receive without reaction and contain the full impact of her natural, regal splendour, her greatness, her sweetness, her bliss, her possessing might and her vast power of love.

Her soul makes the earth a springboard to soar to the heavens, and even beholds the vasts beyond the heavens conceived by the human mind. It meets a great light from the Unknowable beyond and dreams of the action-range of the transcendent.

Around her she is aware of the universal Self in all, she encounters in these human beings

Reflections of her own being, complements, counterparts, extensions of herself. Though they are separated in the outer physical bodies and their mental constructions, they are linked to her spirit by inner ties.

The invisible barrier soul from soul acts also a defence against invasion from outside. Savitri, however, overcomes this separating wall with a view to holding all in one large embrace. She seeks to contain in her inner extension all living things, raising them from their divided, dense obscurities into one gathered state of luminous awareness, uniting all with herself, Nature and God.

But only a few respond to Savitri's call to rise and enlarge themselves. Still fewer are they who recognise the veiled divinity in her and make an effort to companion her godhead with the godhead of their own soul – by awaking and articulating it in life -, nor do they feel an affinity with her and climb to reach her heights.

Even these few who are uplifted towards unknown luminous heights or those who leap high making an effort to reach the hidden splendour above of which they are aware, get only a glimpse of her unearthly light for a moment. And unable to hold that vision and power; they fall back to their old, dull life routine.

They feel themselves near a daring mind soaring high, growing wide, probing eagerly into the realm of unknown, but their human nature keeps them tied down; they cannot keep pace with her, they are too small and restless to keep in rhythm with her large-paced will, their vision is too narrow to look with her gaze of the Infinite. Their nature tires soon of these things that are too great for it.

Even those who are close to her thoughts and have the capacity to walk very near her effulgence, worship the power and light they feel in her, but are not in sense her equals. She is but adored by them.

She admits them into her friendship. But they find her too lofty to know her fully. She walks in their front and leads them towards a light still greater than hers; she rules over their hearts and souls; they hold her lovingly close to their hearts, but still she is divine and far from their human grasp.

They watch her, in admiration and amazement, attempting either with a godlike swiftness to scale heights too distant for their human nature or with deliberate massive effort making towards an objective beyond their conception. Though they are thus unable to keep pace with her, they are obliged to follow her wherever she moves; they cannot do without her light. They desire her and reach out to her somehow; some even manage to follow with faltering steps the paths she has forged.

Some approach her in a vital way and cling to her for the inner nourishment and support they get from her; what else they derive they are unable to see clearly. They bear her greatness without knowing precisely what it is.

Some are so ridden with their senses and desire that they approach her in a too human way, adore her with their impure love; these cannot grasp her mighty spirit; even close proximity fails to change them into her likeness – there is an inner gulf.

Some, however, can feel her from their soul-level and they thrill to her presence. Her greatness is felt close but it cannot be grasped by the mind. Merely to see Savitri evokes spontaneous feelings of adoration; to come near her imparts a force that flows from attunement to a higher Source.

This is how men adore God who is too great to be grasped and known by the mind, who is too lofty and vast to be cabined in a shape small enough to suit human comprehension. They feel a high Presence; feel and obey a superior Might; they are thrilled by a rapturous Love which they adore. They increase their pace under the drive of the divine enthusiasms that flood their being and follow a higher law that uplifts their life. Thus they begin to breathe a fresher and diviner air.

New vistas of a freer and happier world open to man and he sees the high-climbing steps leading to the Self, to the Light above.

Savitri's dignity claims the allegiance of the souls of those around her; the soul sees, feels and recognises the divinity embodied in her. Her will exerts itself on their active nature; her sweetness of heart is abounding and helplessly attracts their hearts; they love her whose reaches range far beyond their own; they cannot, indeed, measure up to her but they bear her touch joyously like the budding flowers to the sun; they ask for nothing more than give themselves to her entirely.

She is much too great for them, too vast for their comprehension; they cannot understand or entirely know her with their minds, but their lives respond to hers and go into action at her instance; they feel a divinity in her and obey its call; they follow her lead and participate in her work in the world, carrying out her wishes; their lives and natures are pressured into movement by her own. It is as if the greater truth of their own being, of which they are not conscious, has taken form in the divinity that is Savitri in order to raise them to a high level beyond the reach of their own physical nature.

They feel a wider future opening before them as they advance in her trail. She leads them, choosing their paths for them. They are urged by her towards great unknown things; though they do not know where they are led and impelled, they are drawn by sheer faith and by the joy of belonging to her. In her they live and with her eyes they see.

Some, however, turn to her against their own natural inclinations, on the one hand they do not accept her and rebel against her, but on the other they are filled with wonder and admiration, attracted by her charm, dominated by her will; they are possessed by her even though they struggle to possess her. They are impatient of her rule and yet their hearts are her prisoners and hold close to the bonds that tie them to her – though they outwardly protest against her yoke of beauty and love, but had they lost that splendid yoke they would have wept. Some pursue her with nothing more than vital desires, each wanting to monopolise her for himself, to possess all her sweetness that is meant for all for himself alone.

Just as the physical earth draws by its gravitation all life-giving light to itself – leaving other planets bare – they seek to monopolise her and ask of her such limited movements as can be grasped by their limited selves; they long to get from her responses in keeping with their own smallness. They complain that she exceeds their hold. They hope to bind and keep her near to themselves with the cords of their desire.

When they find her touch too strong for their small, impurified beings they complain of her tyranny – which, however, they love secretly – and shrink from it as one does from the dazzling sun. And yet they long for the very splendour they turn their backs upon. Because their weak earthly nature cannot bear her intense radiance which they so desire, they get angry but loudly protest when the touch is vouchsafed to them. They are unable to bear the presence of the divinity too close. They become intolerant of a Force they cannot hold within themselves.

Some cannot resist being attracted to come under her sway, however much they may dislike it; they endure it as a sweet but foreign spell. Unable to rise to her sublime heights, they seek to bring her down to their own levels. When they are obliged to organise their active lives around her, they hope, for their own petty human needs, to draw upon her glory and grace to which their souls have fallen captive.

Some, indeed, respond to her with the best in them. But even among these none can equal her or companion her. She stoops to equal them, but in vain, her air is too pure for the earthly beings to breathe. She desires to raise them to her own amplitudes and pours into them her own power so that a greater and a diviner Force may enter and uplift them. For only by the breath of God can human life be greatened. It cannot rise beyond a certain level by its own effort.

Savitri leans down to their smallness and lays the balm of her strong hands on their lives; by sympathy she knows their needs and wants; she plunges into the shallow waters of their lives and shares their joys and griefs; she bends to give succour to their sorrows and hurt pride; She pours her unique might on them in order to raise their aspiration to her heights; she draws their souls into her vastness, surrounds them with her inner silence

And holds them as the Divine Mother holds her children. Though she thus participates in their life, she is not lost in it; it is only her earthly exterior that suffers their impact and mixes its flaming purity and strength with their mortal nature. Her deeper and greater self lives within by itself, untouched, uninvolved.

More often she feels a closeness with Nature around, animal, birds, and other sub-human species are drawn to her by the Force within her. She joins her spontaneous delight to the unsophisticated, ardent lives of animals, birds, plants and flowers. They respond to her presence and touch with the simplicity that is natural to them.

This free response from the sub-human creation is not possible from man. For in him there is a new element, a vitiating factor, the human mind. It disturbs the harmony achieved at the plant and animal level of creation. It perceives and recognises the divine Light which can illumine and complete its limited self if only it would open and surrender itself to its power. But it is perverse and it deliberately turns away from the greater Light preferring to wallow in the darkness of its ignorance.

There are many who are drawn to Savitri. But she does not find among them even one who could be her partner in the high tasks before her, who is designed by Providence to be her companion self, who is created along with her to be one with her, like God and Nature that are one in partnership.

Some do succeed in approaching close to her; they are touched and catch her burning intensity; but they cannot keep it up, they fail after a time. Her demand proves too great to meet, her force too pure to bear.

Thus does she live like the sun, herself aloof but lighting up all around her. There is a gulf between her and even those who are most close to her. She is, like the gods, powerful and apart from all.

She has no connection yet with the world outside her immediate environment. She lives content in the little circle of her young fellow-spirits, growing in human life-experiences, blossoming like a flower in an unfrequented spot.

Earth-Nature nurses this flaming child on her bosom, albeit unconscious of her greatness. All the same – though the Earth is not yet conscious of her greatness – there is something in the Earth Consciousness that knows vaguely and is moved to its depths; there is a stir and an intense call goes forth; there is bright dreaming and cheering of a luminous change in the air. An increasing expectation is abroad of something new, rare and beautiful.

Then a vague intimation of her presence reaches life on earth; it comes as an answer to the felt need of all. The great wide world discovers Savitri and she is hailed in high wonder.

Her name is a key to the realm of Light not yet manifested. The inspiring name communicates itself from person to person, exalting and filling everyone with happiness like the notes of a celestial lyre or a mantra chanted by a far-ranged Seer.

All the same she is felt too sacred to be approached. She is admired, but not sought after; she does not lend herself to be grasped. Her beauty and strength are watched from afar like the play of lightning at dusk. Here is a divine glory that cannot be approached too near by humanity.

Nobody's heart seeks to meet and join her heart. No human love of man invades her calm being. Nobody's conquering passion is strong enough to seize her. No man's eyes evoke a response in hers.

Human beings are awed by some great Power in her. There is in them an instinctive shrinking from the Light that would dispel their accustomed ignorance; their instinct recognises the presence of the Divine in the form of Savitri and draws back from her touch. Earth-nature bounded in the small life of the sense shrinks from her.

Men are in love with their littleness and take naturally only to that which partakes of their earthy nature. They cannot bear the touch of higher spirits the strong air of the supernal realms which are too vast for those who have not the stature to rise high to be the summits of their being.

And so it is with all who are too great and rise too high above the shoulders of the rest. Such a person is obliged to be lonely. Though he is adored by all, he has to live in solitude, he is too forbidding to others to come closer. He tries to raise his companions to be his equals but does not succeed; they cannot rise to his level. His only companion is his own inner strength.

And this is exactly what happens in the case of Savitri, for a while; all marvel at her and adore her, but none dares to claim her as his own. Her mind is too high radiating its illumining rays; her heart overflows with celestial delight. She dwells alone like a single light of perfection, a pure shining image in a solemn shrine. Till her hour of action arrives, she lives in herself, apart from others.

Book Four: The Book of Birth and Quest **Canto Three: The Call to the Quest**

Word-Meanings and Explanatory Notes

Scribe: a teacher of religious law; one who copies document.

Dwarf: creature like little man with magical powers.

Immaculate: extremely clean and tidy, spotless.

Conch-shells: used in prayers.

Stark: bare, simple or obvious.

Altars of despair: shrine of gloom.

Enfranchise: to give right to cast a vote

Oracular: mysterious and difficult to understand

Falters: to move awkwardly

Apparelled: clothed or enveloped

Robe: loose-fitting dress worn on formal occasions

Eternal realms: domains lasting forever

Aureate: golden.

Palimpsest: an ancient document from which some portions are removed and replaced by new extracts; something that has many different layers of meaning or detail.

Chiselled out: carved out

Pedestal: a tall column like structure on which a statue rests

Tresses: a woman's long hair

Poignant: causing or having a sharp feeling of sadness.

Ephemeral: lasting for a short period of time

Icon: a symbol or statue

Inscrutable: difficult to understand

Cathedral: main church under a Bishop

Annulled: no longer legally valid

Renounced: to give up faith belief etc. publicly

Spell: short period of time.

Impromptu: done without preparation or planning

Splendid: excellent and impressive

Halo: circle of light around the head of a holy person

Inscription: words written on stone or metal

Rubies of silence:

Lustrous: soft and shining

Vibrant kindred harps:

Ordeal: a very unpleasant experience

Mantra: word or sound believed to have spiritual powers

Index: a list.

Transmuted: changed

Allured: captivated or engrossed.

Sapphire: a transparent bright blue precious stone

Pinnacle: highest or the most important part

Waif: starving child

Stupendous: extremely large or impressive

Lucent: shining.

Explanation

A day dawns with a brighter sun in happier skies; it is as if a new creation is begun. There is something strange and living about this morning's beauty that has issued out of the immutable source of all things.

The origin of all the innumerable changing things in the universe is one and unchanging.

The earth is once again astir with an ancient, unfulfilled desire. High trees sway to the morning wind like souls that throb with expectation at the imminence of joy. And out of its hiding place in the green forest, a coil sounds its love-cry, never tired of repeating its single note of love.

Aswapathy turns away from the usual earthly noise that is full of mundane concerns and listens, in the dawning revelation, to sounds other than those that are heard by the outer sense-bound ear.

Looming over the physical space in which men live and move is a subtler space that lies between the physical earth and the higher regions of the Spirit. In this space, the doors that are normally closed because of the indrawn concentration of the inner Spirit, open to Aswapathy and notes that are inaudible in external nature come to be heard. Above the hectic rounds of life, beyond the pressing cares of the present, rises the intense aspiration of the Earth to the Ineffable. He hears the muffled voice of the Powers that are struggling to be born behind the bright beats of the music of time.

The ages-old aspiration in the Earth-Soul once again mounts high, claiming a perfect life for man struggling in imperfections, certainty for the human mind fumbling amidst uncertainties, unending bliss for suffering humanity, full formulation of Truth in this world of ignorance and divinity for mortal man.

A message leaps down from beyond the ranges of thought; it is received by the receptive mind of Aswapathy beneath its veils of the intellect; it travels through the corridors of his brain and leaves a strong impression on its cells of active memory.

And this is the communication Aswapathy receives:

Ye men born on this lowly earth, ever compelled by a Force extraneous to yourselves to do what it wants, ever driven by a Fate that is relentless, ever engaged in small pursuits in a world that is infinite, helplessly limited by a stunted human mould, how much longer are you going to turn round and round in the never-ending whirlings of the mind, centred on your petty selves and their pettier concerns?

But you were not meant, by your creator, to be engaged in this unchanging littleness; you were not shaped for this exercise of repetition without issue. You have been formed out of the being of the Immortal and your actions can be and have to be movements revealing that Truth, your life must be a growing and changing mould for the Powers of that Truth.

Within you is a divine Seer who watches, a mighty creator who effects; a spotless Glory presides over your days; in the cells of your nature lie unexpressed mighty powers of God. A larger and higher destiny than what seems to be awaits you ahead.

If only he wills, however transitory and earthly man's form may be, his actions can be turned into movements of a scheme that transcends his limitations.

Man is just awakened from the sleep of the Inconscient and he stares at the world around him with ignorant eyes that light upon images only and do not perceive the Truth behind them. But it is possible for those eyes of his to be activated by the immortal sight.

The godhead concealed in you shall grow in your hearts. Though living on earth, you shall breathe the air of the Spirit, feel the collapse of the walls that shut in your human mind, listen to the Word that overwhelms mortal life, gaze beyond Nature on the light of the Truth-Spirit and announce your arrival at the doors of the Eternal.

You, who have brought about great, uplifting changes on earth, are empowered to brave and cross the untrodden realms of the soul, to move into action the mighty Mother of the worlds, to come face to face with the All-Powerful in this tenement of living Matter and to realise all life as a multiple manifestation of the One.

The earth on which you move is not the whole creation. It is only a border-land veiled beyond which lie the brighter realms of the heavens; the life you lead covers the light you really are. Divine Powers pass you by, but you are not aware of them. On the heights of your being beat the rhythms of God, your thoughts call you to rise above yourselves; but few hear these summons. And of those that hear, fewer still have the courage to dare to climb, they are those who are ever avid of the flaming bliss of the Divine.

The earth is torn between hope and disappointment; her form and circumstance are too inadequate for her force and will. She is a veritable goddess caught in the net of inconscience; she has bound herself in the field of death and yet she hopes for eternal life; she submits herself to intense pain and suffering and yet aspires for ceaseless joy; she erects her edifice of hope on the bricks of despair. She knows indeed that one great step ahead taken by her could free all; she strives thereto and suffers so that her sons may be great.

But as a rule this fire of aspiration burns dim in the human hearts; the Divinity within waits unadorned, unattended. Man is apt to conceive of the Highest, the Infinite in a bounded form, as a Person, as a Name only. Instead of looking to the highest, he turns to inferior deities for petty gains or worships a nether power therefore.

Man is in love with Ignorance which is at the root of all his pain and suffering. The wonderful potentialities within him lie dumb. He has lost touch with the intimations of the soul that once led his mind. The eidolon of Reason has occupied the place of his guiding Daemon.

Man has lost contact with the truth within him; he lives in the illusory consciousness that encloses him. Seers who see the Truth have been many but they have made little difference to the life of the ordinary human individual. Thinkers ponder in vague, indifferent light, poets sing of surface dreamings, even prophets speak on errant inspiration.

Illuminations from on high come down to earth, but they are not received and they return. The perceiving Wisdom nears but draws back as there is none to hold it. The knowledge eternal speaks, but none understands; the fate that dogs man's steps is unwilling to accept the higher truth; the abyss of the nether existence denies it. The sub-conscious and non-conscious waves of the sea of Inconscience bar all progress.

The mind act as a veil over truth. With all man's efforts, the screen is lifted but a little. Even the wise ones who know, see only the part of the Truth. Even the strong ones who climb, succeed only in scaling low peaks. Those that pine for love are overtaken by time. The minstrel of humanity stops half-way in his narrative. Men are still too earthy; gods in human forms are too few.

The voice recedes into its unseen Source. But as if in answer from the Gods, Savitri comes advancing through a column of tall trees, clad in her shining robe, she looks a veritable torch of incense and flame burning towards the Eternal above, lifted by a pilgrim's hand in a sacred temple of which the earth is the soil and the sky, the roof.

An instant revelation comes upon Aswapathy. His vision is no more limited by his physical eyes; he sees from deeper levels that interpret things truly and he discovers in Savitri a messenger of the Delight that sustains the world, a marvellous handiwork of the Divine Artist shaped like a nectar-cup of the gods, a living testament of the Eternal's Joy, a capturing of radiant, intense sweetness.

Her delicate face gets transformed before his sight into a significant form revealing the secrecies of a deeper Nature, a bright script of esoteric content, a solemn, living symbol of the world. Her broad and pure brow is a veritable base for meditation, unshakeable; it appears to contain and is lit with the smile of a self-engrossed Space. Its very brooding etches the significant figuration of infinity.

Her luxurious hair-tresses shadow her long eyes which beneath the broad and contemplative forehead, pure-gold in hue, are full of world-embracing love and thought; gazing in wonder at life and earth these eyes perceive the truths that are still distant.

An immortal significance is seen to fill her mortal limbs. They seem to be full of the rhythmic, muffled cry of bliss of the earth's dumb adoration towards heaven – the cry of beauty in living forms seeking perfection of the eternal elements in creation.

The outer physical form of Savitri grows transparent and reveals to Aswapathy the manifesting Deity within. The captivating harmony of the lines of her form exceeds the external sight and sense and assumes a new meaningful figure of a Power.

It is a Power from on high descending once again on its mission into a clear-cut human figure in this field of evolution on earth, a veritable godhead sculptured on the wall of thought, reflected in the flowing stream of time and enshrined in the temple-cave of Matter.

Aswapathy's consciousness undergoes a change; the fleeting values of the mind drop off, the physical sense shifts its focus beyond the earthly range; and the immortal in him greets the immortal in Savitri.

Breaking through the walls of the outer form which hide the inner truth, he sees behind the familiar limbs of his child a great and unknown Spirit shaped as Savitri.

Suddenly from the seeing depths within him arise thoughts that are not aware of their own implications. And he speaks to Savitri, who is looking at him in her divine, mind-transcending love, words that come direct from the supernal heights that are beyond human sight.

It happens at times that a casual word or a phrase uttered by someone in passing has an unexpected result in changing the course of our life. That is because the occult agents in this creation of God who really prompt our speech from behind – while we think we are speaking on our own – can load with a fateful meaning of which utterer himself is hardly aware.

Aswapathy addresses Savitri: “ O Spirit, voyager of eternity, thou hast come here to this mortal world from thy immortal regions, equipped for the noble adventure of conquering Time and Chance that dominate this earth. But like the moon wrapped in her halo thou art still dreaming. A great super-natural Presence guards thy body.

Who knows, the celestial Powers are guarding thee for someone great. The work for which thou hast come, the fate that thou carried, are still kept by them afar. Surely, thou hast not come down alone.

The beauty of love is shaped in thy living form, radiant in its virginity. Thou carried some message of divine strength and bliss direct from the Eternal. Only he to whom thou wilt open thy heart shall come to know it and with it greater his existence.

Through thy ruby lips, always silent, rhythms of tranquillity flow in soft laughter; thy lustrous eyes shine like stars in a wide clear night; thy limbs with their glowing curves are shaped by the gods. Love and destiny await thy charm elsewhere; depart and seek thy waiting companion in the wide world.

Surely, somewhere unknown to thee waits thy destined lover for thee who art unknown to him. Thou shall find thy way to him; there is no need for any external guide for thee; thou hast the soul-strength and Him who blazes within thy inner powers.

To meet thee, shall draw near thy second half who will companion thee till the last step of thy body's journey is taken, keeping close pace with thy pace, bringing out what lies latent in thee.

When thou wilt have found thy mate, both of you will grow and prosper like two vibrating kindred harps, one even in beats of variation and joy, responding to each other in divine and equal notes, finding fresh notes in the eternal theme of life.

Though you be in two bodies, one shall be the force to impel you and lead you, one the light around you and within you. Hand in strong hand, meet the question posed in life by the Powers celestial. It is a vast disguise here imposed upon all. Break through it, rise from the low levels of this Nature in Ignorance to the heights of the Spirit, look at the felicitous gods above and then meet an over-God, with thy own self transcending the whole movement in Time

These words of Aswapathy become the seed of everything to follow; they start Savitri on her mission in life. Something supernatural opens the sealed doors in her heart and she is shown the great work for which strength has been given her.

When a Mantra is uttered and the ear of the yogin listens to it, its message enters within and the unseeing, mechanical brain is stirred by it; its sound is registered in the ill-lit ignorant cells of the brain; the hearing takes in only the external form of the words; the mind contemplates upon the significant thought in the Mantra and labours to understand it, but all that it gets is a few bright hints of the embodied truth, not the truth itself.

When the mind fails to grasp the truth, its thought-activity ceases and the mind falls silent in order to make room for knowledge; the deeper hearing of the soul comes up; the charged Word goes on repeating itself in its rhythmic variations and his thought, sight, feeling, sense, the very body-consciousness, are seized by it entirely, an ecstasy overtakes them and he undergoes a permanent change.

He feels himself becoming a Wideness; he becomes a Power; like a sea, knowledge rushes upon him from all sides; a pure-white Ray of the Spirit bathes him into a transmutation and he traverses the unveiled regions of joy and calm, sees the face of God, hears the speech beyond. A similar greatness is sown in Savitri by the words spoken by Aswapathy.

As a result, the old accustomed scenes of the past are put aside. Touched by new greatnesses and celestial signs, contemplating, she turns to new vastnesses. Her heart is attracted to new and unknown sweetnesses. An unseen world is about to open up its secrets to her.

The morn advances into bright noon; the day slides into eye; the moon appears and sinks; the stars are ablaze in the night. Savitri's mind withdraws into its depths, her senses are shut from outer sight by a supernal darkness and she is sucked into the profound of sleep.

And when the next day dawns, the palace is empty of Savitri. The presiding joy of the place has left; its beauty and divinity have departed; delight has gone adventuring into the wide world.

Book Four: The Book of Birth and Quest

Canto Four: The Quest

Word-Meanings and Explanatory Notes

Welled up: emotions became stronger and began to pour out

Climes: of various types of climates

Clans: a group of family connected to each other

Flash: light or signal

Bygone: happening or existing a long time ago

Prefigured: suggested or predicted what will happen in future

Hooded: having or wearing a hood

Executors: one who carries out instructions.

Furrows: wrinkles on the skin; cut made by plough in the ground.

Prescient: foreknowledge of future events.

Reins: that controls checks or restricts.

Cavern: large cave

Carven chariot with its fretted wheels:

Sentinel: guard

Armoured: protected by strong covering

Hewn: cut a long piece of rock, wood or metal

Frescoed walls: painted walls.

Lattice: structure with spaces between used as a screen, fence or support

Tardy: slow to move or happen

Primaeval: very ancient

Sower: person or machine that puts seed in the ground.

Remnants: leftovers of past.

Antique: old and valuable

Wizard: a man with magical powers

Snare: a trick for deceiving.

Importunate: demanding excessively to the point of annoyance.

Self-rapt: excessively involved in oneself.

Clamorous: noisy; making lot of demand or complaints.

Mortar: mixture of sand, water, and cement or lime for fixing bricks or stones; anything that cements or binds.

Couched: garbed.

August: important or significant.

Summit: Peak.

Respite: relief from something unpleasant.

Rustle: soft dry sound made by leaves or paper while moving.

Beckoned: gestured.

Recess: pause or space.

Seers: who can see in future

Insistent: firm or prolonged resolve.

Gambolling: running and jumping in a fruitful way.

Plastic: soft enough to be moulded in a new shape.

Yoke: connection that limits freedom.

Sylvan: wooded

Prey: victim one who is hunted or killed.

Occult: relating to magical powers and activities.

Cloak: clothing without sleeves that fastens at the neck.

Tawny mane: yellowish brown colour hair that grows on the neck of a horse

Rustic couch: bed or seat available in countryside.

Anchorite: hermit

Multitudinous: extremely large in number.

Indolent: lazy, showing no interest for effort

Huddled hills: hills forming a group

Weird: strange or unusual

Grandiose: large and detailed

Regal: impressive; typical of a king or queen

Prowled: moved quietly in order to avoid being seen.

Lolling: sitting, lying or hanging in a relaxed or comfortable way.

Explanation

The world-ways open wide before Savitri. At first her mind is full of the strangeness of the bright scenes she is traversing and her eyes are enraptured. But as she proceeds across the changing scenery a deeper Consciousness surges up in her. This Consciousness is universal and feels at home everywhere. It makes her identify herself with every country and people she comes across, till the destiny of entire mankind, becomes her own.

Though the region she traverses are new, they are familiar to some inner sense in her. All revives some old memories, landscapes, cities, rivers, plains. The stars shine recalling their past friendship with her, the winds whisper to her of ancient happenings. She does not indeed know the names of those she comes across, but she is aware that once before she has loved them as comrades.

All is a part of lives past and forgotten.

Either in flash or in some vague way, her acts reveal a power held in the past; even the objective of her journey is not new. To her remembering witness soul it seems that, as a traveller to some predestined event, she is again setting out on a journey that has been often made in the past.

The wheels of her swift-moving chariot are guided by the veiled godheads, the Powers that are assigned to man by Providence and accompany him from his very birth, knowing the governing laws, inner and outer. They are the transmitters of his spirit's will, observers and effectuators of what is called his fate, but is really the choice of his soul.

These godheads are ceaselessly engaged in their task and direct the movements of man's nature in accord with the deeper will of the soul. It is they who carry the continuing thread forged by and linking up all his past lives. They follow the determined course of his destiny leading to the joys and pains that he has evoked by his actions. They are there to guide even his casual movements.

Nothing that man thinks or does is without consequence. Every movement releases an energy and it goes forth on its course. These veiled custodians of man's unbroken past see to it that each act of his will –whether he remembers it or not – produces its own consequence. Thus they make his fate the result of his own acts.

But this process is not seen by the outer eye. Man lives in the present; the past of which the present is a result, is not known to him. Hence to his mind labouring under the rule of the laws of physical Matter, all happenings, which are really consequences of his own past acts, appear to be the workings of a mechanical Force in Nature. In reality they are all instruments through which a supreme Will effectuates itself under the calm overseeing Eye of the Divine.

The Divine architect who foresees all, who works through the instrumentation of Fate and Chance and shapes the life of man according to a prefigured pattern, knows precisely the significance and the consequence of each step and he watches the action of the lower agencies stumbling towards the fulfilment of his design.

Savitri is aware of a calm Presence above her head. This Presence sees the goal of the journey and decides which turning to take. It uses the physical body as its pedestal, the seeing eyes as its torchlights, the hands holding the reins as its living instruments.

All that is going on is really the working of a plan that has been drawn up of old; the way has been prepared by a faultless Guide.

On the long journey, she comes across the various aspects of Nature, meets different human beings and listens to the voices of the wide world. She speeds on impelled from within, silent in the luminous depths of her heart.

At first her path runs through crowded territories – kingdoms, scenes of imposing activity of men, noisy marts, towers and forts, beautiful gardens, magnificent assembly halls. She passes by small temples on the way in which a calm Image regards the rushing activity of man; she also passes by huge temples hewn in the rock, looking as if gods exiled from heaven have erected them as a semblance of the eternity they have lost in their banishment.

On her way, she often rests during nights in the palaces of kings. Her sleep is half-conscious – it is not of the overpowering type that pulls one down into sub-conscious or unconscious depths.

Savitri's van, carrying the fate of the earth, passes through hamlets and villages where people are ever engaged in the

small rounds of their existence, cultivating lands for the sustenance of their lives that are transient, mechanically moving in the same old grooves under a sky that watches, unchanging, their mortal toil below.

Savitri now leaves behind all scenes of human labours and crosses into vaster spaces of Nature where human joys, fears and griefs have not yet entered and disturbed. Here she is able to see what the earth was like in its infancy – quiet, happy and expansive – wrapt in timeless musings. Men have still not come here filling it with their cares. Here are the royal expanses of God, the eternal sower, acres of grass-lands swaying to the winds, glistening in the bright sun.

Like a rapid hope journeying through dreamland, Savitri's chariot hurries through green forests and rugged hills, through groves filled with the humming of the bees, passing by the frothy waters of rivers in flood.

She passes over tracts which have absorbed memories of the long, dateless past of the earth even before man appeared; domains of light steeped in ancient calm listen to the unaccustomed sound of Savitri's horses; the vast silences of the woods engulf her from all sides; the blooming creepers and variegated growths mesh the wheels of her chariot.

The tread of Time has been slow and soft on these lonely spaces; all things are fresh and whole.

Unlike the physical ear that hears only the loud sounds of the external world, there is an inner ear that hears the silence of solitude, the silence behind the movement of life in which the Thought beyond word gathers; here in these lonely ways this self-rapt ear hears the inner rhythm without constriction.

Here also rises in its inarticulate voice the aspiration of the earth in its intense concentration.

Away from the loud clamour of the world of men, freed from the pull of outward will, the quieted, all-seeking mind can here feel the ceaseless clasp of the mute, untired love of Mother-Nature and know her as a living soul.

Here the emerging spirit fumbling in the domains of the senses, the mortal buffeted on the waves of time, is able to find large spaces of release. Here is a world not yet filled with human cares and anxieties.

Here Mother-Nature has still reserved for man her solemn regions and meditative depths, her impersonal, vibrant solitudes and the glories of her rapture-fields.

The air is one of contemplation and mystery. It is a veritable place of worship where the joyous valleys serve for pure sacraments, the mountain tops for the altars of the dawn fires, where the beaches are continually invaded by the ocean and the huge forests resound with prophet-chantings.

Fields stretch out in solitary joy, plains are quiet and happy in pouring light; all over are the cry of birds and hue of flowers; wildernesses are transformed to wonder by the moon; meditative evenings kindled by the stars, there are dim stirrings in the vastness of the night.

Here Nature exults in the sight of her Lord; she feels close to him in this region of the earth. In the stillness obtaining here she is able to converse with a Light that burns behind the veil, commune with the Eternity beyond this manifestation.

Here Nature calls and admits to her peace a few, fit inhabitants of the region. They feel at home in her wideness, in her height; they have broken out of the walls of their ego-selves.

Strong kings who have completed their tasks and are free from the tensions of their royal assignments, now attend as sages these sessions of peace. The struggle of their lives is left behind; now is the period of rest.

Here the king-sages live in happy communion with the birds, beasts, flowers and plants, the sun, the wind, the stars, the gyrations of time in the morn, the noon and the night.

Some of these sages delve deeper. They withdraw from the hold of outer life, retire into the vibrant, pure secrecies of the soul invaded by external impacts, and live there in immortal bliss. There in that ecstasy and silence they hear a profound Voice and behold an all-revealing Light.

They overcome the barriers of time and space. They widen their hearts and become one with the world. With their limitless love they embrace all and find the one Self that dwells in every heart.

Expansion of consciousness starts from the heart and love is the door to reach the unity of the Self in all.

They tune themselves to the Silence looming behind things and in that Silence hear world-rhythms. They are no longer confined within the walls of the mind. Their sight is no longer limited to and distracted by apparent phenomena; their inner eye opens and sees wide and far, unaffected by what is seen. Their daily ascent reaches the peaks of their being and Truth from her celestial regions leans down to them. Spiritual suns of Eternity shine above them.

Here also are self-denuding, austere ascetics, giving up speech, motion, desire, withdrawn from fellow-beings, sitting alone absorbed in themselves on the purer heights of the self, on the silent, luminous peaks of concentration. These

hermits who have renounced the world sit immobile like the tranquil hills around them, - hills that look like so many thoughts of some vast poise, waiting only for the Infinite's order to end themselves.

There are seers who are in tune with the Universal Will, absorbed in God who ever smiles behind the exterior of earth's forms, living unaffected by the pressing passage of time. Around these seers are young, earnest disciples shaped by their mere touch, trained to act directly and speak consciously; they are enlarging their consciousness from within and growing towards the heights of their masters.

To these springs of Quietude, wanderers on the Path of the Eternal come to quench their spiritual thirst; here they spend a rich silent hour, bathing in the reigning purity of the gentle atmosphere of the place oozing peace, and under its influence find the ways of calm.

Here too noble children, chosen souls, the prospective hero-leaders of the dawning future, are nourished in the free air of the place and grow imbibing half-consciously the greatness of the seers and seekers of God.

They are formed in the mould of the high themes they sing about and they learn effortlessly the poise of large vastitude that makes one share the cosmic impulses; no more confined to their little separate selves, moulded easily by the hand of the Divine Shaper, they meet Nature freely, without inhibitions, and serve her executive Power.

Free from the constricting bonds of ego and division, meeting all on the basis of one soul, radiating the warm, impersonal joy of wide equality, these sages live for the natural delight of God in existence.

By means of this inner participation with the Divine, these sages help in the slow entry of the gods into the earth-field; they sow in the young minds under their charge the immortal thoughts which they themselves live; they teach and hold up to all the great Truth to which humanity must rise; they open the doors of liberation to the chosen few; themselves released from the dreary yoke of Time, they impart to the struggling world the Light they have gained; they are both the companions and the channels of the Cosmic Force; they have a natural mastery over things as the radiant sun has. Not their speech alone but even their silence is a help to the earth.

From their touch flows a strange happiness all around. In the peace of the green woods reign a oneness: enemies among the beasts join in friendship; hatred and strife cease. Through the hearts of the sages flows the one Mother's Love healing the wounds of the world.

There are others among the sages who have gone beyond the bounds of thought to the heights of being where the mind lies still, dormant, receptively waiting for the outbreak of the higher Light; when they come back from these summits they are charged with a new Force and their very cells vibrate with flashes of Light.

Intuitive knowledge flows through their words; their ear is open to the subtle sound, *nada*, that covers the celestial realms; they bear the glory that lights up the suns in the skies. They hymn the names of Infinity and the Powers Immortal in metres that correspond to the rhythms of the movement of the worlds; the seeing word, *pasyanti vac*, breaks out from the profound of their Soul.

Some are no more conscious of their personal selves and thought; they are poised in a status of immobile, vast, impersonal Power, seeing with the Light of the Infinite. In tune with the eternal Will, they survey the rollings of Time.

Some soar out of the universal expanse and disappear into a shining, indeterminate Vast. Some, steeped in Silence, watch the Cosmic play or stay indifferent and yet by that indifference help the world; even their uninvolved presence acts as a stable support to the world-movement.

Some, however, do not watch the universe at all; they are merged in the Self that is aloof from everything; completely absorbed in the trance-state from which none returns to external waking condition, they shut themselves off the various occult world-systems, freed from the bonds of birth and individuality. Some isolate themselves from everybody and everything and reach the Reality that is inexpressible in speech.

Savitri in her chariot drives past these scenes of meditation. Often she arrives at a peaceful hermitage in the evening as the cattle are returning home after grazing and the busy day has set; she rests there covering herself, as it were, with the spirit of unhurried contemplation and powerful prayer reigning in that place.

Or it is a doomed temple exuding a serenity of repose, amidst solemn trees on the bank of a river, that entertains her to stay awhile and indulge in the surroundings.

In the solemnity of that spot redolent with memories of ancient silences, where mighty voices from the past reach the heart and the wide freedom of contemplative seers has left a strong stamp of their soul-action, Savitri – awake in the moonlit night or at the break of dawn – shares tranquillity the pervading stillness and feels close to the eternal Calm.

However, with the coming of the morning Savitri is reminded of her quest. She gets up from the humble couch or mat

on which she rested during the night and resumes her journey. She follows the destined curve of her life as she is impelled to, like a strong desire that meets and questions the gods who answer not and without tarrying there proceeds on its way to some radiant Beyond.

She arrive at bare uninhabited tracts where man does not dwell but only passes across to find more habitable regions, or where man struggles to live in the extended vastness of Nature and overcome by the immensity of his environment, unconscious of his veiled infinity, prays to the Gods for help. The Gods of Powers of the Supreme God-head individualised and manifest in subtler forms for purposes of the Manifestation.

The Earth presents to Savitri a variegated landscape and beckons her farther and farther. The hermit-like mountains and the forests humming with innumerable sounds reveal to her, as it were, the doors of the Divinity veiled in Earth-Nature.

Savitri lies down relaxing under the open skies on musing plains; she crosses clusters of hills shooting into the skies; she journeys through strange and vacant tracts where barren summits stand like dumb sentinels under a wandering moon.

She wanders in a solitary thick forest chiming with the crickets' cry; or she takes a long shining road darting through the fields and pastures under a relentless sun; or she arrives at a desert, wildly beautiful, where nothing has ever grown and sleeps there upon the bare, dry sand amidst the night cries of wild and savage beast.

Still Savitri's fateful quest is not fulfilled; she has not yet found the decreed person for whom she has been searching. An imposing silence reigns on the magnificent day. The sun is intense and his burning heat pours down on earth. The spring winds are no more. The summer sky is set like bronze.

Savitri Discussion

The Symbols of Savitri

The legend has a power over the minds of the reader and what Aurobindo makes out of it has become significant. Aurobindo's employment of Savitri as a symbol is even more dynamic and even more beautiful. The childless king, a physically barren king who cannot have a child, Aswapathy becomes in Aurobindo's symbol a figure of cosmic significance. Interestingly he is made to represent the unfulfilled aspirations of all humankind. The tapasyas-austerities, sacrifices, and the trials and tribulations in eighteen years of penances that he does become the epic climb of a great soul striving to find the meaning of life and death, the secret knowledge by which one becomes illumined. In this context, Aurobindo describes many worlds in the first three books of Savitri. What are the stages of this epic climb? What does Aswapathy find? He discovers the master ideas-the unattained ideas of truth and of humanity. He experiences not only one person's unfulfilled desire, but human aspiration itself. In other words, Aswapathy's ascent represents the purification of all, the highest conscious spiritualization of the aspirations of humanity. In his epic climb of many, many heights, Aswapathy finds that he is not merely an individual or a physical being, or a vital being. He finds in this epic climb of his soul, seeking for divine knowledge, that he is also a cosmic being. Not only is he related to all other worlds, but the individual and the cosmic world, he discovers, are in turn, related to transcendent being This process, this yoga, by which the highest stage of illumination comes is described by Aurobindo as psychicization, universalization and supramentalization. In the legend, Savitri is an ordinary human princess. In Aurobindo's symbol she is at all times conscious of her humanity as well as her divinity. She is an answer of the Supreme Grace, the divine's response to the cry for help, for all the things that human beings find they cannot do alone. Aurobindo finds the intervention of divinity necessary for humankind to fulfill its task on earth. Savitri becomes the intervention of love, linking them and eternity by a concrete person. In the person of Savitri is symbolized the whole universe of the Supreme Grace, and the qualities of the Supreme Mother for the perfection of human life and the perfectibility of the Spirit. She will become the instrument for evolution in the individual and collectivity for the Supramental Truth. King Ashwapathy's-(meaning Lord of Life in Sanskrit) attempts at self-perfection and his great background for the birth of so great a spiritual human soul really gains an epic grandeur in Sri Aurobindo's vision endowing this earth with a tremendous significance. There are greater worlds than the earth, higher levels of consciousness than that of the human. But there is no more significant world than this earth in the great divine destiny that it holds. The canvas of Savitri is as wide as the cosmos. It takes into purview the worlds of being that are connected with humanity which are not perceived by it because of its limitations of ignorance. The unity of structure of Savitri is a remarkable experience.

The Symbol Dawn – Usha

The symbol Dawn-Usha; unlike the legend, is not merely an ordinary dawn. In Sri Aurobindo's symbol, it is the birth of new consciousness, new light of learning and knowledge which symbolizes new realizations and initiates the transformative process of earth life, of matter and energy, of nature and self, and the collectivity and therefore, of

humanity and the cosmos. Savitri can also be thus described as spiritual architecture, exteriorized in the vision and structure of “Auroville: the New City of Dawn” in the design, colours and shapes of Matrimandir and the gardens linked to the galaxies, their approach to immanence and transcendence. The symbol Dawn leading from out of the crisis of the story - and the imminent death of Satyavan, it introduces the chief character of Savitri in glowing and divine colours. The nature of the crisis itself and its cosmic significance raises the character of Savitri to that of the “Saviour” and redeemer of humanity.

Savitri as A Female Avatar/saviour

It is the first time in the history of Avatars (descent of divinity in earth life) or Saviours, that Sri Aurobindo presents us with a female Avatar. In the legend, Savitri is born, she grows up, she is educated, she is asked to get married, and chooses her husband and then she lives happily ever after, after salvaging the whole obstacle with death about her husband’s own life. In the legend, this is where it stops, but in the symbol, her getting married to Satyavan is also a symbol of the perfect balance and union of the male and female principles in the universe that are necessary for the evolution of mankind, as also the union and raising of the world to God and bringing God down to man. Savitri as the saviour represents the divinity, the light of which must unite in Truth, namely in Satyavan here, in the symbolic sense. Therefore, her going out and choosing her own husband is really a mission that she has to accomplish, to bring Supramental Truth or Divine Light on earth. That is the purpose of her mission. There is not an ordinary marriage, but where marriage is used as a divine instrument for spiritual evolution for bringing the Supreme Truth into the processes of nature and of earth life, into the daily processes of living and thinking. The blind king Dyumatsen represents in Sri Aurobindo’s symbol not only physical blindness but spiritual blindness, the rejection of light by the individual and the collectivity. In the original legend, Savitri meets with Death, a very unconventional idea for a mortal to challenge death, but there too from another point of view, compared to Sri Aurobindo’s symbol, the legend is religio-ethically oriented. While as in the symbol, she warns death and says, “I am the power of Light, I am the daughter of Truth and Light.” Death doesn’t believe her and he gives such an abysmal cry that it rends the heart of the whole universe, and the earth begins to crack, earthquakes occur, mountains begin to tumble, rivers begin to overflow when Death gives his abysmal cry. Because Death doesn’t believe her he says, “Show me a body of Supreme Truth, of living Truth and I will become your servant. Many know the Truth and many have the Truth, but they cannot radiate it.” At that point, because Savitri is the daughter of the Supreme Mother, she becomes the light, her physical body is transformed into total light and slowly proceeds and swallows Death. Death is dissolved. Before all this happens as the anticlimax, Death says, “I can turn all the golden truths of life to ashes, all your accomplishments mean nothing once I come. It is total darkness.”

Savitri says, “No.” She tells in the symbol, “I am the absolute, I am the Divine. But you, Yama, are only the servant of the Divine. You can do only what you are permitted to do.” Yama doesn’t believe her, he says, “No, I will show you my power.” And at that time she becomes Light, swallows Death, and darkness disappears. At this point, she enters into the realm which is known as the realm of the Everlasting Day, where the Sun of Truth never sets, where ignorance and death have no place. She looks at that world and goes through many, many temptations to stay there in that realm. She looks around and says, “What is that joy that is not shared by all?” As she decides, she looks at the earth down below. Here it is that she says, as Sri Aurobindo points out in Ahana:

*“Two are the ends of existence, two are the dreams of the Mother:
Heaven unchanging, earth with her time-beats yearn to each other,-
Earth-souls needing a touch of the heavens peace to recapture
Heaven needing earth’s passion to quiver its peace into rapture.”*

In the epic, Savitri falls to the earth like a star, and Satyavan’s soul soars beside her and they are reunited on earth. The work of supramentalization, of that Supreme Truth then begins for the perfection of humanity in the individual and collectivity, and the perfectibility of life. There are other dimensions that Savitri as an epic deals with, the problem of pain and suffering and death. What is the meaning of pain and why is it that man has to suffer? How is this episode or series of episodes brought in the whole epic and vision of Savitri? In the legend when Narada makes the prophecy that Savitri’s husband would die in one year’s time, and the Queen Mother Malavi and King Aswapathy are extremely upset, as all parents would be to know such news.

Here in the symbol, Savitri’s true yoga begins with the fore-knowledge of her husband’s death.

Narada, the sage, chanting, spoke of “the toils of men and what the gods strive for”, “the marvel and mystery of pain”. “He sang to them of the lotus-heart of love” which “sleeps veiled by apparent things”. Savitri’s calm choice speaks of “once with heart chose and chooses not again”. It is like a Truth once uttered which always remains and “sounds immortality”, “in the memory of Time”. Savitri reflects thus:

“My heart has sealed its troth to Satyavan. Its seal nor Fate nor Death nor Time dissolve, Fate’s law may change, but not my spirit’s will.”

Savitri’s flawless logic in rendering her arguments to marry Satyavan, even though he was fated to die within a year’s time, are expressed thus:

“My will is part of the eternal will My strength is not the titan’s, it is God’s. My spirit has glimpsed the glory for which it came.”

“I will have joy only in union with Satyavan”. Compared to that joy “the riches of a thousand fortunate years, are a poverty”.

“I shall walk with him like gods in Paradise”. “If for a year, that year is all my life ... I know now why my spirit crone on earth And who I am and who he is I love, I have looked at him from my immortal self, I have seen God smile at me in Satyavan I have seen the Eternal in a human face.”

What more can be said after such a realization?

“Silent they sat and looked into the eyes of Fate.”

The great problem: “Why pain at all in a world created by God?” is represented in book six, canto II, when there is actual crisis in the living situations. Is there a divine Presence behind the outer appearances? The divine Presence is to be found in each one’s heart-in its deepest core. The birth of divinity in life occurs through trials and tribulations and heart-breaking agonies and ordeals of the chequered experiences of life-of joy and sorrow, of pain and pleasure where life and death and rebirth become a miracle.

Nature VS Spirit

The question of all questions, of determinism of Nature versus the determination of the Spirit: Does the human have the power to intervene and to overcome such processes as pain, ignorance and death? There are many answers that are given in the history of philosophy about this very crucial problem of pain, darkness, suffering and death. The Queen Mother and Narada’s dialogue is so powerful and so heart-rending it makes a perfect case for agnosis, a perfect case for atheism. He says, “What kind of a God is this who would be so cruel that my child who hasn’t done anything wrong is going to be widowed in one year! Are my tears in vain and for deaf ears? What about this injustice? Why is it that even Savitri has to suffer? What is the meaning of all this?”

In order to help humanity even world-saviours have to suffer pain and combat the Forces of the Adversary which constantly oppose any move towards Light-and therefore, thwart, abort and confuse the forces of Light by their strong and gigantic might. What then would be the solution to the problem of the Adversary? Escape is certainly not the answer, for mere escape from the world of pain would not and cannot solve the problem. The Light must descend into the density and darkness of inconscience and nescience, the illumined energy of existence in the cosmos which is the basis and origin of Ignorance and therefore, of pain. In fighting and overcoming the problem of ignorance and evil, one experiences pain-sometimes very intensely and extensively, to dolorous depths and fathomless heights. Sri Aurobindo points out that this adversary Force hides from man “the straight immortal path”. This enmity continuously poses problems and impediments to God’s work on earth. “Till it is slain, peace is forbidden” for the human for the adversary force twists and turns and perverts and can contort, and camouflage and deceive everything divine into evil. Furthermore Sri Aurobindo explains:

“It is the origin of our suffering here. It binds earth to calamity and pain. This hidden foe lodged in the human breast Man must overcome or miss his higher fate. This is the inner war without escape.”

As for the task and the purpose of the world-redeemer-it is the hardest and most difficult-because “the world itself becomes his adversary.” “His enemies are beings he came to save.” And why and wherefore is it so? Because “The world is in love with its own ignorance”.

“It gives the cross in payment for the crown. “Escape, however high, redeems not life Escape cannot uplift the abandoned race. Or bring to it victory and the reign of God.”

What then is the hope for the human against such anti-divine forces? Sri Aurobindo says:

“He too must grapple with the riddling sphinx. ... He must call light into dark abysses He must enter the eternity of night And know God’s darkness as he knows his Sun.”

and "for this he must go down into the pit For this he must invade the dolorous Vasts."

Pain

Narada's words to the human exhort:

"O mortal, bear this great world's law of pain Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace."

The integral answer of Sri Aurobindo is that pain and suffering and darkness are the intermediary conditions that the soul has deliberately chosen as its transitional phase from the inconscient Omniscience to the Superconscience. Thus ignorance and pain are intermediary states and not a permanent affliction according to Sri Aurobindo. Savitri has selected Satyavan and she is approaching his father's house and they are meeting now. The problem of pain comes here, in the second canto of the sixth book of Savitri, where Savitri's mother addresses herself to Narada, the divine sage and asks him a question. "Passionate-like sorrow, questioning heaven, she spoke ...

"By what pitiless adverse necessity, By what random accident, or governed chance, Came that direr mystery of grief and pain? Is it thy God who made this cruel law? Or some disastrous power has marred his work, And stands helpless to defend or save?"

The mother of Savitri is putting these questions forth. The question that comes to our mind is:

"What need had the soul of ignorance and tears? What power forced the immortal spirit to birth? And who persuaded it to fall from bliss?"

If you say that it was in ignorance or bliss, Sri Aurobindo says in Savitri,

*"Why is it all and where from are we here? Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream, Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance."
"Was then the sun a dream because there is night?"*

The rational intelligence of Savitri's mother puts this question forth to Narada:

"Why is there this will to live? Is there at all a soul?"

Narada replies to her by putting a counter question,

"Was then the sun a dream because there is night? Hidden in the mortal's heart the eternal lives. He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul; Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light ... Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break The dead resistance in the mortal's heart. Pain is the signature of ignorance Attesting the secret god denied by life, Until one finds Him, pain can never end ... Pain is a hand of nature sculpturing man To greatness: an inspired labor chisels With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould Thou art a vessel of the imprisoned spark. It seeks relief from Time's envelopment, And while thou shuttest it in, the seal is pain."

Now one gets some idea of the place of pain in the scheme of things. Then he goes further and explains:

"With pain and labour, all creation comes. Even God's messengers have to bear the law of pain."

When God's messengers come to help the world, as we have seen explicated in the life of Christ, in the life of Buddha, and in the life of all the great prophets of the world, and through their lives in the lives of all of us, "He too must bear the pains that he would heal. For how shall he cure the ills he never felt?" Pain and suffering can be instrumental in helping humans to grow towards God. There is a divine utility for pain and suffering in the cosmic scheme of life. One must bear pain with patience if it comes but one must not be sick or morbid to invite it. The depths of our pain and suffering are also indicative of the heights of our heaven which are occult. Even if one doesn't see any pain in the outer, the idea of the battle is inside, because the Avatar represents humankind by his identity with it. He takes on vicariously all the suffering, and this grief, pain and suffering is by his identity with the cosmic self. He gets all the grief of the human being, all the humanity into himself. So that vicariously there is always suffering within him. As the Bhagavad Gita says, "The greatest enemy of the self is the self, and the greatest friend of the self is the self". And so often we know that the enemy is not outside, the enemy is really within. The enemy within creates the enemy without. The hostility to the divine is the origin of this pain. Only the suffusion and penetration of the power of Truth and its purity will change the anti-divinity and forces of darkness and nescience. Therefore, conquest over death or the gaining of immortality in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, means divine consciousness and transformation of man with

a divine existence on earth, with an Eternal Now. Sri Aurobindo points out that man is the architect of this problem of pain:

“Thou art thyself the author of thy pain” ... “It longed for the adventure of ignorance And the marvel and surprise of the Unknown.”

Sri Aurobindo continues:

“A huge descent began, a giant fall For what the spirit sees creates a truth ... They came, born from a blind tremendous choice, This great perplexed and discontented world, This haunt of ignorance, this home of Pain: Their pitched desire’s tents, grief’s headquarters. A vast disguise conceals the Eternal’s bliss.”

Fate & Free will in Savitri

Fate in Savitri is ‘the child of our own acts’. Still it has to bear the impress of our will which is believed to be free. In Canto IV *The Quest*, a realization dawns on Savitri:

*Nothing we think or do is void or vain;
Each is an energy loosed and holds its course.
The shadowy keepers of our deathless past
Have made our fate the child of our own acts,
And from the furrows laboured by our will
We reap the fruit of our forgotten deeds.*

Then she asked a question: “Is it then fated that all things will remain like that, and men will have only this circle of going around and around in pain, suffering and so on?” The answer is given also in the sixth book of Savitri. *“Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny’s book. Man can accept his fate, or he can refuse ... For doom is not a close, a mystic seal ... The spirit rises mightier than defeat; ... Its splendid failures summed to victory.”*

He points out that every stumble and fall also has a purpose, many times. Sri Aurobindo has a tremendous mathematical technique of using spiritual algebra to express deep metaphysical truths. For example, he calls that a “logarithm of necessity” to explain the problem of pain, and the “Calculus of destiny”.

“Each soleness inexpressibly held the whole.” “It made all persons fractions of the Unique, Yet all were being’s secret integers.”

Savitri is extremely modernistic and yet it takes the inspiration from the tradition of the Vedic-Upanishadic language which formulates the original epic poetry, perfect mantrik poetry. He adds so much to the vision of that poetry by transforming it into the symbol. Now Savitri is telling the Divine:

“Earth is a chosen place of mighty souls, Earth is a heroic spirit’s battlefield. Thy servitude on earth are greater King Than all the liberties of heaven.” This is when Savitri and Satyavan decide not to stay in the Everlasting Day, a paradise where there was no connection with earth, and where earth and ignorance had no place. They said no because earth is the chosen place of mighty souls. Savitri is replying to the Supreme:

“Imperfect is a joy not shared by all ... Thy sweetness give me for earth and men ...” We who are the vessels of a deathless force ...”

Sri Aurobindo calls the new race of mankind “the architects of immortality” descending into the human and they will do the work of perfecting humanity.

Time & Eternity in Savitri

Throughout Savitri one finds this question and the relation of eternity and time constantly repeated in different contexts to bring out their dependence of time-eternity on timeless eternity. It is timeless eternity of the Absolute on one hand, that wells out into the flow of time-eternity, carrying with it the unrolling of the cosmos, an evolutionary unrolling and unfolding of the spirit is taking place. How do we experience it? By experience of it in time here and now. But that wouldn’t be possible if the timeless absolute wasn’t pouring out its light. The legend talks about the dawn, the tomorrow, the birth of something from darkness into light. But in the symbol of Sri Aurobindo, the dawn is the dawn of the new age of man, the new age of Supramental Consciousness, the divinization of life on earth. He talks about the dawn of constant growing into the spirit of truth and knowledge, and elimination of darkness—the symbol dawn, of inspiration and the dawn that will bring new knowledge, new discovery, and new insights to the human. Then he says, “The eternal’s quiet holds the cosmic act.” This act would not be possible without the eternal’s quiet-timeless eternity of the Absolute in polarity with the time eternity continuum. There are two ends of eternity visible in Savitri—the eternal below, facing the human with its unfathomable depth of darkness of the Nescience, which may be called the Dark Eternity, described in the Vedas as “darkness covered thickly by darkness” in which there was neither being or

non-being. The other is the eternity of the Divine Absolute even beyond the realms of the three supernals-sat, cit, ananda, meaning Truth, Consciousness, Bliss.

Far from eternity being in opposition, the grand vision of Savitri constantly brings eternity into moments of time. In other words, the timeless absolute becomes real to us. Sri Aurobindo says:

“The eyes of the timeless might look from time And manifest the unveiled divine.”

He continues,

*“Eternity drew close disguised as love And laid its hands upon the body of Time.
The spirit’s greatness is our timeless source, And it shall be our crown in endless time.”*

Love & Death in Savitri

One is reminded of Wallace Stevens’ “Death is the mother of Beauty” as one chances on Sri Aurobindo’s “Death is a shadow of love.” This love wider than the universe is really the divine Love; for “even pain and grief are garbs of world-delight for in our world “A vast disguise conceals the Eternal’s bliss.” The Fate of the Spirit is to march from Matter to Spirit. Savitri here is a master builder, as many great spirits have worked at this goal. Narada’s advice to the Queen Mother was not to interfere with Savitri’s decision and not to traverse the ordinary track of the human way. Thus, rightly seen, joy and indifference, pain and suffering too are only the garbs of universal Delight. By their polarity, they connote and denote their opposites and therefore, even the depths of our hell are indicative of the heights of our heaven. It is true Satyavan must die: but death is not the end. The Fate of the Spirit is not the event but the goal and the path he chooses.

“All life a song of many meeting lives For worlds were many, but the Self was one. “A seed shall be sown in Death’s tremendous hour, A branch of heaven transplant to human soil; Nature shall overleap her mortal step; Fate shall be changed by an unchanging will.”

For nothing is accidental or merely casual or causal. Sri Aurobindo says:

“The cosmos is no accident in Time; There is a meaning in each play of chance, There is a freedom in each fact of Fate.” Thus “Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance.” The human is free in spite of Fate, in the sense he/she can accept or reject one’s Fate, for “doom is not a close.” The events of human life, sad or happy, “are not thy fate.” “Thy goal, the road thou chooseth are thy fate.” In this sense, “fate is a long sacrifice to the gods”, until the human has made “thee one with the indwelling God”. Thus Fate is intimately connected with the destiny of man.

“Thy spirit’s Fate is a battle and ceaseless march”, ... a passage from Matter into timeless Self”. In this long battle, both the human and humanity have to face many vicissitudes that involve treading dangerous fronts, perilous journeys, fights, earthly plains, frontal and not-so frontal assaults, holding fortes and experiencing the `dark night of the soul’.

“Through peril and through triumph and through fall”, “through green lanes” and “desert sands” of life “Led by its nomad vanguard’s signal fires marches the army of the waylost God”. Thus, the “waylost God” continues his march and battle till one faces “the forces- the last passes of the Ignorance “till climbing the mute summit of the world”, “He stands upon the splendour peaks of God”. “In vain thou mournst that Satyavan must die”, because “His death is a beginning of greater life”. “Death is the spirit’s opportunity”. There is undoubtedly a higher purpose behind the workings of this world. For Sri Aurobindo continues,

“Love and death conspire towards one great end”.

For, “Sometime one life is charged with earth’s destiny”. “Alone she is equal to her mighty task”. Narada here says:

“For this the silent Force came missioned down; In her the conscious Will took human shape.”

Savitri is no longer the ordinary woman. She is the embodiment of that silent Force and conscious will on earth. Narada’s words thus conclude:

“Leave her to her mighty Self and Fate.”

So saying Narada disappeared “like a receding star” and yet “A high and far imperishable voice Chanted the anthem of eternal love”.

Crisis in the Epic Savitri

When Savitri reports her choice to her parents where the Divine sage Narada is present. The moment Savitri uttered the name of Satyavan, King Aswapathy sees a heavy shadow floating over that name of Satyavan, but charged by a stupendous light. Then he feels that all is well. He approved her choice but at this moment Narada is about to speak. But Aswapathy signs at him not to speak. The Queen has been observing this and asks Narada to bless her

child and to advise her how to keep away from the wings of the evil. But Narada replies that whoever are doomed will not listen to warnings; they will go ahead. So, he does not want to speak. But queen insists on to speak and ultimately he says Satyavan is fated to die within twelve months from this date. The queen reacts violently She asks “where is your god? Where is Grace? Where is justice? What sin has my daughter committed that she should be tempted like this and delivered to doom?” She is better She tells Savitri to go out once again and make another choice. But Savitri replies.

*... Once my heart chose and chooses not again.
The word I have spoken can never be era
It is written in the record book of God.
... I am stronger than death and greater than my fate;
My love shall outlast the world, doom falls from me
Helpless against my immortality*

Fate’s law may change, but not my spirit’s will

The queen is helpless. She appeals to her daughter: “You speak like the gods, but you are a human being. Listen to me, use your reason, do not be persuaded by a passion.”

But Savitri is firm:

“I have seen God smile at me in Satyavan; I have seen the Eternal in a human face.”

But the queen is furious. But after a silence Narada makes a reply He explains why there is suffering, why there is pain.

*“Pain is the hammer of the gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.”*

This book is called the book of Fate, perhaps the most important one in the epic, and this was the last book Sri Aurobindo worked upon and completed about three or four weeks before he left his body It is in this book that he dictated 400 lines at a stretch. This is his testament. He discusses why there is ego, why there is pain.

*“Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny’s book.
Man can accept his fate, or he can refuse.
For doom is not a close, a mystic seal
The spirit rises mightier than defeat
Its splendid failures summed to victory.”*

Here Sri Aurobindo describes how the incarnations of God came here to save the suffering humanity and they themselves have to suffer.

He who would save the race must share its pain:

Then he adds:

*Hard is the world-redeemer’s heavy task;
The world itself becomes his adversary,
His enemies are the beings he came to save.
... It gives the cross in payment for the crown.*

Narad warns the queen to stand aside to leave Savitri to meet her fate because much else is involved in it. He says

*“A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers,
In a tremendous silence lost and lone
Cry not to heaven for she alone can save
She only can and save the world
O queen, stand back from that stupendous scene,
Come not between her and her hour of fate.”*

The sage leaves the earthly scene.

Savitri joins Satyavan, she takes up all the household duties from morning ‘till evening, she speaks to none of the impending calamity Sri Aurobindo writes the great never share their sufferings with others. It is the small who speaks of theirs. She does not speak a word of it even to Satyavan. But, every day after the daily chores, are over, and he goes to sleep, she sits at his bedside and broods over the approaching doom. One day when it is very severe,

she hears a voice from her own higher being

*Why camest thou to this dumb deathbound earth...
If't wast to nurse grief in a helpless heart
Or with hard tearless eyes await thy doom?*

Savitri asks what else could she do if Satyavan is to die. She would follow him in death. After a while the voice speaks again:

*Is this then the report that I must make,
My head bowed with shame before the Eternal's seat,
His power he kindled in thy body has failed,
His labourer returns, her task undone?*

This stings her, and she asks, "What shall I do? I have no strength." The voice replies:

Find out thy soul, recover thy hid self.

And Savitri plunges into herself in search of her soul. While Aswapathy goes above the earth higher and higher, exploring the different levels of existence and consciousness, Savitri goes inside herself and explores the inner countries.

She comes out of her physical body and enters into the subtler regions behind the physical, she passes through the turbulent waters of life across the safe walled spaces of the wind and then beyond. She meets the host of Gods who directs her to follow the world's winding highway to its source. Savitri turns and comes to a place where there are very few footsteps, the passage narrows and then opens on the slope of a hill.

There she encounters on a rock, a woman, an ancient woman with a divine pity in her eyes, with her feet bleeding on the pricking stone.

*A woman sat in a pale lustrous robe.
A rugged and ragged soil was her seat,
Beneath her feet a sharp and wounding stone.*

She is the Mother of sorrow who identifies Herself with all grief in the cosmos and sustains the bleeding hearts of man till the purpose of suffering and sorrow is fulfilled. Slowly she speaks:

*To share the suffering of the world I came
I draw my children's pangs into my breast.
I am in all that suffers and that cries
I am the spirit in a world of pain.*

Savitri says yes mother your role is indispensable but that is not all enough but thine is the power to solace, not to save. One day I will return, a bringer of strength. And she passes on.

And as she climbs up, the whole air changes. There is a new atmosphere.

*All beautiful grew, subtle and high and strange.
Here on a boulder carved like a huge throne
A woman sat in gold and purple sheen,
Armed with the trident and the thunderbolt,
Her feet upon a couchant lion's back.*

She is the Mother of might who declares herself

*I stand upon earth's paths of danger and grief
And help the unfortunate and save the doomed.
To the strong I bring the guerdon of their strength
To the weak I bring the armour of my force.
I smite the Titan who best rides the world
And slay the ogre in his blood-stained den.
I am Durga, goddess of the proud and strong,
And Lakshmi, queen of all the fair and fortunate;
I wear the face of Kali when I kill
I am charged by God to do his mighty work
His seal is on my task, it cannot fail.*

Madonna of might
 Because thou art in him, man hopes and dares;
 Because thou art, men's souls can climb the heavens
 And walk like Gods in the presence of the Supreme.
 Without wisdom power is like a wind,
 It can breathe upon the heights and kiss the sky,
 It cannot build the extreme eternal things
 Thou hast given men strength,
 Wisdom thou couldst not give.

Savitri advances still upwards till she is greeted by the Mother of light:

A woman sat in clear and crystal light:
Heaven had unveiled its lustre in her eyes,
 Her feet were moonbeams, her face was a bright sun.

She speaks:

*O Savitri, I am thy secret soul,
 I have come down to the wounded desolate earth
 To heal her pangs and lull her heart to rest
 And lay her head upon her Mother's lap.
 I am peace that steals into man's war-worn breast...
 I am charity with the kindly hands that bless;
 I am silence mid the noisy tramp of life;
 I am knowledge poring on her cosmic map.
 I make even sin and error stepping stones
 And all experience a long march towards light.*

Savitri hails this mother of joy and peace and tells her:

*Because thou art, the soul draws near to God;
 Because thou art, love grows in spite of hate
 And knowledge walks unslain in the pit of Night.*

But that too is not enough to deliver man from the state of his limitation and imperfection.

She tells her: One day I shall return with the light and peace in all the worlds. Thus, passing the mother of sorrow, the Mother of Might, she goes to bring the Mother of Love. She follows the direction given by the gods and She comes to a passage where there are rocky doors. She entered there and sees on the walls all the gods and goddesses, Radha and Krishna, Shiva and Kali and something wakes up in her She feels herself that they are her own forms; She passes on, all the figures of gods and goddesses disappear, there is an impersonal peace, an impersonal presence, the presence of the Self and then she comes to a wall of fire without a door She steps through that wall and sees there her secret soul; the human Savitri regards the Divine Savitri. For a moment they look at each other and they rush into each other and they become one.

Savitri's outer being merges in her inner being. A capital realisation in spiritual life, particularly, in the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo where the soul merges into its oversoul and loses its humanity. What follows is an original and authentic description of the rising of Kundalini when the divine power enters and strikes her body the Kundalini the pranic dynamism shoots up and the centres open one by one. She calls down the great mother to come down into her. Now she is ready to house the divine mother in her breast. Here Sri Aurobindo's most memorable description of what happened when the descent from above touches the human soil, how the Kundalini is aroused, how she courses upwards. Sri Aurobindo describes:

*A face, a form came down into her heart
 And made of it its temple and pure abode.*

She had undergone all the fundamental work and when the fated day arrives she is confident. She prepares to meet her fate. On the fated day she gets up early, finishes the prayer before the figure of Durga, the world Mother carved on the stone by Satyavan and completes her usual work. Then she goes to Satyavan's mother and asks for leave to accompany Satyavan on that day and see the emerald world around. Gladly permitted she sets out with Satyavan. He calls the various birds and beasts by name and they respond and come. It tells her who is who and what is what. They go for fuel to a tree and Satyavan wields a joyous axe, but very soon his strength fails. The moment has

arrived and his life ebbs away. The entire forest scene becomes tense. The birds stop chirping, suddenly she becomes aware of another presence. She knows it is the god of death. He tells Savitri unclasp thy hold and thy husband suffers. Savitri lets her hold go and the god of death bends down touches the earth. She now releases that hold and a luminous Satyavan arises from the body on the ground. A unique procession commences: the soul of Satyavan, the God of Death and behind both, Savitri. They walk on a pathless path. She feels the earth, the leaves and the trees rushing by, and then suddenly on the frontiers of the physical world she loses sight of them. She realises that her body is a weight, a dross, so she soars out of her physical body and in her subtle form she soon overtakes the two and joins them.

The God of Death does not relish it very much, and he tells her that mortals cannot accompany Death to his home and asks her to go back. This debate between the God of Death and Savitri is one of the highlights of the epic, touching as it does upon the shortcomings of purely materialistic and the idealistically escapist philosophies.

She says - No, I love him, I can't. He says: Go back to your earth, you will find fresh loves and you will forget the old. She persists and goes on. He asks her to choose whatever boons she wants. She tells him: I don't care for your boons but if you want to give, give all that Satyavan wanted for his parents, let them recover their sight, let them recover their kingdom. Contemptuously he assents. But still she does not turn back, then he argues with her: that is the famous debate between Love and Death. He says: Why, I am the guardian, I am God, everybody has ultimately to come to me for peace, for rest. She replies: Love is greater than death. He asks: What is love? It is only a passion of the flesh, there is no God and there is no love. She tells him that he is trying to slay truth with truth. But her truth is greater, she has a mission to fulfil. What is that mission? To conquer death, to bring everlasting peace to earth. He laughs and points to her a whole world of beauty, beautiful forms, movements; it is world of Ideals, but the moment she wants to touch it, it disappears. He remarks: This is what happens to shadowy ideals which you mortals nourish and cherish. Nothing is substantial. He next shows a whole panorama of history, all the kings and kingdoms, religions, philosophies, ideologies, the minarets and palaces all pass by, nothing stays. This, he says is the unreality of the earthly real, as unreal as the shadowy ideals. She watches but something in her is convinced that it is not the truth, she says: No I am charged by God, I am charged by His Power to fulfil my work with Satyavan, and I have to take him. Then he says impatiently: If thou that Power, show me that Power; if the mighty Mother be with thee, show me her face so that I may worship her. At last when he throws her that challenge, to show what is her real power, what is the truth of her being, Savitri looks on Death and does not answer

*A mighty transformation came on her
A halo of the indwelling Deity,
The Immortal's lustre that had lit her face
And tented its radiance in her body's house,
Overflowing made the air a luminous sea.*

Before this flaming little figure, Death towers in his massive figure; he increases but there is a siege of light, a burning light around him. He looks back and calls his ally, the Night of the dark, but she refuses to come, he calls his support, the Inconscient which refuses to answer; the sea of light licks up his shape, the body of God of Death is no more and Death flees the scene. Savitri finds herself on a luminous scene of the Eternal day And Savitri returns to the Earth along with Satyavan. She has refused the highest heavens in order to fulfil the aspiration of the earth which is indeed the Intention of the Supreme.

*The frontiers of the Ignorance shall recede,
More and more souls shall enter into light....
Nature, shall live to manifest secret God,
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.*

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NISSIM EZEKIEL'S

Poetry

UNIT-II NISSIM EZKIEL'S POETRY

1. Nissim Ezekiel: A Biographical Sketch

Nissim Ezekiel was born in a Jewish family in Bombay in December 1924. Both his father and mother were teachers, as his father was a Professor of Zoology and Botany, his mother was the principal of a school. His father died in 1969 while his mother died in 1974.

Nissim had his early education in the missionary schools of Bombay. For his higher education he joined Wilson College, Bombay. As an under-graduate he came under the influence of M.N.Roy and was an active member of Roy's Radical Democratic Party until 1947. He got the Wilson College Fellowship while studying for the M.A. degree there. At that time he also worked as a part-time teacher and taught at Hansraj Morarji Public School Andheri, Bombay. He topped the University of Bombay in M.A. English Literature and won the R.K.Lagu prize for it. In 1947-48 he taught English Literature at Khalsa College, Bombay. He also published some literary articles and reviews in various Indian newspapers and periodicals.

With the help of Mr. E. Alkazi he went to England in November 1948. He stayed in England for three-and-a-half years. His pursuits there included theatre, cinema, art, culture and psychology. He also studied philosophy there at Birkbeck College. However, he was primarily interested in literature. It was in 1952 that his first book of poems, *A Time to Change*, was published by the Fortune Press, London. That very year he came back to India.

Back in Bombay he joined the editorial staff of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. In November 1952 he married Daisy Jacob and in December 1953 he published his second book of verse, *Sixty Poems*. He worked for *The Illustrated Weekly of India* for two years and in 1954 he became associated with M/s Shilpi Advertising as a copywriter. In 1952 he started broadcasting on art and literature for the Bombay station of All India Radio and he did so continually till 1962. In 1955 he became the first editor of the then-bimonthly *Quest* and continued his associations with it for several years as a reviews editor. In 1957 he went to America for four months as a manager of Shilpi. There he visited several American Universities as a grantee of the Fairfield Foundation. In 1959 he left Shilpi and came back to college teaching. That very year the third volume of his poems, namely *The Third* was published by The Strand Book Shop, Bombay. In 1959 itself he worked as general manager for Chemould, a company-manufacturing picture frames. In 1960 his fourth volume of poetry namely *The Unfinished Man* was published by the Writers' Workshop Calcutta.

In 1961 he joined *Imprint*, a books monthly and started writing its reviews section. He did it for about seven years. In 1961 he joined Mithibai College of Arts, Bombay as Professor of English and Head of the Department of English. He served that institution till 1972. From 1964 to 1966 he worked as art critic for *The Times of India*. For six months in 1964 he was Visiting Professor at the University of Leeds where he delivered lectures on Indian Writing in English. His fifth volume of poems *The Exact Name* was published by Writers' Workshop Calcutta in 1965. He edited *Poetry India*, a quarterly, during 1966-67 and brought out six issues. He was the Secretary of the Indian P.E.N. from 1963 to 1966 and from 1968 to 1972. He also edited two P.E.N. conference volumes.

He went to America the second time in March 1967. There he delivered five lectures on Indian Writing in English at the University of Chicago. Besides that he lectured at several colleges and universities on a variety of literary topics and gave readings from his own poetry. His book *Three Plays* was published by the Writers' Workshop Calcutta in 1969. He conducted a course in art appreciation for J.J. School of Art and some other institutions during 1969-72. In 1973 he conducted a series of ten programmes in art appreciation for Bombay Television. In November 1974 he went for a tour of the United States on an invitation from the U.S. Government. In 1976 he was working as a Reader in English at Bombay University. In 1982 he was working as a Professor of English at Bombay University. He retired on 20th April 1985. He died on January 9, 2004 after a long illness.

In his write-up "Death of a Poet" Keki N. Daruwalla wrote: "On January 9, while I was in Bombay, I got a call from Adil Jussawalla late in the evening to tell me that Nissim had passed away. One would be lying if one did not say that along with sorrow, there was also a sense of relief, for Nissim had been suffering from Alzheimer's [for] the last few years and even his best friends would not have wanted him to linger on the way he was." Daruwalla called him "an intellectual powerhouse" when he wrote, "The man's versatility was amazing ... It is sad to use a cliché for him, but he was an intellectual powerhouse. ... His death leaves a very big void."

He was a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award for Literature. The Government of India conferred upon him the Padmashri. (Adapted)

2. Nissim Ezekiel's Works

Nissim Ezekiel brought out a number of collections of poems. They include:

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. A Time to Change (1952) | 2. Sixty Poems (1953) |
| 3. The Third (1959) | 4. The Unfinished Man (1960) |
| 5. The Exact Name (1965) | 6. Hymns in Darkness (1976) |
| 7. Latter-Day Psalms (1982) | |

He also wrote plays. The include

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Song of Deprivation | 2. Nalini |
| 3. Marriage Poem | 4. Who Needs No Introduction, and |
| 5. The Sleepwalkers | |

3. A Critical Appreciation of 'Night of the Scorpion'

Ezekiel's poem 'Night of the Scorpion' is his best known poem so far. The poem deals with a scorpion's stinging a woman and, consequently, people's taking curative measures to relieve her of the pain caused by it. The speaker in this monologue is the woman's son.

The poem has taken its birth from the speaker's emotion recollected in tranquility. He remembers the night on which his mother was stung by a scorpion. The scorpion had crawled beneath a sack of rice as it had been raining steadily for ten hours. After stinging the speaker's mother in the dark room it went back from the room into the open where it was still raining.

On coming to know that she had been stung by a scorpion, peasants in several big groups came to her and started chanting the name of God. Their voices put together sounded like the buzzing of bees. When they, with lanterns and candles, searched for the scorpion, their giant shadows which looked like giant scorpions, were falling on the walls of the house. But when they failed to find it, they signified the fact by clicking their tongues. They said that as the scorpion was moving on, its poison was spreading in the lady's body. So they stated their wish that the scorpion might stop moving. They wished that the lady's sins of her former lives might be burnt away. It means that these people believed that the lady had been stung by a scorpion because she had committed some sin or sins in her former lives and was being punished for it.

The peasants also wished that this suffering of hers might decrease the misfortune of her next life. This signifies that for them the suffering she was undergoing was a part of the total suffering she was to have in all her lives and the suffering she underwent this time would mean her facing less suffering in a future life. They also wished that the pain she was undergoing might diminish the sum of evil balanced against the sum of good. They also wished the poison of the scorpion in her body to purify her flesh and remove from her heart desires and ambitions.

What the speaker says in these lines about the wishes of the peasants signifies that these peasants regard this incident of her getting stung by a scorpion as a part of the punishment that has been inflicted on her for her evil deeds and that they believe that joys and sorrows come to man as the consequences of his virtuous deeds and evil deeds respectively committed during this life or in former lives.

When these peasants were seated on the floor with the speaker's mother in the center, they were not at all disturbed or worried and every face gave the impression that he knew the metaphysical facts fully well.

Then came some more neighbours with additional candles and lanterns. And with the candles and lanterns there came more insects. It was still raining and it appeared that it was not going to stop. The speaker's mother was feeling severe pain and was, consequently, twisting and groaning on a mat.

The speaker's father, even though he claimed to be a sceptic and a rationalist, was trying every curative measure he was aware of: inviting curse on the scorpion, getting the lady blessed, applying some powder, some herb, and, then, a mixture of some powder and some herb on the spot where the lady had been stung. The speaker's father went to the extent of pouring a little paraffin oil on the toe which had been stung and put a match to it with result that the flame appeared to be feeding on the lady. Even a holy man was called and he performed his rites with an incantation in order to tame the poison. The lady got relief in about twenty hours.

The lady got relief also to realize that the scorpion had stung only her and none of her children. That signifies that the lady would have suffered much more if any of her children had been stung by the scorpion. This evidences the fact that the lady has a self-sacrificing nature and cares for the well-being of her children more than for her own.

The poet records four kinds of responses to the incident of a scorpion's stinging the persona's mother: the religious-mystical response of the peasants, the rational response of the persona's father, the ritualistic response of the holy man, and the self-sacrificial response of the mother. The peasants buzz "the Name of God a hundred times/to paralyse the Evil One." This approach is based on the metaphysics that there exist in the universe two kinds of forces, namely the forces of goodness headed by God and the forces of evil headed by Satan and that in order to counter the forces of evil we need the help of God and His goodness. The peasants' wishing that the lady's sins of the previous life be burnt away, that her present suffering may decrease her suffering of the next life, that the sum of evil may be diminished by her pain, and the poison may purify her flesh of desire, signifies that according to them the lady's having been stung by a scorpion is a punishment given to her for some misdeed in the present life or in some former life. The father's trying a powder, a herb and a hybrid signifies that he has faith on allopathy and tries to neutralize the scorpion's poison inside her body with the help of antidotes. The holy man's using incantation and performing his rites is a ritualistic approach in which one resorts to praying to God to realize the desired end. The mother's thanking God for the scorpion's picking on her and sparing her children is an instinctive self-sacrificial approach as for her it is the welfare of her children that is more important than even her own welfare.

The incident proves that all the measures whether taken by religious minded people or by the rationalist father or by the holy man were exercises in futility as it takes twenty hours for the pain to subside. Twenty hours is a sufficiently long amount of time for the body to neutralize the poison injected into it by the scorpion. If any of the measures had been effective, the pain would not have taken such a long time to subside. The persona ridicules even the rationalists, as the father who is a sceptic and a rationalist, as the poet describes him, tries "every curse and blessing". If he is a rationalist, he should not believe that blessings and curses can bring any relief to a patient stung by a scorpion.

He also laughs at the superstitious view that the poison of the scorpion moves in the victim's blood with every movement of the scorpion and so it is to be killed at the earliest. The view finds expression in the following words:

*With every movement that the scorpion made
his poison moved in Mother's blood, they said.
May he sit still, they said.*

The mocking tone in the poem has rightly been resented by T.V. Reddy who says in his article "Nissim Ezekiel: Dissociation of Sensibility":

The situation is cleverly presented, but at the same time more intelligently the writer has levelled his pungent attack on the illiterate rural folk. The attack is all the more vicious because it is at once contemptuous and brutal without any remote suggestion of sympathy or empathy to the unlettered poor folk. The ignorant ideas and superstitious speculations of the villagers are cleverly but callously transformed into mathematical equations. While the sting of the scorpion loses its power after twenty hours, the sting of the poet's vitriolic pen gains its savage power.¹

1 Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed T.R.Sharma (Meerut: Shalabh; 1994), pp.143-44

The poet does not find anything positive in any of the approaches so far as the problem of scorpion-sting is concerned. That signifies that the poet is rejecting everything without offering any alternative.

The poem has been written in free verse and the lines do not rhyme. However, a large number of lines are octosyllabic interspersed with hexasyllabic lines. For instance, the lines

"was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours...."

and

"to crawl beneath a sack of rice."

are octosyllabic, while the lines

"he risked the rain again."

and

"may the sum of evil...."

are hexasyllabic.

4. 'Island' : A Critical Appreciation

Though the poet does not mention the poem which island he is writing about, yet his line "I was born here and belong" unambiguously indicates that he is writing this poem about the island of Bombay, and that he himself is the speaker here.

The island of Bombay, according to the poet, is not so good that songs should be written about it. Nor are things here sensible enough to deserve the attention of one's sense. Then the poet turns to its growth and marks that if, on the one hand, very tall buildings have come into existence here, on the other hand, slums too are spreading fast. This kind of uneven growth is reflecting the growth of the poet's mind as some of his mental faculties have developed fast while only regress is to be noted in the rest of them. The poet reflects that he has to live in this city and find what he can achieve here.

The poet does not find his life on this island a smooth-sailing: sometimes he finds things here to be beyond him to manage with the result that on such occasions he urgently seeks help from others. However, most of the time he depends on his own perception and understanding. The solutions which occur to him are usually ambiguous. The same thing in a distorted way he finds in the reactions of the people of the island. In these reactions he also finds the distorted echoes of the voice of those who are as bad as dragons though they claim to be human beings.

There come occasions when there is pleasant atmosphere and everybody on the island appears that the past, which was bad, has been buried and the future is going to be different from it. This brings stillness all around and one is at rest but even at this time activity is still going on.

In such a situation it is not possible for one to delight oneself with the realization that problems have been solved for ever and salvation has been achieved, and one cannot devote one's energies to the single task one has chosen for oneself. The persona loves the island so much that he cannot leave it: he has a claim over the island as he was born here and he belongs here. He means to say that even though the conditions prevailing on the island disturb him considerably yet he will not go elsewhere, and since he was born here and belongs here he has a right to see it to be what he likes it to be.

Since the conditions prevailing on the island are so disturbing that life cannot sail here smoothly, it is nothing less than a miracle that he discharges his daily business with swiftness and efficiency, at the same time keeping in mind the ways of the island like a good native; and while he does that he is conscious of the fact that if there is calmness in one part of the island, people are clamouring in some other part.

The poet asserts his right to see the island to be what he likes it to be, but he should also accord this right to everybody born on the land. However, if a man claims a right to be his on the ground of his birth, he must allow that right to each and everybody on that ground. If the poet's statement implies that everybody born on the island of Bombay has a right to see Bombay to be what he likes it to be, then the right does not remain one person's but becomes a right of the group as a whole.

The poem consists of five stanzas of five lines each. The poem has been written in free verse as the lines do not rhyme. The poet does not follow the rule of metre: if some lines are decasyllabic, some are hexasyllabic while some others are even octosyllabic. The line

“Unsuitable for song as well as sense”

is, for example, decasyllabic, the line

“the island flowers into slums”

is octosyllabic, while the line

“as a good native should”

is hexasyllabic. Likewise, the lines

“Bright and tempting breezes
flow across the island, ...”

are hexasyllabic.

In the last stanza of the poem when he writes:

“Even now a host of miracles
hurries me to daily business ...”

he has violated a rule of grammar. The expressions ‘a host of’ and ‘a number of’ are used as the substitutes of ‘several’ and if a noun following this adjective is plural, the verb agrees with the plural noun. In the same way since the subject in the sentence at hand is ‘miracles’ and ‘a host of’ is an adjective like ‘several’, the verb in the sentence should agree in number and person with ‘miracles’ rather than with ‘a host’. The poet seems to have treated ‘host’ as the subject and makes his verb agree with this.

5. 'The Patriot' : A Critical Appreciation

'The Patriot' is one of those poems which Nissim Ezekiel calls, 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English'. It is a satire not only on many Indians' deficient proficiency in English but also on some Indians' naive, narrow and self-justifying conception of patriotism.

First let us take the persona's deficient proficiency in English. Instead of saying: "I stand for peace ..." he says: "I am standing for peace ..."; instead of saying: "why does the world not stop fighting?" he says: "why world is fighting fighting ..." and so on. If we remove the mistakes in the poem it may take the following shape:

*I stand for peace and non-violence.
I simply do not understand
Why the world does not stop fighting
And why the people of the world
Do not become Mahatma Gandhi's followers.
The ancient Indian Wisdom is 100 % correct.
Nay, it is 200 % correct.
But the modern generation is neglecting it -
They are too much after fashion and foreign goods.
The other day I read in a newspaper
(I read the Times of India regularly
To improve my English)
How a goon
Threw a stone at Indira behn.
He is associated with student unrest, I think.
Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I say
(to myself)
Lend me your ears.
You will get everything:
Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception.
Be patient, brethren and sisters
Do you want one glass lassi ?
It is very good for digestion.
With a little salt it becomes a lovely drink,
Better than wine;
Not that I drink wine; I have not even tasted it.
I'm a teetotaller, complete! total!
But I say
Those who drink wine are drunkards,
What do you think are the prospects of world peace?
Pakistan is behaving like this
China is behaving like that,
It makes me very sad, I tell you.
Really, I find it most offensive.
All human beings are brothers, isn't it so?
Even in India:
Gujaraties, Maharashtrians, Hindi wallahs
All are brothers -
Though some have funny habits,
Yet, you tolerate me
I tolerate you,
Some day Ram Rajya is sure to come
Are you taking leave of me now?
But you will visit me again.
Come any time, any day.
I do not believe in formality,
I always enjoy your company.*

By employing irony in the poem the poet suggests that the 'Patriot' whose monologue the poem is is a naive person who does not understand how intricate the political problems are and how difficult it is to find their solutions. The persona here says he stands for peace and non-violence and is disturbed to find that people have not become the followers of Mahatma Gandhi but are engaged in fighting. If all human beings had been non-violent and peace-loving, there would not have been any need of any government. Since in spite of armies there are aggressions, and in spite of the police-force there occur incidents of robbery, murder, rape, swindling and exploitation, it is obvious that somebody's simple wish for the people to become honest and peace-loving can do nothing. It has become a cliché in India to say that one should become a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Those who say so remember Gandhi's upholding the value of non-violence but tend to forget conveniently the fact that Gandhi was primarily a fighter and that his contribution to the Indian struggle for freedom was that he produced a large number of freedom-fighters, and organized them into a disciplined political party. It is again a cliché to say that the ancient wisdom of India is the only road to salvation. It is again a cliché to bewail that in our age Indians are too much after fashion and have an obsession with foreign goods.

The persona here talks of the unrest among students in the mid-nineteen-seventies when flouting norms and university-rules had become the order of the day. It is a fact that Mrs. Indira Gandhi's face was injured when somebody hurled a piece of stone at her in Orissa in the nineteen sixties.

The 'Patriot' in the poem posits his faith in the value of universal brotherhood. But he does not pay heed to the fact that unless 'they' too have that feeling, our faith in universal brotherhood will be suicidal. It will be like Yank's going to the gorilla, under the impression that the latter is a brother, and getting killed by it. Not to speak of harbouring a feeling of universal brotherhood, people are not willing even to honour the laws of the land, even though they know that the laws are being applied uniformly over the whole country. The fact that many people tolerate one another gives the 'Patriot' a hope that some day they are going to have Ram Rajya in the country. But what is not to be forgotten is that intolerance too exists in the country and that tendencies like those of swindling, exploiting, harassing and killing have to be kept in check. Otherwise, we can never have "Ram Rajya".

6. 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' : A critical Appreciation

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* William Shakespeare finds the lover, the lunatic and the poet to be living in the world of imagination and so he puts the three together, when he says:

The lover, the lunatic and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.

In the poem 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' Nissim Ezekiel replaces the lunatic by the birdwatcher and brackets the poet, the lover and the birdwatcher together and finds the three to be alike as all the three have to wait and, in order to gain success, they cannot depend on their being up and doing and fast. There are areas where one's being speedy and remaining engaged brings one success but this is not so in the fields of composing poetry, courting a beloved and watching birds. One who studies birds does not attain success by becoming speedy in one's actions and by never becoming still. Similarly a lover has to wait and cannot attain success by forcing oneself to be swift and to remain engaged. Likewise, a poet cannot succeed in his field by becoming swift and keeping himself engaged. A poet has to wait for the right word to cross through his mind. And just as in the field of bird-watching much depends on the mood of the bird, in the field of love much depends on the mood of the beloved, and in the field of writing poetry, much depends on the right word's occurring to the poet: it may occur in a second, or it may take hours to occur. In other words, neither a poet, nor a lover, nor a bird-watcher can get things done at his will: the will of the word, the beloved and the bird too matters. A bird-watcher has to wait patiently up a hill in a relaxed mood and watch the timid bird's movements. He cannot make the bird exhibit its ways to him as and when he wants it to. He has to make the bird feel that he is not an intruder as the moment the bird feels disturbed, it will fly away and the bird-watcher will lose the bird. Likewise, a lover has to win the heart of the beloved and has to wait patiently until she comes to know that he is in love with her. The moment she comes to know that she is loved, she will take the risk of surrendering.

A poet too has to wait until his spirit has moved: he is able to say his say only when his spirit has started speaking. So long as he is using only his intellect, he should not speak as at that time his words will not be able to express what he wants to say.

The piece of advice that a bird-watcher has to be patient and has to move very slowly implies that in order to watch the rarer birds one has to go to lonely places and to the places where nature has not been disturbed by man: he may have to go to the source of a river where man has not yet disturbed the landscape or along the lanes which are no longer frequented by human beings. Likewise, a lover has to go to the dark floor of the beloved's heart and know her unexpressed desires. The beloved responds only when the lover has reached the beloved's heart which is not easy to

reach and where one may find many pricking thorn-like desires. But when the lover reaches the dark floor of the beloved's heart, he gets not only her body but the whole of her - whatever she is. According to the poet the beloved is a myth of light having darkness at the core. The poet seems to be using the image of a flame which gives light no doubt, but has darkness at the core. If it is so he likens the beloved to a flame here. If he means to say that the beloved is not light but only a myth of light having darkness at the core, he means to say that the lover is disillusioned and realizes that the beloved is not as valuable a person as he believed her to be.

The poem consists of twenty lines grouped into four stanzas of five lines each. The rhyme scheme in the first stanza is a b b a a, and in the second stanza it is a b a b b. In the second half of the poem the same pattern recurs: the rhyme scheme in the first stanza is a b b a a, and in the second stanza it is a b a b b.

The poem has been written in iambic pentameter and with a few exceptions each line is decasyllabic. The exceptions are the eleventh line, which consists of eleven syllables, and the thirteenth line, which consists of twelve syllables.

7. 'The Visitor' : A Critical Appreciation

The poem is based on a Hindu folk belief that if a crow caws at somebody's in the morning a visitor must follow. The poet justifies the folk belief in the poem but suggests that most visitors are ordinary people and that most incidents in life are ordinary.

In the opening stanza of this poem Nissim Ezekiel describes how a crow cawed three times at his widow: the crow fixed his baleful eyes on the poet's, it raised its wings slightly so as to acquire a sinister poise, its body was tense at the moment and its neck had been craned like that of a nagging woman. When the crow cawed the whole room appeared to have been filled by the crow with its voice and presence.

Since the crow cawed three times, the poet heard its voice each time. The voice made his attention turn to itself and even when he was doing something else, he was thinking of the crow's having cawed. Thus he was behaving like one who is walking while still asleep. He felt concerned for the safety of all beings and started preparing himself to deal effectively with the visitor whose visit had been signalled by the crow's cawing. He feared that the visitor would be mightier than he and that he (the visitor) would make his terms prevail over his (the poet's) terms.

The poet waited for the visitor the whole day. He had to do so because he posited his belief in the folk belief that a crow's cawing indicates that some angel disguised as a visitor would pay one a visit on that day or some temptation would come to one in an unexpected shape to test one's promises and to ruin one's sleep.

The visitor who actually paid a visit to the poet that day was an entirely different kind of person: he came empty handed (and so there was no need for one to be frightened); and he came only to while away some time in the company of the poet. Thus the visitor was a good-intentioned man and had nothing to do with anything like temptations. The poet too had a feeling of sympathy for him. They talked to each other and their talks were as light as the cigarette-smoke which they produced while talking.

Now the poet feels that he should have foreseen all this just in the morning when he heard the crow caw, as most events in life are ordinary, the extra-ordinary incidents of life being the miracles of the mind, the sex act, the seasons, and the blazing figure in the carpet.

The poem consists of five stanzas of six un-rhyming lines each. The lines of the poem have no uniformity so far as length is concerned: the opening line of the first stanza is a hexasyllabic line, while the last line of the stanza has nine syllables in it. Likewise, in the last stanza the first line is hexasyllabic, the second line is octosyllabic, the third line is octosyllabic, the fourth line has nine syllables in it, the fifth line is again octosyllabic, while the last line is decasyllabic. It appears that the poet has tried to write the poem in octosyllabic lines.

The poet employs the image of a nagging woman in order to describe the cawing crow when he says :

“And neck craned like a nagging woman's ,
Filling the room with voice and presence.”

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.54)

Just as in many of his other poems Ezekiel mocks at the ways and views of Indians, he is mocking at an Indian folk belief here. The poet seems to have a knack for finding something or the other in the day-to-day life of his countrymen deserving mockery and he readily writes a poem about it.

8. 'A Time to Change' : A Critical Appreciation

The opening poem of Nissim Ezekiel's first collection of poems *A Time to Change* (London: The Fortune Press, 1952) is a plea for one to change from the position 'With faults concealed' to the position 'With faults concealed no more'.

In the opening stanza of the poem the speaker and his fellows possess many faults: they are corrupted by the things they have imagined, their flesh is defiled by the dreams of flesh, and they are debtors to the whore of love. But since they want to attain redemption with their faults concealed, they are not going to get it. So long as the mind determines everything, the leap is never made and the music is never completed. That signifies that he regards one's resolving to change oneself and, then, achieve harmony in one's life to be the two very significant steps in life.

The persona and his fellows may be happy with what they find occurring before them, but that does not mean that that is all that can exist or can occur. According to him possibilities are unlimited and inexhaustible. The persona and his fellows are witnessing the usual things: small rain, sundry mists, half-hearted birds and dawns. But it is very likely that there will occur surprises and they will discover cities fresh as brides, new orchids or unimagined seas. Nay, what they are familiar with may reveal something unfamiliar: the oldest idiom may reveal a simile hitherto not seen, a limb may be found to be having virginal veracity and a piece of stone may show itself to be as original as it was when the world was made. Life offers infinite novelties and even if one has stopped taking interest in them one may restart doing that at any stage.

A man of God needs no creed more than having a singing voice, a talking voice, a bit of land, a woman and a child or two and the capacity to accommodate himself to the needs and moods of his woman and children. With his able hands, knowing eyes and the instructions he has received from his parents, ancestors, and friends altered slightly here and there to suit his strength, he can build something. Occasionally he has to go abroad to know the lives and dreams of men and show his deep affection for the world by speaking in such a way that he is genuinely remorseful and what he is saying is coming from his heart. So one has to be moderate in one's desires and should not harbour ambitious objectives in one's heart.

There is no possibility of a pure invention. It exists in a dream. So does the perfect poem. So does the precise communication of a thought. So does perfectly reciprocated love. So do flawless doctrines. And so does the certainty of God. The persona can only testify to what they mean. One has to consider how the persona wins redemption in the private country of his mind where the worse part presides. Dreams keep the world going. For example, the workman's dreams make him break the stone, loosen the soil, sow seed in it, and, then, wait patiently for the fruit. It is when he gets the fruit that his dreams are realized.

So what is needed for one to do is perceiving one's condition as it is as well as not concealing one's secret faults, a lighter touch, a smoother line, cutting excesses, simplicity, the going forth prepared with prayer and the timed return redeemed with prayer.

This approach will enable one to find one's aspiration again, to talk for four hours everyday, to sing praises in a singing voice, to have a bit of land and a woman, and to be rewarded with fruit, poetic metaphor and illumination.

While discussing this poem of Ezekiel Michael Garman asserts: "The title poem of the first volume, *A Time to Change*, opens with part of the message of the Spirit to the angel of the church of Laodiceans, the physical rejection of the indefinite and uncommitted man (Revelation 3.16). The poem falls into five sections, outlining a man's departure from the home; consequent desolation and the search for a new life; a look into the desired pattern of the future; a statement of the means of attaining this; and a final recognition of the need for penitential exposure of secret faults. Considered thus abstractly, the poem achieves an association of an initially secular departure from the house with a finally religious striving in the journey; the journey becomes a pilgrimage"¹

What the persona says here in terms of one's undertaking a journey also applies to a poet's undertaking the task of writing poetry. At the beginning the persona finds himself lost in temptations of the flesh and he is not able to compose. However, he begins to realize his infirmities and defects in his approach. For instance, he realizes:

*... when the mind determines everything
The leap is never made, the music
Never quite completed, redemption
Never fully won
From what has been, ...* (Journal of South-Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p.11)

He also realizes the need of one's observing things endlessly and remaining engaged in a never-ending quest. That is why he says:

*...who can say
There shall be no more surprises,
Discovery of cities fresh as brides,
Bright legends of a recent birth,
New orchids or unimagined seas?* (Ibid, pp.11-12)

¹"Nissim Ezekiel - Pilgrimage and Myth" South Asian Literature xxi, 3-4, p.210

He accepts the possibility of one's finding new meanings in a familiar idiom as he says:

*So, in our style of verse and life
The oldest idiom may reveal
A simile never seen, limbs retain
A virginal veracity and every stone
Be as original as when the world was made*

(Ibid, p.12)

The poet does not consider it essential for a poet to have his own metaphysics or ethics. What one has received in this area from one's parents, ancestors and friends is enough for one to embody in one's compositions. He says so in the lines:

*Practising a singing and a talking voice
Is all the creed a man of God requires.
He has to build something with able hands
'And knowing eyes, with some instructions
From his parents, ancestors and friends,
Altered slightly here and there to suit his strength.*

(Ibid, p.12)

His asserting that 'practising a singing and a talking voice' is the only creed one requires signifies that the poet acknowledges the importance of poetic craftsmanship and expects the poet to master it.

When he says that the perfect poem is a mere dream he signifies to say that a poet should be modest in his ambitions and should not set his goals too high. Rather he advises a poet to remain satisfied even with a composition of modest merit.

In this dramatic monologue we have a description of the degenerated persons in the first stanza in which the speaker describes himself and his comrades as:

Debtors to the whore of Love,

Corrupted by the things imagined

*Though the winter nights, alone,
The flesh defiled by dreams of flesh,
Rehearsed desire dead in spring,
How shall we return?*

(Journal of South-Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p.11)

They are pleasure-seekers as the speaker says:

*Here in April we are waiting
For passages of pure creation or simply
Girls, lightly dressed and light of heart,
Determined that the door be never shut.*

(Ibid, p.11)

The poem has been written in free verse as the poet adheres neither to the rules of metre nor to those of rhyme. If the opening line consists of nine syllables, the last line of the first stanza consists of only four syllables. Here are the relevant lines:

*'We who leave the house in April, Lord, ...
With faults concealed'.*

The second stanza opens with the decasyllabic line:

'Witness to the small rain and sundry mists, ...'

but its 9th line

'But who can say'

consists of only four syllables. The fourth section opens with the decasyllabic line

'The pure invention or the perfect poem, ...'

but it also contains the following line:

'Then I am God'

which contains only four syllables. In the last section we have the octo-syllabic line

'With secret faults concealed no more'

but it also has in it the tetrasyllabic line:

'A bit of land ...'

9. Nissim Ezekiel's Philosophy of Life

Nissim Ezekiel's poems are also the embodiments of some views about metaphysics, ethics and principles of life and so a study of these poems can enable one to arrive at what Ezekiel thinks on metaphysical, ethical and such other questions.

So far as Ezekiel's views of man's relationship with the Supreme Being and man's place in the universe are concerned, Ezekiel seems to believe that a man can know about the Supreme Being only what the Supreme Being reveals to him, and that the reality is unfathomable. These views lie embodied in his 16th hymn in which he writes:

*You are master
neither of death nor of life
Belief will not save you,
nor unbelief.
All you have
Is the sense of reality
Unfathomable
As it yields its secrets
slowly
one
by
one¹*

This assertion of his brings him close to the upholders of the theory that man cannot know more than what has been revealed to him in the field of theology. According to these theologians the Supreme Being reveals himself to man through prophets who play the role of the medium. One's efforts to know God, according to them, are not of much consequence in case God chooses not to reveal Himself to one. Nissim Ezekiel seems to be of the opinion that the man desirous to know the reality has to make efforts as in this poem the unfathomable reality "yields its secrets". The use of the word 'yield' is significant here as it signifies that the seeker is making efforts to seek. His describing reality as "unfathomable" signifies that he is an agnostic as he holds that it is beyond human intellectual capacity to understand the reality.

Ezekiel finds God's creation to be covered by numerous veils with the result that one who wants to know the universe has to remove these veils. This view of his finds embodiment in the following lines of the poem 'Theological':

*I've stripped off a hundred veils
and still there are more
that cover your Creation.
Why are you so elusive?²*

According to Ezekiel even man is hidden behind veils and it is not easy to remove all the veils and know the real man, as he writes in his poem 'Theological':

*Even as myself, my very own
incontrovertible, unexceptional
self, I feel I am disguised.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.99)

Ezekiel disagrees with Wordsworth when in 'Dilemma' he says; "I shake with intimations-/not of immortality" (Latter-Day Psalms, p.30)³, as in his 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality' Wordsworth talks of the intimations of immortality which Ezekiel rejects in 'Dilemma'. Intimations come to Ezekiel too but they are not those of immortality!

¹ Hymns of Darkness (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1976]), p.62
Hereafter the book is referred to as HD (Hymns of Darkness, p.62)

² Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4 (spring-summer 1976), p.99.
Hereafter the journal is referred to as JSAL

Ezekiel rejects sectarian approaches according to most of which one is going to be saved only if one belongs to a particular sect. He adopts the secular approach enshrined in the constitution of India according to which it is regarded as immaterial as to what one's sect is and one gets the civil rights if one is a citizen of India. Ezekiel says:

*Salvation belongeth unto the
Lord. It is not through
one or other Church.
Thy blessing is upon
all the people of the earth.*⁴

Ezekiel's assertion that 'Salvation belongeth unto the/Lord' signifies that God accords salvation to people irrespective of their churches or sects. In other words he rejects the claims of those who claim that one can attain salvation only when one is a follower of Jesus Christ as Jesus sacrificed himself in order to save man.

However, there are poems which make it evident that Ezekiel also posits his belief in mysticism for instance, when in the 12th of the 'Hymns of Darkness' he writes:

*Don't curse the darkness
since you're told not to,
but don't be in a hurry
to light a candle either.

The darkness has its secrets
which light does not know.

It's a kind of perfection
while every light
distorts the Truth.*⁵

This statement has an appeal not to the ordinary reason but to the higher reason.

Nissim Ezekiel is aware of the fact that even if one makes a detailed plan and proceeds working in accordance with it, there do occur unforeseen interferences. He calls them the doing of "a long/Arresting arm, the Unseen, the Unknown" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.24). He talks of it in his poem 'Planning'.

Ezekiel does not trust all spiritual teachers as many of them are spurious. He exposes one such teacher in his poem 'Guru' when he says that this teacher lived a life of sin in his past days, is faithless to his friends, in "ungrateful for favours done" and is greedy enough to be polite to foreigners but rude to visitors from his own country because he is likely to be given more money by the foreigners than by his own country-men. The poet finds this teacher to be

*"... over-scrupulous in checking
The accounts of the ashram".
(Hymns in Darkness, p.25)*

The details, which the poet has given, indicate the Guru's interest in his own material well being rather than in his or anybody's spiritual well-being.

In his poem 'Portrait' he ridicules a man who is "foolish still", even though he is "[n]o longer young", and is wanting in will to change himself and make improvements in his thinking. The poet further ridicules the man when he gives some other details of the man: his faith has broken, his toughened will has taken the form of sadness, and he hopes to change himself by play. The poet seems to be suggesting that one can attain improvement in the spiritual field when one discards one's follies, and has a will strong enough to improve oneself spiritually.

The poet also ridicules the healers who adopt widely divergent, nay even contradictory, approaches: some of them prohibit meat and drinks while others allow them; some prohibit sex while others allow it, but they assure everybody that God's love remains everyone's heritage and they ask everybody to get his Shakti-awakening. The poet records the healers' teachings in the following words:

³ Latter-Day Psalms (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1982]), p.30.

Hereafter the book is referred to as LDP

⁴ Latter-Day Psalms (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984 [1982]), p.40.

⁵ Hymns in Darkness (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1976]), p.59.

⁶ Essays on Nissim Ezekiel, ed. T.R.Sharma (Meerut, Shalabh, 1994) pp.161-162

*Sex is prohibited or allowed.
Meat and drink are prohibited
or allowed. Give up
everything or nothing
and be saved. The Master
knows the secret.
X X X
God's love remains your heritage.
You need not change
your way of life
Know your mantra, meditate,
release your kundalini,
get your shakti awakening
and float with the spirit
to your destination.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.14)

They seem to believe that one can get one's kundalini released simply by asking it to get released!

In his article "The Basic Simplicities of Living: An approach to Ezekiel's Poetry", G. Nageswara Rao asserts, "In a general sense one may describe his work as that of a religious philosophical poet. He is widely read and, except for Islam, one finds a pervading spirit of such different religions as Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism and Christianity in his poetry".⁶

The gulfs between Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism and Christianity are so wide that it is more than impossible to bridge them. For instance, Christianity regards man to be a sinner and holds that if a man wishes to be saved he must accept the church as his guide, while Shankaracharya, the great Hindu philosopher regards man as a manifestation of the Supreme Being Himself, meaning thereby that man is as much divine as the Supreme Being. There is so wide a gulf between these two views that there is no possibility of reconciling them. How can, then, one be a Christian and a Vedantic Hindu at the same time? Buddhism regards the teachings of Gautam the Buddha to be one's safe guide while the Zen thinkers refuse to accept Buddha's eightfold path and expect one to attain enlightenment and then to arrive at one's own conclusions. In such a situation it is impossible for one to be a Buddhist and a Zen at the same time.

G. Nageswara Rao says: "The basic simplicities of living throughout the poetry of Ezekiel appear to be his deep moral need. A desire to live life on nature's terms is almost out of the reach of only modern man, particularly the urban sophisticated man. The only possibility is to live a sane life in accordance with the basic simplicities of human nature: frankness, honesty, simplicity, truth, friendship, tenderness and love and patiently to build a life with these".⁷

However, what G. Nageswara calls "the basic simplicities of human nature" are not simple to observe and they may clash in very many situations. For instance, there are situations in which friendship drags one in one direction, honesty in the other, tenderness wants one to do one thing, truth wants him to do just its reverse, love expects a man to hush up a matter, frankness expects him to bring ugly facts to light. In such situations one has to choose between friendship and honesty, between tenderness and truth, between love and frankness. G. Nageswara Rao does not reveal as to which of such alternatives Nissim Ezekiel likes to be chosen. The fact can be illustrated by taking the example of John Dryden's drama *All for Love*, in which love expects Antony to devote himself to Cleopatra while duty expects him to go back to Octavia. Both love and duty look noble. But there is a clash between them.

Ezekiel admits that human beings have vices which they cannot get rid of and cannot acquire virtues they do not have. But since it is his nature to behave like that, it must be so because man has been made to be so. And so it is the Maker rather than man that is responsible for this state of affairs. That is why the poet regards it as God's duty to rescue man. He says so in the second of the 'Poster Prayers' when he prays:

*The vices I've always had
I still have
The virtues I've never had
I still do not have
From this Human Way of Life
Who can rescue Man*

⁷ Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma op.cit, p.162

*If not his Maker?
Do thy duty, Lord!*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.133)

He calls prayer “Transcendental Speech” (Ibid, p.54) and says:

*This much is true: to pray is good,
To go the way of dispossession,
To be alone, without desire, ...*

(Ibid, p.54)

He recommends prayer even for evil-tongued persons and rejects nothing but indifference as he says:

*“Guard my tongue from evil”
Is a prayer within the reach
Of evil tongues. Indifference
Alone is unredeemable.
The rest is faith, belief and truth
Pursued, at any rate, in prayer*

(Ibid, p.54)

Ezekiel regards prosperity as a desirable thing and likes to be rich even though Jesus Christ says that a rich man cannot enter the gate of heaven even if a camel can go through the eye of a needle. Ezekiel prays:

*Let me be, O Lord,
The Camel of the Higher Income Group
Who passes smoothly through
The eye of that needle.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.134)

Knowledge is another thing he considers desirable and prays to his Lord:

*Give me as much knowledge
as I need, and then some more.
The extra slice or two
from your bread of love and truth
is only for my greed.
You know what lies beyond my hunger.
Overlook, O Lord, my love of food.*

(Ibid, p.136)

Ezekiel has realized that wisdom lies in one’s having respect for the near and affection for the familiar,⁸ as in his 18th Poster Prayer he says:

*Respect for the near
affection for the familiar,
these I have learnt
late but not too late.
Let me never lose them, Lord.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.137)

If one has no respect for the near, one becomes alienated because one always finds oneself with the near and never with the remote. Likewise, he unfamiliar is beyond one’s reach and so if one likes to be loved one must have affection for the familiar.

Ezekiel believes that it is essential for people to change, even though he holds that sanity wants man not to change. He says so in his poem ‘Dilemma’ when he says:

*“Change, they say,
or die of sanity”*

(Latter Day Psalm, p.30)

What he says here is tantamount to saying that life wants man to change and so one who wants life to go on will have to change. Want of change is synonymous with death even though it is sane to remain unchanged.

Adversities and misfortunes visit a man, according to Ezekiel, to teach him truths. That is why he invites God to send him misfortunes and says:

*Kick me around
a bit more, O Lord.
I see at last*

⁸ This view lies embodied also in Leo Tolstoy’s story ‘Three Questions’ in which a wise man tells a king that the person with whom you are is the most important person for you.

*there's no other way
for me to learn
your simplest truths.*

(JSAL, IX, 3-4, p.133)

Ezekiel posits faith in the natural process which revives a man's energy by making him just sleep. He does so in his poem 'Process' where he says:

*Just when you give up
the whole process
begins again
and you are as pure
as if you had confessed
and received absolution.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.117)

When a man is tired he simply goes to sleep and when he gets up next morning he is fresh even though he has done nothing to regain that freshness. It is a miracle according to the poet and he says:

*You have done nothing
to deserve it,
you have merely slept
and got up again,
feeling fine
because the morning is fine;
sufficient reason surely
for faith in a process
that can perform such miracles
without assistance from you,*

(Ibid, p.117)

But if a man assists the process, it can do wonders. So the poet exclaims:

*Imagine what it would do
with a little assistance from you!*

(Ibid, p.117)

10. Ezekiel as a poet of the Fallen World

The subject matter of Ezekiel's poetry is the fallen world and in his poem 'After Reading a Prediction' he says:

*I seek on firmer ground
to improvise my later fiction,
the fallen world
a faithful friend.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.97)

He calls the fallen world a faithful friend perhaps because it always provides him one or the other subject to write about.

Man, as delineated by Ezekiel in his poem 'What Frightens Me', is far from being virtuous: he pretends to be good but practises simulation and dissimulation, he makes vows to break, commits shameful deeds but rationalises all that he does, and conceals his wicked self behind a pleasing face. He writes:

*I have long watched myself
Remotely doing what I had to do,
At times ashamed but always
Rationalising all I do,
I have heard the endless silent dialogue
Between the self-protective self
And the self naked,
I have seen the mask
And the secret behind the mask.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.57)

That means his view of man is different from that of Wordsworth according to whom "Trailing clouds of glory [do men] come from God who is our home" ('Immortality Ode'). If for Wordsworth man comes from God, for Ezekiel man comes from Satan. The gulf between what one pretends to be and what one is is so wide that the uncertainty of its final shape frightens him.

Ezekiel's men do not hesitate in resorting to the use of lying, and flattering in order to attain their goals, and even their

goals too are, in many cases, wicked. For instance, the speaker in the poem 'The Couple' resorts to lying, and flattering in order to achieve a wicked end as the poet narrates:

*As for him-
he knew he was lying,
but then how else
could he hope to win her?
The flattery and the bold advances
were necessary after all,
the minimum politics of survival and success.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.90)

Many men who claim to be human beings are, according to him, dragons. Such men appear in his poem 'Island' in which he says:

*I hear distorted echoes
of my own ambiguous voice
and of dragons claiming to be human.* (Ibid, p.101)

Ezekiel finds degeneration to be wide-spread. Sickness in his poetry is not confined to one or two individuals, he finds it to be rampant in the whole society. In his poem 'family' he says that sickness is not confined to one or another member of the family but everybody is sick here. The speaker in this poem says to a psychiatrist:

*Let father go to Rajneesh Ashram,
Let mother go to Gita classes,
What we need is meditation.
Need to find our roots, Sir.
All of us are sick, Sir.* (LDP, p.29)

In his poem 'The Great' he enlists not only the strengths but also the weaknesses of the great persons. When he writes:

*The great are strong upon the printed page,
Subtle where the world is gross, innocent
When knowledge by itself would lead to evil,
Delicate and stoically beautiful
In facing uncouth physical realities
And in their emulation free from parody* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.19)

he declares the great to be subtle, innocent, delicate, and stoically beautiful in facing the difficulties of life. But when he adds:

*The great are egoistic, sensual,
Self-sacrificing, self-controlled, unique
And universal, lovable and damnable,
Selfish and sympathetic, married happily
And sex-frustrated, listen to the voice
O God who favours them, and play the host
To all the devil's favourite sons and daughters,
Daring in the vigour of their cowardice
And in their shameful failures dignified.* (Ibid, p.19)

no doubt, he states that if the great persons are self-sacrificing, self-controlled, lovable sympathetic, daring, and dignified, but he also says that they are, at the same time, egoistic, sensual, damnable, selfish, and cowardly. This signifies that Ezekiel does not like one to follow a great man blindly because that great man is not free from weaknesses. On the contrary, he wants one to realize that one has to understand life on one's own by exposing oneself to life. He wants one to realise that great men cannot make one great, and for that one has to depend on one's exposure to life. Ezekiel associates some weaknesses with some communities. For instance, he finds the Hindus to be unruly and wanting in sophistication. He does so, for example, when he writes in his poem 'Background, Casually':

*I grew in terror of the strong
But undernourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.*

*One noisy day I used a knife.
 X X X
 All Hindus are
 Like that, my father used to say,
 When someone talked too loudly, or
 Knocked at the door like the Devil.
 They hawked and spat. The sprawled around. (Hymns in Darkness, pp.11-12)*

The Hindus, as Ezekiel describes them here, talk too loudly, knock at the door by beating it too hard, clear the throat too noisily and spit, and lie with their limbs spread out ungraciously. As a matter of fact, no Hindu scripture instructs one to be too noisy or ungraceful and the follower of any religion can be ungraceful or too noisy provided they are not adequately sophisticated. That is why the poet is giving expression to nothing but his prejudices here.

The Christian boys, according to the poet, regard every Jew as a murderer of Jesus. In the poem 'Background, Casually' he says:

*I went to Roman Catholic school
 A mugging Jew among the wolves.
 They told me I had killed the Christ,
 That year I won the scripture prize. (Hymns in Darkness, p.97)*

Since the boy wins the scripture prize it is evident that he has read his scripture carefully. Yet the Christians judge him as a representative of the Jewish community and charge the whole community with having killed Jesus.

The Christian and the Muslim boys, according to him, cheat, bully and steal. About them he writes:

*The Roman Catholic Goan boys
 The White-washed Anglo-Indian boys
 The muscle-bound Islamic boys
 Were earnest in their prayers.
 They copied, bullied, stole in pairs
 They bragged about their love affairs
 They carved the tables, broke the chairs
 But never missed their prayers. (Latter-Day Psalms, p.97)*

These boys' indulging in copying, bullying, stealing and carrying on love affairs evidences the fact that they are lax in their morals. It is surprising that inspite of being earnest in their prayers their morals are lax and they have no scruples.

Drinking whisky is another practice in which the Anglo-Indian gentlemen and Muslims indulge in these poems even though they also pray. The poet records:

*The Anglo-Indian gentlemen
 Drank whisky in some Jewish den
 With Muslims slowly creeping in
 Before or after prayers. (Latter-Day Psalms, p.51)*

Since these people cannot abstain from alcoholic drinks inspite of the fact that they are earnest in their prayers, either they are so bad that they are incorrigible or their prayers do not urge them to keep away from such drinks.

Ezekiel does not refrain from exposing and ridiculing even the Jews and reports some of them to be eating pork, and swearing and drinking on the Sabbath day, as in his poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' he records:

*Even the most orthodox, it was said, ate beef because it
 was cheaper, and some even risked their souls by relishing pork.
 The Sabbath was for betting and swearing and drinking (Latter-Day Psalms, p.18)*

The poet finds people having no belief in the Jewish rituals which are observed at the time of a marriage, as in the poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' he records:

*I don't think there was much
 that struck me as solemn or beautiful.
 Mostly, we were amused, and so were the others.
 Who knows how much belief we had? (Latter-Day Psalms, p.97)*

The poet seems to be suggesting that people embrace vices even when they observe the rituals of Islam, Christianity or Judaism.

A large number of characters in his poems are lax in morals. For instance, when twenty-three people representing six countries assemble to celebrate the year's end, most men indulge in flirting and enjoy it, as he reports:

*The men are quite at home
among the foreign styles
(what fun the flirting is!),
I myself, decorously,
press a thigh or two in sly innocence.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p.51)

The English boss in the 4th section of the poem makes the lady a victim of his immoral advances as is indicated by her being "in disarray" and the report that her hard struggle had not been "altogether successful":

*At the second meeting
In the large apartment
After cold beer and the music on,
She sat in disarray.
The struggle had been hard
And not altogether successful.
Certainly the blouse
Would not be used again.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p.52)

The persona and his companions go to the hotel in the poem 'At the Hotel' to see the Cuban dancer who comes with her upper half body uncovered and a little later uncovers even the lower half. In the poem 'Motives' the speaker is so much interested in his beloved's body that he dwells on all the details and says:

*I dwell on it
as on a landscape
or a beloved painting.
Not the total form only
but the details interest me.* (JSAL XI, 3-4, p.96)

He is lecherous as are the speakers in the 'Nude poems'.

Ezekiel is aware of the fact that it is not only difficult but even impossible for many a man to avoid temptations and even when one resolves to resist them, the moment one meets baits one falls for them. He describes this condition of man in his poem 'Transparently' which has the ring of a confessional poem:

*The most painful
confrontation
makes me happier
but I still rush off
in every direction at once
and fall for every bait
It is a falling____
a most terrible thing.
And what one learns
is not all that important
because one has learnt it
already, over and over again* (JSAL XI, 3-4, p.87-88)

It is a commonly held view that one learns from one's experiences. But Ezekiel is of the opinion that one's learning from experiences fails to save one from baits. The poet evinces here that one falls for baits repeatedly and even bitter experiences fail to make one refrain from falling for baits.

A similar person has been delineated in the 11th of the 'Poster Poems'

*From theorising to practice
From illusion to reality
From folly to wisdom
And back to theorising*

*Illusion and folly
Has been my way, O Lord
Forgive me.*

(Ibid, p.135)

This man is incorrigible.

Nissim Ezekiel writes in his 'Latter-Day Psalms' No.2: "Save us from ourselves" (Latter-Day Psalms,p.40). The statement indicates that the poet is aware of the fact that it is one's own thoughts and misdeeds that harm one more than the misdeeds of others, and that it is one's own sinful thoughts which lie at the root of one's ruin. In his poem 'Transparently' the speaker is a man who is being oppressed by himself and says:

*It's fantastic
what a slave
a man can be
who has nobody
to oppress him
except himself.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.87)

While Karl Marx found industrialists oppressing the proletariat, in Ezekiel's poem one is being oppressed by oneself as one refuses to change oneself and repeatedly submits to temptations. That is why he says:

*Light is the opposite
of heavy and of darkness.
I have always
consciously
loved the word
and all it stood for__
yet more than half my hours
are heavy and dark.
Compared to my mind
rocks are reasonable,
clouds are clear.*

(Ibid, p.87)

What can one do when one's mind is not even as reasonable as rocks?

However, Ezekiel believes that if one is willing to change oneself one can become different and both social and individual miseries will decrease, if not wither away completely. He believes that it is one's ego that stands as a barrier between one and the people around one, and that if one forgets oneself and connects oneself with others with the feelings of love and service like Mother Theresa, one's feelings will be responded to. He says so in his poem 'Minority Poem':

*Everyone understands
Mother Theresa; her guests
die visibly in here arms.
It's not the mythology
that you need to know,
It's the will to pass
through the eye of a needle
to self-forgetfulness.*

(Ibid,p.143)

Ezekiel likes one to commit oneself to the well-being of the society one lives in. He says:

*And you, uneasy
orphan of their racial
memories, merely
polish up your alien
techniques of observation,
while the city burns.*

(Ibid, p.143)

What is the use of your polishing up your alien techniques if the city is burning and you are doing nothing to save it? When the city is burning it is one's duty as a citizen to extinguish the fire, or, at least, to do one's bit to extinguish it.

The poet is conscious of the fact that in order to achieve a goal efforts have to be made. The fact comes to light when we read his poem 'Lawn'. In the poem he says that often we take things for granted and tend to turn a blind eye to

the fact that one can get a desired end by putting in a lot of effort. The poet ridicules such thoughtless people, who may even be proud of their knowledge, when he writes in his poem 'Lawn':

My knowledge

*never looked
beneath its nose
to learn
how lawns are made.
I thought
grass grows
as Topsy grew
Not so.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.113)

Ezekiel considers both labour and patience essential for an achievement. This view of his lies embodied again in his poem 'Lawn' in which he writes:

My knowledge

*never looked
beneath its nose
to learn
how lawns are made.
I thought
grass grows
as Topsy grew
not so.
Before I am
awake
a back is bent
across a brown
and barren
patch of earth,
the soil
requiring
not only water
and seed
but patience at the root____
the gentle art
of leaving things alone*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.113)

It is the labourer with his back bent against a patch of earth that makes it possible for a lawn to come into existence. No doubt, there are a large number of writers who have stressed the importance of labour. They include Karl Marx and Mohandas K.Gandhi. But Ezekiel stresses the importance of patience, as a reward does not always come immediately after labour has been done. After sowing the seed one has to wait for weeks. The poet writes;

*For weeks
this earth
is like prophet
who will not give a sign.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.113)

If one finds one's patience exhausted during this period of 'weeks' one is likely to get frustrated. Frustration in such cases can be avoided, according to Ezekiel, if one remains patient for an adequate period.

Ezekiel does not approve of poor people's resorting to begging but likes them to be respectful enough to make themselves useful to their fellow men and earn thereby. This view finds embodiment in his poem 'The Truth about Dhanya'. The man is old weak and, perhaps, ailing but he is respectful enough not to beg as he "isn't out in the streets, begging" (JSAL XI, 3-4, p.139). His ways have been recorded in the following lines of the poem:

*He cannot
stand upright
or walk without pain,*

*does odd jobs
for the ten families
of The Retreat, collects
a few coins every day,
uses them for tea
and smoking.*

(Ibid, p.139)

What is remarkable about this old man is that he is content with what he gets, as the poet reports:

*Given food, he eats,
otherwise he goes without
Quite a cheerful chap, really.*

(Ibid, p.139)

How happy life can become for both the haves and have-nots if they have the relationship which prevails between the ten families of The Retreat and Dhanya, namely:

*We look after him
and he makes himself useful.*

(Ibid, p.139).

11. India in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

India as depicted in Nissim Ezekiel's poetry is a country of infirm, deficient, irrational and superstitious people who find the problems of life to be too intricate for them, and the poet seems to be trying to laugh them into honesty, sincerity, efficiency and wisdom. Here is a passage, for example, from his poem 'In India':

*Always in the Sun's eye.
Here among the beggars.
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and God.
Burnt-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal,
All in nosy silence
Suffering the place and time....¹*

The poet is drawing his readers' attention to the miseries of poverty people are encountering: there are people who beg and depend for their bread on charity; there are people who cannot afford to buy a bed under a roof at night and sleep on the pavements; there are people who dwell in slums and cannot afford to have a better dwelling house. When he talks of burnt-out mothers he may be talking of people's burning widows as satis. And when he mentions "frightened virgins" he might be talking of the girls who fear goons, rogues and aggressors.

He attacks the judicial practices of India in his poem 'Undertrial Prisoners' as in this poem he writes about an undertrial prisoner who has been living in a jail (for a crime which perhaps was committed ten years ago) because he is not in a position to pay. Delaying justice that long is denying justice. Nay, it is doing injustice. The state is not going to compensate the loss in case he is found innocent. The state is not going to compensate the loss in case he is found innocent. Even if he is not innocent and has committed the crime, in case the punishment for the crime is imprisonment for only one year, who will give him the period of nine years which he has lost in prison? The key stanza of the poem reads as follows:

*Thousands like him
who did something wrong
five years ago or may be ten
they don't know when
they were offered bail
but didn't have the money
so they live in jail*

(LDS, pp.26-27)

He exposes the hypocrisy of political leaders when he writes in the poem 'The Double Horror':

¹ Nissim Ezekiel, Latter-Day Psalms (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984),p.50

*Unpolitical I still embrace the sterile
Whore of private politics, sign a manifesto,
Call a meeting. work on committees; I agree
Something must be done but secretly rejoice
When fifty thousand Chinese have been killed,
I who, as a child, wept to see a rat destroyed.*

(Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p.14)

The man who as a child wept at the killing of a rat rejoices at the killing of fifty thousand Chinese!

In his poem "The Truth about the Floods" Ezekiel exposes some students' desire to be regarded as altruists. These students distribute biscuits to some flood-victims so that they may get themselves photographed while doing that. The poet shows all this in the following stanza of the poem:

*'Don't make a noise'
said the students
'sit down in a circle'.
The villagers sat down in a circle.
They did not say another word.
The transistor was on,
the biscuits were distributed,
the camera clicked,
Then the students left
humming the tune
of a popular Hindi film song ...³*

Ezekiel also ridicules the middle class people for their petty ambitions: they like their sons to get administrative jobs and to own personal motor cars. A retired professor is happy to note:

*By God's grace, all my children,
Are well settled in life,
One is Sales Manager
One is Bank Manager,
Both have cars.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.23)

It is the financial security that each of the children has acquired and the father is happy to note that each of them is leading a financially comfortable life.

Tempting advertisements inducing readers to buy or serve make people corrupt, according to the poet, and these corrupt people are likely to corrupt others. This view of the poet has been embodied in the poem 'The Double Horror' in which he writes

*I am corrupted by the world, ...
Posters selling health and happiness in bottles,
Large returns for small investments, in football pools
Or self-control, sixty easy lessons for a pound,
Holidays in Rome, for writing praise of toothpastes,
The jungle growth of what so obviously intends
To suck life from life, leaving you and me corrupted.⁴*

Newspapers, cinemas, radio features and the like evidence the fact that there is a jungle growth of industrial products which are advertised with tempting promises so that they may sell well, with the result that most people are corrupted and this corruption is likely to become seminal. The poet is of the view that one who is corrupt must corrupt others, as he says:

*Corrupted by the world I must infect the world
With my corruption. This double horror holds me
Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake, denounced
Only by myself, to others harmless, hero,
Sage, poet, conversationalist, connoisseur*

³ Nissim Ezekiel, *Hymns in Darkness* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1976]), p.20

⁴ Nissim Ezekiel 'The Double Horror', *Journal of South Asian Literature* XI, 3-4 (Spring, Summer 1976), p.14

*Of coffee, guide to modern Indian Art
Or Greek antiquities.*

(Ibid, p.14)

Since the people regard this corrupt man as a sage, he poses a genuine threat to their innocence!

The poems in Ezekiel's Latter-Day Psalms evidence that fact that this poet regards the present age as the time of decay and degeneration. According to him this is the age in which the ungodly are as mighty as the godly ones, and if the godly cannot be removed easily, even the ungodly cannot be removed. This view of the poet lies embodied in the following lines from the first of the 'Latter-Day Psalms':

*The ungodly are in the same condition,
no more like the chaff
which the wind driveth away
than the godly.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.39)

The sinners, according to him, are so clever that they disguise themselves and join the congregation of the righteous, as he says:

*In the congregation
of the righteous, the sinners
are well disguised. Do not seek
to count them.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.39)

Since he forbids the reader to seek to count the sinner, he is suggesting that their number is quite large. According to him the present age is the age in which one is not willing to regard the Lord as one's shepherd and asks: "Is the Lord my Shepherd?" (Latter-Day Psalms, p.41). Nor is one prepared to accept the assurance that one will not want, and ask: "Shall I not want?" (Ibid, p.41).

Ezekiel attacks the practice of releasing the under-trials on bail in case they have money and not-releasing them in case they have no money. He does so in his poem "Undertrail Prisoners" when he says:

*Let me show you, friends
a man in jail,
they offered him bail
but he didn't have the money
so he lives in jail*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.26)

Thus one's richness gives one an extra-advantage over the person who is not rich and so the practice must give a boost to people's desire to have money and they are likely to use any means, good, bad or indifferent, to enrich themselves.

The government officials, according to Nissim Ezekiel, are the people who have been alienated from the masses of the country. In the poem 'The Truth about the Floods' the flood-affected people refuse to talk to a man under the impression that he is a government official: they talk to him only when he has convinced them that he is not a government official, as he reports:

*I arrived at Arde
but the villagers wouldn't talk to me
till I told them I wasn't a government official.⁵*

The poet finds that these officials' reports are not trust-worthy as he writes:

*Meet any official,
he will claim his district
sub-division or block
is the "worst-hit",
with statistics of relief-work.*

(Ibid, p.19)

Only one district could have been worst-hit. So the officials were either exaggerating facts or did not know the meaning of the expression 'worst-hit'.

Since Nissim Ezekiel stands for the planned development of a city and holds that it is the want of planning that is responsible for people's not being able to lend healthful lives and then going to healers. This view of his finds expression in his poem "Healers" in which he writes:

⁵ Nissim Ezekiel, Hymns in Darkness (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1976], p.21

*The unplanned city has a death-wish:
everybody is in the business, buying cures,
so the healers come in droves.
Their incantations hang
in the polluted air.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.14)

Since the city has not been planned, it has a death-wish and the air is polluted, the inhabitants of the city are bound to be ailing with the result that healers come here in droves. And the healers suggest contradictory remedies, as the poet reports:

*It does not matter
if your marriage is arranged.
It does not matter
if you cannot love your wife.
It does not matter
if you teach or advertise.
God's love remains your heritage.
You need not change
your way of life.
Know your mantra, meditate,
release your kundalini,
get your shakti awakening
and float with the spirit
to your destination.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.14)

Nissim Ezekiel's approach is that of a rationalist who refuses to trust the healers suggesting to the ailing people not to change their way of life but awaken their shakti. The persona in most of Nissim Ezekiel's poems is an alienated man. He can sympathise neither with the Hindus, nor with the Muslims, nor with the Roman Catholics. So far as the Hindus are concerned, they, according to him, do not possess adequate proficiency in English, are under-nourished and are not sophisticated in the manners, as he writes in his poem 'Background, Casually':

*I grew in terror of the strong
But under-nourished Hindu lads,
Their prepositions always wrong,
Repelled me by passivity.
X X X
All Hindus are
Like that, my father used to say,
When someone talked too loudly, or
Knocked at the door like the Devil,
They hawked and spat. They sprawled around.
(Hymns to Darkness, p.11-12)*

The Roman Catholics, according to him, regard all the Jews as the murderers of Jesus Christ, as he writes:

*I went to Roman Catholic school
A mugging Jew among the wolves.
They told me I had killed the Christ,
That year I won the scripture prize.
(Hymns to Darkness, pp.11)*

He finds the Roman Catholics and the Muslims to be loose in their morals as they unabashedly carry on illicit love affairs and indulge in immoral acts like stealing in his poem 'In India':

*The Roman Catholic Goan boys
The white washed Anglo-Indian boys
The muscle bound Islamic boys
Were earnest in their prayers.
They copied, bullied, stole in pairs
They bragged about their love affairs
They carved the tables, broke the chairs ...* (Latter-Day Psalms, pp.50-51)

The poet's alienation in India finds embodiment in a large number of his poems. For instance, in 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' he is ridiculing the Indian users of English for their inadequate proficiency in English, as in the poem 'The Patriot' he makes the 'patriot' say:

*I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.22)

and suggests thereby that the Indian users of English use the progressive aspect even when the indefinite aspect is needed, and often transliterate the native expressions into English without paying heed to the rules of English, and so on.

This inability of the poet to adjust himself with the conditions prevailing around him has been described as Ezekiel's alienation in India by M.K.Naik in his article "Nissim Ezekiel and Alienation" when he writes: "A clear perception of all these considerations should help [one] assess the role of alienation in Ezekiel's poetry and the measure of success attained by him in coming to terms with it. Ezekiel's background itself provides a copy-book example of social and cultural alienation, the story of which is told in 'Background Casually' ... It is likewise obvious that as an exclusively urban-based native poet born and bred in westernised surroundings in his "bitter native city" of Bombay, Ezekiel cannot naturally have the kind of inwardness with the traditional Indian ethos which some of his fellow-poets, more fortunate in this respect, can legitimately claim to possess".⁶

T.R.Sharma calls it his tension when he writes: "This double impulse splits his personality, creates tension between the 'poetic-self' and the context and imparts a kind of inhibition to his poetry ... Ezekiel's tension results from his awareness of a gap between himself, his language and his environment. The way he dramatizes the tension between the urban and the primal to reconcile the contradictions with the help of an aesthetic strategy, sets forth his consciousness of the gap between himself and his environments, his 'un-Indian root' and the context."⁷

Ezekiel does not regard himself as an alienated person and asserts that he is an Indian and that he loves India, as he writes: "In the India which I have presumed to call mine, I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness that Mr. Naipaul discovered. I am not a Hindu and my background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian. When I was eighteen, a friend asked me what my ambition was. I said with the naive modesty of youth, 'To do something for India'"⁸

He adds, "India is simply my environment. A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India."⁹

In his poem 'Background, Casually', too he declares that he has made his commitments to stay where he is. He says:

*The Indian landscape sears my eyes
I have become a part of it
To be observed by foreigners.
They say that I am singular;
Their letters overstate the case.*

*I have made my commitments now
This is one: to stay where I am,
As others choose to give themselves
In some remote and backward place.*

My backward place is where I am. (Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p.86)

Ezekiel claims that he is not as harsh a critic of India as V.S.Naipaul in his book "An Area of Darkness" (Andre Deutsch, 1964) is. As a matter of fact Ezekiel defends India in face of the charges levelled by Naipaul as is evidenced by his article 'Naipaul's India and Mine' published in Imprint (1965). Ezekiel writes: "... in Naipaul's India, 'the clerk will not bring you a glass of water even if you faint.' In my India, a clerk will do virtually anything for you if he is treated humanely."¹⁰

⁶ Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma (Meerut: Shallabh, 1994) p.54

⁷ T.R.Sharma, "Nissim Ezekiel's Two Voices: A Study of His Early Poetry" Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma op.cit., pp.60-61

⁸ Naipaul's India and Mine", J.South Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p.203

Ezekiel also rejects Naipaul's assertion that in India European engineers are paid much more than Indian engineers and one is likely to be rejected in interviews because one does not own a car. Ezekiel's comment on this assertion of Naipaul is: "In my India, engineers trained abroad, provided they have what it takes, advance rapidly, buy a car before they can afford it because advancement is certain, land superior jobs even if they don't have a car and are given one by the firm, with an allowance for maintenance."¹¹

But the fact remains that Nissim Ezekiel is critical of much in India as he says: "... I see India in most ways as Naipaul see[s] her. All that he says against the grossness and squalor of Indian life, the routine ritualism, the lip service to high ideals, the petrified and distorted sense of cleanliness, and a thousand other things, all this is true."¹²

At another place in the same write-up he says: "I am incurably critical and sceptical. That is what I am in relation to India also."¹³

Thus Nissim Ezekiel is certainly different from poets like Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu and K.R.Srinivas Ainger in the sense that while Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu and K.R.Srinivas Ainger draw attention to India's glorious past and write about Savitri, Sita, Damayanti, Kanki and Indian weavers and palanquin bearers, Nissim Ezekiel draws attention to the realistic aspects of Indian life and writes about the flood-affected people, who have been disgusted with the behaviour of the government officials so much that they do not even talk to a person until he declares he is not a government official, wanton women, the Hindu boys, who have not acquired adequate proficiency in English, the Christian boys, who are prejudiced against the Jews, the Muslim boys, who talk of their love-affairs, the Jews who do not take their religious practices seriously, and the like, and indicates thereby that all is not well and what exists stands in need of much improvement.

12. Marriage and Married Life in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

Nissim Ezekiel has written several poems about marriage and married life. For example, 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' is one, and 'Marriage' is another. In most of them he evinces that marriage promises happiness to both the husband and wife and also to their parents. In the poem 'Marriage', for example, he writes:

*Lovers, when they marry, face
Eternity with touching grace.
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.62)

It is in this poem that he draws attention to the fact that a marriage is spoiled by the 'Mark of Cain' meaning thereby that it is the disturbance of the norms that poisons the sweet relations between the husband and his wife. The poet writes:

*However many times we came
Apart, we came together. The same
Thing over and over again,
Then suddenly the mark of Cain
Began to show on her and me.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.62)

Usually the husband and the wife in his poems are devoted to each other and their children. For example, in the poem 'Night of the Scorpion', the husband devotedly takes care of his wife who has been stung by a scorpion as the persona says:

*My father, sceptic, rationalist,
trying every curse and blessing
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid,*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p.49)

Ezekiel stands for a true and full companionship between a husband and his wife, rather than a partial one, as he writes in the poem 'To a Certain Lady':

⁹ Ibid, p.203

¹⁰ J. South Asian Literature XXI, 3-4, p.196

¹¹ Ibid, p. 199

¹² "Naipaul's India and Mine" Journal of South Asian Literature XXI, 3-4, p.201

¹³ Ibid, p.204

*Destroying or creating, moving on or standing still,
 Always we must be lovers,
 Man and wife at work upon the hard
 Mass of material which is the world,
 Related all the time to one another and to life,
 Not merely keeping house and paying bills
 And being worried when the kids are ill.* (JSAL XI, 3-4, p.23)

Marriage brings two persons together, he asserts, not merely to keep the house, to pay bills and to worry about the welfare of their children. Marriage, brings the two together to relate themselves to each other and to work together on the mass of material called the world. Such relating will make them a husband and his wife in the true sense of the words and will also make it easy for them to work upon the hard mass called the world.

In the same vein he declares in his poem 'For Her':

*The more you love
 The less you burn away.* (JSAL XI, 3-4, p.48)

Thus he finds love to have a positive effect on the lover.

But in the poem 'Song to Be Shouted Out', the relations between the husband and his wife have no sweetness in them: the wife charges the husband with doing nothing all day and the husband holds that a wife exists merely to shout at the husband. How the wife shouts at him has been reported in the opening stanza:

*I come home in the evening
 'and my wife shouts at me;
 Did you post that letter?
 Did you make the telephone call?
 Did you pay that bill?
 What do you do all day?* (Latter-Day Psalms, p.27)

And the helpless husband concludes: "Shout at me, woman!/What else are wives for?" (Ibid, p.27). In the poem 'Monsoon Madness' he finds his wife's and children's breathing "adding to the chill" caused by the incessant monsoon rain (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.56). There are people who take shelter from the chill of misfortune in the warmth that wife and children provide to one. There are people like Jim and Della (In O'Henry's story "The Gift of the Magi") who delight in giving happiness to their life-partners at the cost of their own happiness. But such husbands and wives do not figure in Ezekiel's poems.

13. Ezekiel as a Poet of Love

Nissim Ezekiel has written many love poems. They include 'Nudes 1978', 'And God Revealed', 'To a Certain Lady', 'An Affair', 'For Her', 'Declaration', 'In the Queue', 'Conclusion', 'Night and Day', 'For Love's Record', 'In Twenty-four Lines', and 'Poem of the Separation'.

He seems to believe, as he says in his poem 'Night and Day', that "[t]he poet calls his spade a spade" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.58) and that must be the reason why he is candid and straightforward in his love poems. What is noticeable about them is that the poet frequently talks of the organs of the body and several times the poems become pornographic. This is so not only in 'Nudes 1978' but also in poems like 'To a Certain Lady'. The lovers in his poems appear to be primarily interested in carnal pleasures.

The lover in most love poems of Ezekiel is a sensual person who is avid of the pleasures of the flesh and finds physical attraction irresistible. The lover in the poem 'In the Queue' is a person of that kind. He is attracted to find that "[h]er skin is warm and golden brown" (JSAL, p.52) This lover will not accept a deprivation! Likewise, the lover in the poem 'Conclusion' regards the activities associated with love as the "true business of living" as he says:

The true business of living is seeing, touching, ... (Ibid, p.53)

This lover puts women in the same category as trees, tables, waves, cats, birds and buildings when he says:

*Searching for the point of it,
 The meaning and the mood, one learns
 Over and over again the same thing:
 That women, trees, tables, waves and birds,
 Buildings, stones, steamrollers,
 Cats and clocks* (Ibid, p.53)

It is in the second stanza of the poem 'Declaration' that Ezekiel expresses the feelings of a lover who is bent upon possessing his beloved. In such a state of mind his lover believes that "possession is necessary", and "deprivation is desolation". Nay, he flouts all rules of morality as he says:

*No moral law can fill the void,
Deaf and blind to all is appetite.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.51)

In the poem 'In the Queue' he delineates the situation when tempting circumstances make one violate gentlemanly manners and loses self-restraint:

*The sky is clear, the wind is mild,
The world is as a little child.
But Adam in the busy street
Is tempted to be indiscreet.
Now savage red, now mildly pink,
Are thoughts I cannot help but think* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.52)

This love restricts the lover to the beloved and makes him apathetic to his duties as a citizen. For instance, in his poem 'Poem of Separation' the lover remains undisturbed by the bursting of bombs in Kashmir as he says to his beloved:

*To judge by memory alone
our love was happy
when the bombs burst in Kashmir;
my life had burst
and merged in yours.
The war did not matter
though we tried to care,
the season, time and place
rejected their usual names.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.111)

This is the state in which the lover and the beloved care for nothing but each other.

Ezekiel is conscious of the fact that love is very rewarding and that love confers on one much more than one can dream of, as in his poem 'And God Revealed' the lover says to the beloved:

*... the world of love confers on us
Plenty beyond our most fantastic dreams,
Approves our state and will not let us go
To cheat our destinies of all but love, ...* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.20)

In the fifth section of the poem 'To a Certain Lady' too there lies embodied the view that love is not an end in itself. Rather the lover wants to die for a cause and wants love to help him in realizing this end. He says:

*Teach us, Love, above all things, fidelity to music,
Sharpen our responses to the colours of creation,
Lead us undeceptively to what comes after passion,
And let us die, Love, as though we chose to, for a reason.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.23)

But he is also conscious of the fact that love is not enough and that life consists of much more than love and that includes the knowledge of the ways of men, the knowledge of the soul and the knowledge of God as revealed in the universe. He says so in the lines:

*We were not made for love alone, my love,
Although our flesh and bones would have it so,
A thousand intricacies of brain
Hold my blood-streams captive, which will not flow
Freely to serve the ends of love, until
They know the various ways of men,
The soul in solitude and God revealed.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.20)

He wants love to be charged with the love of earth and says:

*Yet we, to keep our love as fresh as earth
Must charge our earthly love with love of earth*

(Ibid, p.20)

If Ezekiel talks of lovers' meeting in the poem 'In Twenty-four Lines' in which the lover goes to meet his beloved "at dawn", when people pray to God, "across the town" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.110), he talks of their separation in the poem 'Poem of the Separation'. In this poem the beloved who has been with this lover in buses, trains, and cafes, one day chooses to "sweep ahead to hear/another music" (Ibid, p.111), and then comes a day when the lover is ten thousand miles away from her. There she becomes:

*... a shower letters,
a photograph, a newspaper cutting
underlined, with penciled comments,
and a smell at night.*

(Ibid, p.111)

He wants her back but she asks "to break it up"

(Ibid, p.112)

14. Woman in Ezekiel's Poetry

While discussing Ezekiel's treatment of woman A.K.Singh asserts, "The picture of woman that emerges from his poems is a bleak and negative one excepting a couple of poems. He sees her again and again as an object of sex, an annoying truth and an invariably impending menace impending the person's moral voyage. She appears as a femme fatale, an agent of corporeal corruption, sensuality, defilement and nasty passion, and so in a way as an inferior being in human attributes of all sorts".¹

In the same vein Asha Biswas regards Ezekiel as a poet of the female body, as she says in her article 'Women in the Poems of Nissim Ezekiel': "... Ezekiel remains a poet of the female body. Although he confesses that only his passion poems are influenced by Sanskrit love poetry, in almost all his anthologies the poet is aware of the female body. He has a penchant for describing the sensuality evoked by her body".²

There figure a large number of women characters in Ezekiel's poems. Let us begin with the best ones. They figure as mothers in some of the poems. For instance, the woman stung by a scorpion in the poem 'Night of the Scorpion' is the speaker's mother. First, we find her "twist[ing] through and through/groaning on a mat" (LDP, p.49). But when she gets relief she says: "Thank God the Scorpion picked on me/and spared my children" (LDP, p.50). This mother instinctively loves her children and is relieved to find that the scorpion did not sting any of her children but picked on her instead, with the result that none of her children had to bear the pain she has borne. Like the conventional mother she likes her children to be happy and gay and will gladly undergo pain to protect them. We have a mother in 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay'. She is the bride's mother and sheds "a tear or two" because there exists a tradition of the kind, but actually she is very happy at her daughter's marriage, as the poet reports:

*Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really
crying. It was the thing to do, so she did it,
enjoying every moment.*

(LDP, p.18)

This mother is different from the mother in 'Night of the Scorpion' as she pretends to cry though actually she is happy at her daughter's getting her husband. Her shedding tears signifies her observing one of the formalities of her community.

Woman figures in Ezekiel's poems as a wife too. The Indian wives in the 3rd section of the poem 'In India' are different from the wives from the other five countries represented in the party arranged to celebrate the year's end. The Indian wives neither drink, nor talk, nor kiss, as the poet reports:

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1. A.K.Singh, "A Perspective on Woman in Ezekiel's Poetry"; Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma (Meerut: Shalabh, 1994), p.182
 2. Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma (Meerut: Shalabh, 1994) p.202

*The wives of India sit apart.
They do not drink,
they do not talk,
of course they do not kiss.*

(LDP, p.51)

But in many poems we find a wife nagging her husband. The bride in 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' starts nagging her husband in the synagogue itself when on his sympathising with her crying mother she laughs and asks him not to "be silly" (LDP, p.18). In the poem 'Song to Be Shouted Out' the wife expects her husband to have done dozens of things for her besides his professional work and she asks him whether he has posted the letter, made "that telephone call", paid "that bill", banked "that cheque", bought "those tickets" (LDP, p.27) with the result that the husband accepts his defeat and declares that wives exist only to shout at when he says:

*Shout at me, woman!
Pull me up for this and that,
You're right and I'm wrong.
X X X
Shout at me, woman!
What else are wives for?*

(LDP, p.27)

This wife nags so much that the husband has turned a cynic and finds nothing pleasing in her.

In the fourth section the poem 'To a Certain Lady' the lady nags the lover when the latter is not willing to agree to her buying an expensive lipstick and lady's nagging leads him to say:

*Lady, don't nag.
If you want that expensive lipstick
Buy it for God's sake - not mine -
I mean, really, why should I approve of it?
And that goes for dresses, hats, shoes,
Slips, knickers, and brassieres,
So long as they're not on the instalment plan.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.22)

Thus in Ezekiel's poems the wives are generally very demanding and the husbands find it difficult to satisfy. In some cases they demand too many expensive consumable articles and in some cases too much work by the husband.

The wives in Ezekiel's poems are not as modest as Indian wives are believed to be. They are candid enough to communicate their husbands their physical needs and also to reveal their feelings in candid terms if they are not happy with their husbands. For instance, the newly married wife in the poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' invites her husband in candid terms when the two are on a floor-mattress. However, she takes ten years to reveal to him her disappointment, as the persona reports:

*More than ten years passed before she told me that
she remembered being very disappointed. Is that all
there is to it? she had wondered.*

(LDP, p.19)

Nay, here comes a stage when the wife and the husband have a "serious marriage quarrel" (Ibid, p.19) and she resents his having deprived her of her virginity.

Ezekiel embodies the bridegroom's disillusionment with marriage in the poem 'Marriage', as he, like his wife, was complacent at the time of marriage but there came a time when marriage made him suffer. How happy the bridegroom and the bride were at the time of marriage has been shown in the following stanza:

*Lovers, when they marry, face
Eternity with touching grace.
Complacent at being fated
Never to be separated.*

(LDP, p.62)

At that time both are at their best:

*The bride is always pretty, the groom
A lucky man.*

(Ibid, p.62)

But when "the mark of Cain" makes its appearance, they become so unhappy with each other that the situation becomes too painful to describe and the husband likes to remain silent about it, as he says:

*Why should I ruin the mystery
By harping on the suffering rest,
Myself a frequent wedding guest?* (LDP, p.62)

Unlike the romantics who idealize women, Ezekiel depicts them to be full of weaknesses and to be even repulsive. For example, the woman in the poem 'Couple' is indolent, and arrogant, as the poet records:

*Indolence and arrogance
were rooted in her primal will,
a woman to fear, not to love -* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.90)

It is cooperation that should characterize the relations between a husband and his wife. It is love that should keep the two together. It is fellow-feeling that should make them face the challenge of life. If a wife wants to be feared, or if a husband wants to be feared, the conjugal life does not remain a conjugal life in its positive sense.

In his collection of 'Poems' called "Nudes 1978" there figure a number of women who are lax in morals and are found fooling in order to get carnal pleasures. For instance, in the 5th of these 'poems' here is a married woman who is sharing the bed with a stranger and vindicates herself on the ground that her husband too has a mistress. To quote from the poem:

*It's inconceivable
that he's not sleeping with
someone these days, so why
shouldn't I, too have my
fling?* (LDP, p.34)

For her her husband's infidelity justifies hers even if the moralists say that one wrong does not justify another.

The woman in the poem 'For Love's Record', according to the persona, is "bold and kind". The persona watches the woman walk away with a man. He finds the woman to have "searching eyes". He describes her to be a woman with an uncommon code and calls her "[a] [v]ibrating woman in her nights of joy, / [w]ho gathered men as shells and put them by" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.59)

The three women in the poem 'Three Women' offer not only food but also love and the poet says:

*They spoke the language
of food and love
naturally
as a mother-tongue;
no problem here
of the accent or of intonation.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.89)

and suggests thereby that these women are persons of easy morals and have seductive designs on the men whom they feed.

In the poem 'Good Bye party for Miss Pushpa T.S.' the poet ironically treats Pushpa's "internal" and external sweetness when the poet writes:

*Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
Even for no reason
but simply because she is feeling
... she is most popular lady
with men also and ladies also
... Pushpa Miss is never saying no
Whatever I or anybody is asking
She is always saying yes.* (Hymns in Darkness, pp. 23-24)

It is by giving sly hints that the speaker in this 'poem' has suggested that Pushpa is a lady of easy morals.

The girl in the poem 'How the English Lessons Ended' shows to the persona's 16 year old daughter "her pictures / in a certain kind of book" (Hymns in Darkness, p.36). These pictures must be pornographic, because in the last two lines of the poem the poet says:

*A month later she was married,
Now she doesn't need that picture-book.* (Ibid, p.36)

and indicates the fact thereby. So here the poet indicates that the girl is interested in carnal pleasures.

In the 'poems' included in "Nudes 1978" the women are wanton and not only display their bodies but are also interested in carnal pleasures. They are not uneducated women: the woman in the 7th of these poems begins her contact with the man in the areas of love of art, love of theatre and love of writing. But what she is interested in is the carnal pleasure. The poem opens like this:

*Beginning as a possible
love of art, theatre, writing,
the contact - or whatever
you call it - ripened into
the art of love.*

(LDP, pp. 34-35)

The woman in the 12th poem describes herself as shy though she is as wanton as any other woman in these poems, as she claims she "would never/have made the first move" (LDP, p.37). She even pretends to be virtuous. The poet describes her in the following works:

*She came with gifts, shyly
after two letters and a short
telephone call. Her talk presumed
a certain distance, informal
but nervous, clearly touch-me-not,
no, not available, it's just
my need to know your kind of man
that brings me here, you understand,
and let us meet from time to time,
not too often, only when we can.*

(LDP, pp. 37)

Nor are they poor. The woman in the 13th of these poems, "the richest of them all" (LDP,p.37) is rich enough to buy "expensive underclothes" for him, as the man reports:

*The richest of them all
who spent the money, once bought
expensive underclothes
for me, and sent them with
a letter: 'These are for
the women of Bombay
to see you sporting, not
the worn-out ones I find
so funny on a man
of such implacable
dignity.'*

(LDP, pp. 37-38)

These women seem to be wanton by temperament.

Ezekiel seems to believe that flattery disarms a woman. The fact comes to light when we read his poem 'The Couple'. The woman in this poem is "hard and vain" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.90) but when her lover says to her "You're a wonderful woman" (Ibid), she is "truly quite beautiful" (Ibid).

If we read Sri Aurobindo's Savitri, and K.R.Srinivas Ainger's Sitayana and The Saga of Seven Mothers, we find the poets telling the stories of such women as Savitri, Sita, Damyanti and the like who are devoted to their husbands, who are truthful and who are so brave that they can challenge anybody but will not deviate from the path of virtue. In Nissim Ezekiel's poems we meet wanton women for whom carnal pleasure is the only thing that matters. What a fall!

15. Nature in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

When one thinks of nature one thinks of William Wordsworth, the high priest of nature, who believes that nature "is ours", and serves as both law and impulse to restrain and kindle man. No doubt, it is nature which makes life on earth possible. We are able to live on the earth because the sun is there to give us light and heat, trees and plants are preparing edibles for us, clouds give us clean water, the atmosphere gives us oxygen and so on. No life is possible if even one of these objects of nature stops doing what it is doing.

But Nissim Ezekiel does not seem to have much appreciation for the objects of nature and usually shows man and the objects of nature causing harm to each other, and the objects of nature come in his poems to inflict pain on man or to

be inflicted pain on by man. For instance, in his famous poem 'Night of the Scorpion' a scorpion comes into the house of the speaker and stings his mother. The poet reports:

*I remember the night my mother
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours
of steady rain had driven him
to crawl beneath a sack of rice,
Parting with his poison - flash
of diabolic tail in the dark room -
he risked the rain again.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, pp. 48-49)

The lady stung by the scorpion has done no harm to the scorpion. It comes to the house driven by steady rain for ten hours and goes back into the rain. It appears that nature in the form of the rain and the scorpion conspires against the lady to inflict pain on her. If there had not been any rain, the scorpion would not have come into the house and would not have stung the lady. So one gathers the impression that it rained for ten hours steadily to force the scorpion to go inside the house to sting the lady. The scorpion's risking the rain again gives one the impression that stinging the lady was the main purpose of its entering the house, as it leaves the house when it is still raining. If it had come to protect itself from rain it would not have gone back before it had stopped raining.

In the poem 'Worm' too there is a conflict between nature and man and here the man kills the worm and reports the fact in the words:

*Then, in bitterness, I crushed the worm,
Sadly determined not to honour more
Its easy mocking victory. So now
It's dead. Pretty worm, where is your strength?
The God who made you to be wiser than
The cunning subtleties within my brain
Shall know by this the anger of a man.
Only in anger can I emulate
The worm's directness. I've killed the worm.*

(Journal of South Asian Literature, XI, 3-4, p.15)

Nature figures in the poem 'To a Certain Lady' in the form of a leech sucking human blood, though it appears only in a simile:

*Then, absences and quarrels, indifference
Sucking like a leech upon the flesh, ...*

(Ibid, p. 22)

Nature appears to be something almost useless in some poems of Ezekiel. For instance, nature appears in his poem 'For Love's Record' in the form of shells. Here we have a woman

*Who gathered men as shells and put them by.
No matter how they loved she put them by.*

Here the men who fall in love with this woman and are put by have been likened to shells. Thus the shells here have been treated as things of no worth.

Nature appears in his poem 'After Reading a Prediction' in the form of spiders, ants, lakes and swans when he writes:

*Watching spiders climb
the commonplace, ants
cooperate, lakes
reflect the hills of some
remembered holiday,
ships and swans engender
legends, morals, music, ...*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 97)

Since he finds the spiders climbing the commonplace, the ants co-operating by doing the same, the lakes simply reflecting the hills of memory visited on some holiday, they have little to offer to man.

The dog and the horse too figure in his poetry. For example, they figure in the poem 'Furies' but there they are mad and are being driven:

*Shall I be
driven before them
like a maddened
dog or horse?*

(LDP, pp. 31)

Nature makes its appearance as the rain in the poem 'Mid monsoon Madness'. The rain in this poem falls on the persona's past with the result that he cannot see it clearly. Secondly, it brings "madness" to the persona so that he finds himself saying angrily: "Smash it up and start again" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.56). And thirdly, it is responsible for the chill. That indicates that the poet does not find anything pleasant in the monsoon rains.

At times he talks of breezes too. For instance, in the poem 'Island' he reports:

*Bright and tempting breezes
flow across the island, ...*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 101)

These breezes are bright but since they are tempting, they must not be innocent. And in the poem 'Marriage' he finds the breeze to be immortal:

*Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze.*

(LDP, p. 62)

At times Ezekiel finds nature harmless. For instance, when he likens the movement of transparent existence to "the flight of a migrating bird" (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 92) in the poem 'In the Theatre', he describes the movement as "Innocent" (Ibid) and, thus, indicates that he finds the flight of the bird to be innocent. But this bird too has nothing to do with human life. That signifies that here too Ezekiel finds nature to be of little relevance to human beings.

Ezekiel also evinces that the objects of nature are at war with one another and one creature is treated as its food by another. He does it, for example, in his poem 'In the Country Cottage' when he reports how a lizard comes to eat up cockroaches and does the 'job' clean and complete by the morning:

*The night the lizard came
our indolence was great;
Immobile, tense and grey,
he taught us patience as
he waited for the dark.
From time to time we could
not help but glance at him
and learn again that he
was more alive than us
in silent energy,
though his aim was only
the death of cockroaches.*

*When we awoke the next
morning we found as we
expected that the job
was done, clean and complete,
and the stout lizard gone.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.107)

If there had been harmony in nature, the lizard would not have made the death of cockroaches his aim.

In the poem 'The Night of the Scorpion' too it is so as the scorpion feels uncomfortable in rain and enters the persona's house to seek shelter under a sack of rice. And when it goes out it risks the rain, as the poet puts it. In the poem 'Worm' too the worm tries to avoid rain and comes to a dry spot, as the poet reports:

*I saw a worm the other day, after rain,
Crawling with astounding strength, directed
By an inner eye, towards a dryer place.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.15)

It is in the poem 'Sparrows' that Ezekiel writes about the birds called the sparrows. In the poem he expresses the view that the sparrows have no aim other than flying, mating and building their nests. He says:

*You may not doubt their single aim,
Which is to fly and then to mate,
Aroused to build with twig and leaf,*

*A nest sufficient for the need—
Open, warm, and planned to give
A truly bird's-eye view of things.*

(JSAL XI, 3-4, p.55)

He does not find the sparrows teaching man or harming man. However, he finds a sparrow's nest to be open, warm and planned in such a way that it gives the bird a bird's-eye view of things. That signifies that according to the poet sparrows are intelligent and wise creatures which know what they need and accomplish it at least in one area. But for the poet they have little role to play so far as human life is concerned.

Ezekiel does not accept the view that nature educates man - a view which William Wordsworth held. Ezekiel is, on the contrary, of the view that man already possesses the qualities he is believed to be learning from the objects of nature: there is no need for man to go to the lion to learn wrath, as his wrath exceeds the wrath of the lion; and there is no need for man to go to the ant because man is more sluggish than the ant. He says so in the following lines:

*Crocodile tears
are unknown to crocodiles.
The lion's wrath
is small compared to mine.
The lamb is not as innocent
as lovers in the act of love.
No sluggard learns from the ant.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 127)

Nay, he says man's wrath is much more dangerous than that of the lion!

However, flowers he likes. And he likes them especially for their freshness. In the 17th of the 'Poster Prayers' he uses them for an image when he says:

*Denude me, O Lord,
of all my stale wisdom.
Keep me, if possible,
from everything dated.
Let my follies be fresh
as flowers.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 136)

But even here he likens follies to flowers!

Elephant is one of the objects of nature which he finds useful as he talks of riding on it when he says in his poem 'In India':

*I ride my elephant of thought,
A ceizaanne slung around my neck.*

(LDP, p. 50)

But here too he uses the elephant as an image for thought!

Ezekiel is not certain about man's kinship with the sky, air, earth, fire and sea, but he wishes to have this kinship as he prays in the poem 'Morning Prayer'.

*God grant me certainty
In kinships with the sky,
Air, earth, fire, sea -*

(LDP, p.61)

That signifies that he does not treat all the objects of nature alike.

16. Nissim Ezekiel's Imagery

Since a poet tries to communicate his experience to the reader he has to express it in such a way that the reader gets at least an idea of what it is like. What the poet has experienced is something absolutely personal and it is not easy to reproduce it with all its details. So he has to describe it in terms of what the readers might have experienced. Suppose the poet has a beloved whom he regards as a unique beauty, and he wants to share his knowledge with his readers too. But he cannot show her to all his readers. That is why he usually likens her to some object which his readers might have seen so that they may get an idea of her comely physique. This is what a poet does when he says:

My love is like a red red rose.

Since the poet cannot bring his beloved before the reader he likens her to "a red red rose". And since red red roses are the objects which must have been seen by almost all the readers, they, on reading this line, can imagine how lovely, and attractive the beloved is. That is the reason why almost every poet has to liken his experiences, characters, landscapes

and the like with the experiences, characters, landscapes, objects and the like which fall within the experiences of readers. The objects, scenes, animals and persons to which the subjects in hand are likened are called imagery. When a poet employs for his images those objects, scenes, landscapes and animals which other poets have been employing, his imagery is called conventional. But when he employs novel and original comparisons, his imagery is regarded as original. T.S.Eliot identifies the greatness of a poet with his capacity to find new comparisons and expresses this opinion of his in his essay on the metaphysical school of poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel too employs images quite often. Let us see what kind of images he employs and which fields are the sources of his imagery.

Nissim Ezekiel makes use of the objects of nature for his images. He does so, for example, in the following lines from 'Urban':

*His will is like the morning dew
The garden on the hill is cool,
Its hedges cut to look like birds
Or mythic beasts are still asleep.
His past is like a muddy pool
From which he cannot hope for words.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 61)

Here he employs the images of the morning dew, birds and a muddy pool. He employs the objects of nature as his images also in the poem 'Morning Prayer' and 'Marriage'. In the poem 'Morning Prayer' he uses the image of a mole in his statement "Secretive as a mole" (LDP, p.61), and in 'Marriage' he employs the image of the breeze when he writes:

*Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 62)

The image of the 'Swarms of flies' figures in the following lines from 'Night of the Scorpion':

*The peasants came like swarms of flies
and buzzed the Name of God a hundred times
to paralyse the Evil One.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 49)

The image of an elephant has been used in the following line from the poem 'In India':

*I ride my elephant of thought,
A Ceizaanne slung around my neck.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 50)

Human living is another source of his images. The image of the basement room occurs in his poems quite frequently. It occurs, for instance, in his poem 'London' in which he writes:

*Sometimes I think I'm still
in that basement room,
a permanent and proud
metaphor of struggle
for and against the same
creative, self-destructive self.* (Hymns in Darkness, pp. 33-34)

The images of garments and body-wear occur in several poems of Ezekiel. One such image figures in the lines:

*I wax old as a garment,
as a vesture I am changed.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 46)

The image of the chaff occurs in the following lines from the 'Latter-Day Psalms':

*The ungodly are in the same condition, no more like the chaff
which the wind driveth away than the godly.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 39)

The image of the arrows has been used in the lines:

Children are as arrows in the hands of a mighty man (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 46)

The images of edibles have been used in the following expressions:

"... the bread of sorrow" (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 46)

and

"... the wine of astonishment" (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 42)

Navigation is another source of Ezekiel's images. He employs the navigation image in the following lines from the poem 'To a Certain Lady' as in them he describes tackling the problems of life in terms of sailing a ship:

Launched at last, we have to tack our sail

*To suit the wind, respect the compass
And the stars, the laws of navigation,
Bind the freedom of our days
To log-books and groundwork of routine
Signalling to passers-by
Who are on other routes but use a common code.*

(JSAL, p. 23)

Dreams and nightmares too have been employed for imagery by Ezekiel. The image of nightmare figures in the poem 'The Double Horror' when he writes:

*This double horror holds me
Like a nightmare from which I cannot wake ...¹*

Ezekiel also employs erotic imagery. He does it for example, again in the poem 'The Double Horror' when he says: "Unpolitical I still embrace the sterile / Whore of private politics ..."²

Religion is another source of images for Ezekiel. When he likens the earth to a prophet in the following lines he is giving a biblical image:

*For weeks
this earth
is like a prophet
who will not give a sign.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 113)

Another such image figures in his poem 'Process' in which he says:

*... you are as pure
as if you had confessed
and received absolution.*

(Ibid, p. 117)

17. Humour in Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry

Humour is not wanting in Nissim Ezekiel. He arouses humour, for example, in his poem 'Jewish Wedding in Bombay' in which the wife quarrels with the husband for his having taken her virginity and the husband's desire to return it provided he knows how to do that. The relevant passage reads thus:

*During our first serious marriage quarrel she said Why did
you take my virginity from me? I would gladly have
returned it, but not one of the books I had read instructed
me how.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p. 19)

There is mischievous humour when the bridegroom is silly enough to sympathise with the bride's mother, who is pretending to be crying on the occasion of her daughter's marriage but is actually enjoying every moment. The poet reports the incident in the following lines:

*Her mother shed a tear or two but wasn't really
crying. It was the thing to do, so she did it,
enjoying every moment. The bride laughed when I
sympathized, and said don't be silly.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p. 18)

¹.Journal of South Asian Literature, XI, 3-4, p.14

².Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p. 14

Self-deception is one of the facts he finds ludicrous: one who does not practise humility speaks of humility, maturity makes one commit follies which one did not commit during youth, and one loses what is certain for things of dubious value. While ridiculing such persons Ezekiel writes:

He knows how to speak of humility, without humility.
He has exchanged the wisdom of youthfulness for the follies of maturity.
What is lost is certain, what is gained of dubious value.
Self-esteem stunts his growth. He has not learnt how to be nobody. (HD, p. 53)

A fool who believes himself to be wise has been ridiculed in the second Hymn when he writes:

He has found too many secrets that will not work,
too many keys that unlock no locks.
He lives in the world of desires and devices. It is
colourful and full of poetry.
For every truth in his possession, he has a
falsehood to go with it. (HD, p. 53)

It is by use of irony too that he conveys his opinions. For instance, when in one of his poems which he calls 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' he writes:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.
Why world is fighting fighting
Why all people of world
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,
I am simply not understanding.
Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100 % correct.
I should say even 200 % correct
But modern generation is neglecting -
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing. (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 22)

he is ridiculing not only the speaker in the poem for his naivety, but also the very thinking behind people's claiming that Indian English be recognized as another standard variety of English. He must be suggesting that in every learner's life there remains a stage when he is not yet adequately proficient in the language he is learning, that what he has been able to learn by this stage is an inter-language, and that to reach his goal he is required to make a little more effort. He must be suggesting that if every inter-language is recognized as a standard variety of the language there will be a complete chaos and there will come into existence as many 'standard' varieties of the language as there are learners and users. The poet conveys his ridiculing the speaker here by making him say that "ancient Indian Wisdom is ... 200 % correct". Since 100 % correctness is the highest point of correctness, one who claims something to be 200 % correct obviously does not know what percentage means.

Irony has been employed to laugh at people and social practices too. In the following lines from 'Undertrial Prisoners' he employs the device of irony when in order to reject the argument that law takes its time he seems to be approving of it:

I've shown you, friends,
how Justice meets its ends.
A crime is a crime:
the Law must take its time (LDP, p. 27)

The undertrial prisoner in this poem has already spent at least five (or, may be, ten) years in prison. Not even trying a man for five years, or may be ten years, can be justified only by one who believes that the man undertrial is an inanimate object or, at most, an animal needing nothing more than food and clothes which the state supplies to him. The poet is expressing his disapproval of the logic on which the complaisant defender of the law of the land justifies the treatment being meted out to the undertrial prisoner in the following words:

We have our rules made long ago
he's got to wait the law says so.
it's not our fault he lives in jail,
He did something wrong and he can't pay bail. (Ibid, p. 26)

Can such delays be vindicated by the excuses: "Law must take its own time" and "We have our rules"? The poet ironically ridicules the attempt.

Irony has been made use of also in the poem "Ganga" in which he ridicules people who pride themselves on their generosity to servants because they give a woman worker a stale chapati and a cup of stale tea. He writes:

*She always gets
a cup of tea
preserved for her
from the previous evening,
and a chappati, stale
but in good condition.
Once a year, an old
Sari, and a blouse
for which we could
easily exchange a plate
or a cup and saucer.*

(JSAL, XI,3-4, p. 140)

They give to the woman worker nothing but what is useless for them yet they pride themselves on their generosity to the servants.

Satire is another device Ezekiel employs to arouse humour. He has a keen eye for the ludicrous and usually he exposes hypocrisy. He satirizes the politicians in the poem 'Waking' in which a politician's wife exposes her husband:

*When the politician boasted
How he had made two hundred speeches,
"No, Tom", his wife declared,
"You made the same speech two hundred times".*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, , p. 49)

Ezekiel ridicules the ways of Indian bureaucracy in the following lines:

*When the female railway clerk
Received an offer of marriage
from her neighbour the customs clerk,
She told him to apply in triplicate.¹*

It is quite common in India to invite applications in duplicate, triplicate, quadruplicate and so on, and if the required number of copies are not submitted, the application is likely to be rejected. The incident narrated here also shows how one's professional behaviour enters one's domestic and social behaviour too. Just as the railway clerk here treats even her suitor as an applicant, in the same way a teacher treats even his neighbours as his students, and a police-man treats even the members of his family as criminals!

In the poem 'Portrait' the poet laughs at a man who undulates from a positive resolution to a negative one and has no consistency in his character, he is no longer young but he is still foolish, he has toughened his will but breaks his faith, he plans his day but walks the accustomed way, one day he sharpens his voice and wit, but the second day he turns the other cheek:

*Against the grain he keeps at it
And checks his progress week by week,
Today he sharpens voice and wit
Tomorrow turns the other cheek.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4,, p. 47)

18. Nissim Ezekiel's Poetic Craftsmanship

Ezekiel's poetic craftsmanship has been widely admired. For instance, Chetan Karnani is all praise for it when in his article 'The Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel: A Brief Overview' he writes: "Few Indo-Anglian poets have shown the ability to organize their experience into words as competently as Ezekiel has done. Unlike other amateurs of verse, he has shown a remarkable dedication to his art" (Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4 (1976), p. 223). According to Linda Hess, "He has emerged as most outstanding in craftsmanship, maturity, range and depth of sensibility".¹

While discussing Ezekiel's poetic craftsmanship Anisur Rehman says: "[Nissim Ezekiel] is singularly aware of the craft of poetry and his own performance as a poet".²

¹ Quoted by Keki N. Daruwalla, "Death of a Poet". Hindustan Times 19.01.2004, p. 12

².Journal of South Asian Literature, XI, 3-4, p.14

³.Journal of South Asian Literature XI, 3-4, p. 14

Ezekiel has been described to be aware of the craft of poetry as in his compositions he has said several things about it. For example, in his poem 'A Time to Change' he says that the perfect poem is only a dream that cannot be realized, as he writes there:

*The pure invention or the perfect poem,
Precise communication of a thought,
Love reciprocated to a quiver;
Flawless doctrine, certainty of God,
These are merely dreams; ...*

(JSAL, p.12)

So if one resolves to write the perfect poem, one, according to Ezekiel, is trying to achieve the impossible.

Ezekiel believes that a poem is concerned with an episode while poetry is a flow from which a poem comes. Poetry, according to him, is concerned with the reasons behind the incidents, the manner in which the incidents occur, and all such things related to it. He expresses this view of his in his poem 'Poetry' in which he writes:

*A poem is an episode, completed
In an hour or two, but poetry
Is something more. It is the why,
The how, the what, the flow
From which the poem comes,
In which the savage and the singular,
The gentle, familiar
Are all dissolved, the residue
Is what you read, as a poem, the rest
Flows and is poetry.³*

He believes that it is easy to write a poem, but difficult to write poetry. He says so in his 'Foreword' to Sixty Poems when he writes: "There is in each a line, or a phase, an idea or image which helps me to maintain some sort of continuity in my life. If I could transcend the personal importance of these poems, I would not publish them. I am interested in writing poetry not in making a personal verse-record. But poetry is elusive, to write a poem is comparatively easy".⁴

In some of his utterances he explains how he chooses his expressions. In his poem 'A Time to Change' he writes:

*So, in our style of verse and life
The oldest idiom may reveal
A simile never seen, limbs retain
A virginal veracity and every stone
Be as original as when the world was made.⁵*

This makes it evident that he does not exclude even the oldest idioms from his poetic vocabulary and will use an old idiom provided he can show some novelty in it. Ezekiel holds that the right word is not easy to find and that one has to wait for it. In his poem 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' he says this when he writes:

*The best poets wait for words.
The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing;
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering -
In this the poet finds his moral proved,
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, pp. 52-53)

This opinion of his brings him close to Flaubert who holds that a poet has to choose his words carefully and assiduously as it is only the right word, and none of its substitutes, that can correctly express the poet's meaning. This implies that he does not accept the view that one should write spontaneously. That is the reason why he refuses to accept the practice of William Carlos Williams, Jack Kerouac and such other supporters of spontaneous writing. In his poem 'For William Carlos Williams' he writes:

*I do not want
to write
Poetry like yours
but still I*

*Love
the way you do it,
Something comes
Through and through,
I hear the music of it.
I hear the meaning too.*

(Sixty Poems, p. 7)

In the poems which he calls 'Very Indian Poems in Indian English' and in which he uses English sentences replete with grammatical and lexical errors, he is rejecting the very concept of Indian English implying thereby that if one chooses to write in English one must acquire adequate proficiency in the language. For instance, here are a few lines from his poem 'The Patriot':

*What you think of prospects of world peace?
Pakistan behaving like this,
China behaving like that,
It is making me very sad, I am telling you.
Really, most harassing me.*

(Latter-Day Psalms, p. 23)

If one is not proficient enough to construct a sentence like 'What do you think of the prospects of world peace?', his prospects as a user of English are definitely very bleak. And if this is the kind of English people mean by the term Indian English, they had better switch over to their mother tongue and leave English for those who have acquired adequate proficiency in it. Ezekiel does not use this 'variety' of English in his other poems.

It is in his poem 'A word for the Wind' that Ezekiel gives us a peep into the way he tries to find words which suit his needs and in which sound evokes the sense. He writes:

*I cannot find a word for the wind
Another word, a phrase full of it
Like a sail, ...*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 18)

He is in search of a word which should be full of wind just as a sail is full of it. That means he wants the word to make a visual appeal too just as a sail does and that it should bring out its meaning in its fullness. He adds:

*... verses
Moving smoothly like the wind
Over grass, or among the trees
Rustling down the leaves of meaning
Sound evoking sense, ...*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 18)

His view that the sound should evoke the sense reminds us of Robert Frost's identical assertion in this regard.

Ezekiel believes that a poet has to be stubborn like a workman who breaks the stone, loosens the soil, sows the seed and then waits patiently for grapes or figs. He says in his poem 'A Time to change':

*Subsidised by dreams alone
The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens
Soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits
Patiently for grapes or figs and even
Finds on a lucky day, a metaphor
Leaping from sod.⁶*

This makes it evident that according to the poet metaphors are not easy to find even if they "leap from sod" and the poet has to search for them and wait for them with patience. In other words, he does not accept the principle of spontaneous writing which many romantics uphold and practise.

Michael Garman describes Ezekiel's poetic style as "modern, restrained and conversational (increasingly so as he develops) without being discursive".⁷

Here, for example, is a poem in which we have the use of conversational style:

*What shall I do
with my furies?
Shall I be
driven before them
like a maddened*

*dog or horse?
Or is it
Possible even now
to befriend them?
Can they be tamed?
Neither as enemies
nor as furies
leave me alone.*

(LDP, p. 31)

We have this style also in his poems like 'Song to Be Shouted Out', 'Undertrial Prisoners', 'The patriot', and 'The Professor'.

Ezekiel loves to repeat his words in new contexts in order to make them give new meanings. He repeats the words 'love' and 'world' in the following lines from the poem 'And God Revealed', for example:

*Yet we with wiser love can master love
And with the news we bring of other worlds
Enlarge the world of love with love of worlds.*

(JSAS, XI, 3-4, p. 20)

Likewise, he repeats the words 'earth' and 'love' in the following lines:

*The strange mysterious way of earthly love -
Yet we, to keep our love as fresh as earth
Must charge our earthly love with love of earth*

(Ibid, p. 20)

The word 'corrupt' occurs twice in its two forms in the following lines from 'To a Certain Lady':

*Uncorrupted anger at corruption
Must be found again, ...*

(Ibid, p. 22)

Ezekiel seems to take delight in using a word in various senses and gives the impression that he is trying to squeeze out as varied meanings from it as he can. In his poem 'Touching', for instance, he uses the word 'touch' in the senses of 'have a physical contact', 'to arouse a feeling of happiness', 'to affect' and so on. The poem runs as follow:

*You touch me - a way of feeling
I touch you - a way of understanding.
We are touched
by a film or a book.
We are touched
when a stranger is kind.
How can we live
without touching and being touched?*

*There is a healing touch,
it makes the sick whole again.
Let's keep in touch
we say to a friend who's going away.
To have the right touch
means to know how it's done.
Touching is an art,
it's the movement
to and from the heart*

(LDP, p. 28)

This makes it evident that Ezekiel has a feel for words.

His careful choice of words is responsible for his frequent use of alliteration too. The use of alliteration is quite attractive in the following lines from his poem 'For Satish Gujral', for example:

*What does one do
whose loss
and liability
loom as large as this?*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 108)

Here the consonant 'l' occurs four times. Likewise, here are a few lines from one of his poster poems:

*Contemplate
your own hand -
it holds the secrets
of nature and or art,
also of the self
nakedly expressed
in bone, flesh, and form,
flowing line
and flexibility.*

(Ibid, p. 126)

Here the consonant 'f' occurs four times in the last three lines.

Even though Ezekiel writes verse, language in his verses is not different from the language of prose and reminds us of Wordsworth's assertion that there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry. Let us take up the following lines from his poem 'Happening':

*We have lost
the language of dreams.
We have forgotten
everything but knowledge.
We grope among
the signs and symbols.*

(JSAL IX, 3-4, p. 115)

In none of these sentences in any inversion and the groups in each of them have been arranged in the order Subject + Predicator + Complement + Adjunct (SPCA). So is the case with the following lines from his poem 'Process':

*Just when you give up
the whole process
begins again
and you are as pure
as if you had confessed
and received absolution.*

(Ibid, p. 117)

Ezekiel believes that it is only the contemporary idiom that suits poetry most. Once he remarked: "You cannot write good poetry in a language which is not alive".⁸

Nissim Ezekiel has written poems in a variety of forms: sometimes his lines rhyme, at others they do not; and when they do, they adhere to various rhyme schemes. His poem 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher' consists of twenty lines which have been grouped into two stanzas of ten lines each having the rhyme scheme a bb aa, c dc dd. Each line in this poem is decasyllabic and is an iambic pentameter line.

The poem 'Poetry Reading' consists of five quatrains each having the rhyme scheme a b a b. Here each line of the poem is octosyllabic.

In the poem 'Night of the Scorpion' there exists no rhyme scheme and the poem has been written in free verse. Many lines in the poem are octosyllabic but there also occur hexasyllabic and tetrasyllabic lines in it. The following line is hexasyllabic, for example:

'he risked the rain again'

and

'it lost its sting'

is a tetrasyllabic line.

The rhyme scheme in each stanza of the poem 'Philosophy' is a a b b a . The poem comprises twenty lines which have been grouped together into four stanzas of five lines each. Each line of the poem is decasyllabic.

In the poem 'Portrait' the rhyme scheme is a b a b in each of the four stanzas. For instance it is so in the opening stanza:

⁸ "Modern Indian Poetry: A Discussion" The Miscellany No. 28 (August 1968), p. 66

*No longer young but foolish still
He wakes to hear his words unspoken
A sadness is his toughened will
And all except his faith unbroken* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 47)

In this poem the lines are octosyllabic. They are iambic tetrameter lines with a few exceptions.

In the poem 'In the Country Cottage' he uses unrhyming hexasyllabic lines as each line consists of six syllables. Here is the first stanza of the poem, for illustration:

*The night the lizard came
our indolence was great;
we went to bed before
our eyes were heavy, limbs
prepared to stretch or love.* (Ibid, p. 107)

There is also many a poem in which in some stanza the lines are rhyming, while in the others they are not. This is so, for instance, in his poem 'Undertrial Prisoners' where the following stanza has rhyming lines:

*I've shown you, friends,
how Justice meets its ends.
A crime is a crime:
the Law must take its time.* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 27)

While in the following stanza the lines barring the last two ones are unrhyming:

*Perhaps he tried to kill his wife,
a serious crime
perhaps he hit a man in the street
not so bad but a crime all the same
five years ago or maybe ten
he doesn't know when* (Latter-Day Psalms, p. 26)

In his article "Nissim Ezekiel's Poetic Idiom" R.S.Pathak while giving the stylistic details of Ezekiel's language asserts: "Most of [Ezekiel's] sentences are simple. He wrote longer sentences by the time he composed poems contained in *The Exact Name*. Then came a change in his style. The sentences of *Hymns in Darkness* are about 2/3 in length as compared to those of *The Exact Name*. In *Latter-Day Psalms* the sentences are shorter still ... Most of the words used by the poet are monosyllabic. Some disyllabic words have also been used regularly. The number of other words is negligible. Ezekiel seems to be particularly at home with words of one or two syllables. Sometimes he also uses compound words such as iron-lunged, child-like, many-tongued, day-dream, sun-baked, ..."9

Ezekiel employs the device of paradox too in several of his poems. He does it, for instance, in his poem 'Dilemma' when he says that the farther he moves away from madness the closer he seems "to the verge of madness".

(Latter-Day Psalms. p. 30)

Ezekiel does not like to use symbols and holds that the plain statement of truth is more powerful than any symbol and says:

*There is no symbol
more powerful
than the plain statement
of the truth.
So let us seek
symbols,
they are very small lamps
of useful words.* (JSAL, XI, 3-4, p. 120)

Ezekiel's use or disuse of the punctuation marks too deserves notice. There are cases in which he uses punctuation marks in accordance with the traditional rules. He does so for instance in the following part of the poem 'The Neutral':

⁹ Essays on Nissim Ezekiel ed. T.R.Sharma, op.cit, pp. 129-30

*With, among, but never of,
nor aloof,
not critic, not dissenter,
flattened out, evaporated,
inconspicuous, merely a man
visible as dot or smudge
in some badly printed
newspaper photograph
of mass meeting or procession
joined for the sake of a believing friend.*

(JSAL, XI, 3-4, p.129)

But he does not use any mark of punctuation in the following part of the poem:

*I signed the manifesto
I paid the subscription
I worked on the committee
I attended the party
It made no difference
The common language
hid my absence*

(Ibid, p. 129)

By using no mark of punctuation he might be suggesting that there is no break in the process, and that the process has not come to an end. If he had put a full stop at the end of the last line that would have signified that the process had come to its end. Since there is no mark of punctuation the activity described in the poem remains open-ended.

Long Answer Type Questions

1. Discuss Nissim Ezekiel as a Poet of the fallen age.
2. Write a note on Ezekiel's treatment of woman in his poems.
3. "Nissim Ezekiel is a master craftsman". Do you agree with this view? Give arguments in support of your answer.
4. Write a note on Ezekiel's attitude towards nature.
5. Give a critical appreciation of Nissim Ezekiel's poem 'Night of the Scorpion.'
6. "Nissim Ezekiel ridicules the very concept of Indian English." Do you agree with this view? Give reasons in support of your answer.
7. Discuss the autobiographical element in Ezekiel's poetry.
8. "Nissim Ezekiel is an alienated soul." Do you feel Ezekiel's poetry really leaves the impression that Ezekiel finds himself to be an alien in India? Give reasons in support of your answer.
9. "Nissim Ezekiel is not happy with much that is happening in India". Do you agree with this view? Give reasons in support of your answer.
10. Discuss the use of irony in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel.

19. Short Answer Type Questions

1. How does Ezekiel reject Indian rural ways in his poem 'Night of the Scorpion'?
2. In 'The Patriot' Ezekiel ridicules the very concept of Indian English. How?
3. "Ezekiel is in sympathy with nothing that he finds in India." Elucidate with the help of the poem 'The Patriot.'
4. Discuss the use of irony in 'The Patriot.'
5. What are the salient features of the island he writes about in his poem 'The Island'?
6. Write a short note on the autobiographical element in the poem 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher.'
7. Write a note on Ezekiel's attitude towards Indian folk beliefs in the light of the poem 'The Visitor.'

20. Suggestions for Further Reading

1. S.C. Dwivedi (ed.) Nissim Ezekiel
2. T.R. Sharma (ed.) Essays on Ezekiel

MULK RAJ ANAND

Coolie

Unit III

Mulk Raj Anand – Coolie

Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand (1905 -) is one of the three pioneers of Indian novel written in English, other two being R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. His two novels *Untouchable* and *Coolie* stand out as classics of Indian fiction written in English, as good as R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* or *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* or *The Serpent and the Rope*. Of the three, Anand's fiction is perhaps more socially-oriented. His three novels *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two leaves and a Bud* (1937) were produced in quick succession, and being the product of what he called "The pink decade", the thirties, they depict not only the anxiety of the age, following the Great Depression, but also the novelist's protest against the age of chaos and confusion in morals. His critique of the age, candid and humane, however, brought him notoriety and his novels of the 1930's, one after the other, were either banned or withdrawn from circulation. He was called a propagandist, at times, a socialist, if not a communist. But Anand did not propagate the ideology of the right or the left. He was at best a humanist, a historical humanist at that. He himself said in *Apology for Heroism* (1996) that if a writer was not interested in *la conditiona humane*, he was either posing, or yielding to a fanatical love of isolationism. Committed to this view, Anand asserted further in the same book: "Just as I desire a total and truly human view of experience, a view of the whole man, in order that a completely new kind of revolutionary human may arise, so that I am inclined to stress the need for a truly humanist commensurate with the need of our time."

However, Anand's humanism is not merely the Hellenic idea of man being the measure of all things, independent of social context, particularly when it comes to measuring the development of the lowest of the low in society, Indian society, to be precise – the outcasts and the down-trodden. They could be even disregarded and denigrated erstwhile princes whose privilege was taken away after the independence of India. His sympathies overflow, as he himself said, wherever he finds men deprived of human rights. In "Author to Critic", Anand explained: My knowledge of Indian life at various levels had always convinced me that I should do a *comedic humaine*. In this, the poor, the lowly and the Untouchable were only kind of outcasts. The middle sections and the nobobs and rajas were also included as a species of the *Untouchables*. Unfortunately, there has not been time to show the poor – rich of our country, who deserve pity more than contempt."

Evidently, Anand's sympathies are not confined to the poor and the outcasts, as it is alleged. He is, therefore, no political propagandist, narrow at that. He, indeed, resents being called one. Not did he like to be called a realist, as he has "never viewed man as initially a compound of egoistic influences, but as he advanced on the path of society, his mastery over selfish instincts, which were stronger in the beginning than altruism and which must be held in check in order to make society possible. The family, for Anand, is the social unit and the preparation for a larger social life. Intelligence is the

leading principle in social progress. Social progress which envisages a family of individuals consists in the development of human functions distinguishes man from the brute. But society did not come into being *ex-nahilo*, out of nothing; it developed as man grew more and more altruistic. Anand measures the development of society in terms, how many who are not known or recognized as human at all, are admitted with society – such as all kinds of outcasts. And in doing this, Anand said in “Author to Critic”: “I not only tried to reveal things which the middle classes do not accept but the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie – by going below the surface of various hells made by man for man with an occasional glimpse of heaven as a desire-image.”

Anand laid greater stress on the emotional and the practical social ties and thus brought the ethical ideal into bolder relief. Formerly, intelligence had been emphasized as the great factor in the reform of society; now reason and science are brought into right relation with the feeling and practice. The objective method is replaced by the subjective method, subjective in the sense that it connects knowledge with the subjective needs and with the desire for unity and simplicity in our world-view. Ethics is added to sciences to make the science of sociology, the latest in the services of development, more human and humane. Anand’s humanism is thus the way to humanitarianism. The great problem in the way to this ideal is, as he found out, was to subordinate, so far as possible, the personality to sociability; everything must be related to humanity. Love of mankind, particularly for the neglected sections of the human races, is and has to be the central impulse – to live for others is the absolute demand in Anand fiction. Humanity, according to him, seems the great being worthy of worship.

This is no mean achievement for any artist, particularly of Anand’s genius. He deserved a better appreciation. Fortunately, after a long neglect and “two-line dismissals”, to quote Anand himself, critics now have come to believe that he deserves a better critical attention for his novels. He has already been awarded Sahitya Academy Award for 1972. Still Anand’s appreciation, particularly by the Indian academicians has been grudgingly slow. His later novels, in particular, are found as weak variations on the same theme of social protest that he had attempted in *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *The Big Heart*. Three of the novels, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) form a trilogy; two, *Seven Summers* (1951) and *The Morning Face* (1968) are part of the Seven-Volume autobiography. Other novels, *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), and *The Road* (1961) have failed to attract critical notice. He is still better known for *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, and at the most for *The Big Heart*. The first two are perhaps most dear to his heart. They represent Anand’s religion of humanity, which he created by replacing the religion of God, and that of metaphysics.

Untouchable (1935) is Anand’s first attempt to found this great religion of humanity by exposing the religion of God and metaphysics. Since this novel is akin to theme and characterization to *Coolie*, a through discussion of it is in order. Both have for their central characters innocent young ones, though Bakha of *Untouchable* is a young man of eighteen. Both are strong and able-bodies, but if Bakha’s body is that of an *Untouchable*, that of Munoo, the *Coolie*, is directed by his poverty. There are exactly two religions exposed by Anand – the religion of god and the religion of money. While Bakha’s troubles are mostly because of caste system perpetuated by the priests, Munoo suffers because of materialism. Every society passes through these two stages – theological and metaphysical before turning to the positive stage, the definitive stage of

the religion of humanity. These three stages are clearly marked in *Untouchable*, though they co-exist in both novels, more so in *Coolie* and that is the reason that the later is marked by utter chaos and confusion.

Anand thus traced the evolutionary stages of Indian society, particularly in respect of the *condition humaine* of the outcast Bakha, and through him of the whole low caste people. As Forster writes: The sweeper is worse off than as slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of religion. Unclean himself, he pollutes others when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. Thus, he is disquieting as well as disgusting object to the orthodox, as he walks along the public road. If Bakha's caste keeps people off, Munoo's poverty alienates him from other social beings.

Coolie

Introduction

Written in 1935, the year *Untouchable* was published, though published in 1936, *Coolie* is a sequel, so to say, of Anand's first novel. The canvas of the latter novel, of course, is wider and more varied, as through diver situations Munoo, the Coolie, organized as is the case with *Untouchable*. It is not a story of a single day in the life of Munoo; nor is the journey of the child protagonist straight. In this respect, *Coolie* is truly a picaresque novel, an epic of thousands of *Coolies* in India. Munoo is thus an archetype of the downtrodden, as Bakha is of the outcasts. Both represent the deprived. Writing in "Introduction" to the novel Sarob Cowasjee praised Anand for broaching the question of need in the Indian literature. As he writes: "In India the question of need was not asked in polite literature until Mulk Raj Anand posed it in the early thirties. *Coolie*, according to Cowasjee shows with *Untouchable* not only Anand's social anger, but also its immense popularity (the two novels have been translated into more than twenty languages) The classical unity of *Untouchable*, as we have seen, is not observed; the exigencies of the plot are swiftly dismissed, and as a result, the canvas is much wider and varied. Cowasjee further writes: It(*Coolie*) is a study in destitution, or to use Peter Quennell's words: India seen third-class — a continent whose bleakness, vestiges and poverty are unshaded by a touch of the glamour, more or less fictitious, that so many English story-tellers, from Kipling to Major Yeats-Brown, have preferred to draw across the scene.

Simply told, Munoo, a hill boy, leaves his none too idyllic surrounding in the Kangra hills, forced, of course, by his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri, to earn, orphan as he was, with no inheritance left after the death of his parents. Arriving in the house of a bank clerk, he falls foul of a shrewish and vindictive housewife, and before he flees from the household of Baboo Nathoo Ram in Sham Nagar, he has relieved himself near the doorstep. Munoo next arrives at a primitive pickle factory in Doulatpur, where a quarrel over money between the partners of the factory uproots him and sends him to Bombay to work as a *Coolie* in a cotton mill. But impending strike in the mill followed by communal riots, makes him runs for life and is picked by an Anglo-Indian woman Mrs Mainwaring and is taken to Simla to work for her as a servant. He dies of tuberculosis (which is aggravated by his having to pull the rickshaw for the mistress).

The plot of the novel is thus rounded – it moves from the hills of Kangra to end up in the hills of Simla. Nevertheless, the novel is not so simple as is the case of its outline. For one thing, it is a series of mis-adventures in a picaresque manner, offering a critique of money-culture; only the hero is no rogue but himself a victim of the world's rogueries, as Cowasjee says in the "Introduction" to the novel. Munoo is beaten from the pillar to post. Unlike Bakha who is abused and beaten for his caste, Munoo questions the cause of his sufferings, because he is born in a Rajput family. What is questioned in his case is not the old caste system, but as Cowasjee puts it, the cash nexus. Munoo also arrives at this hypothesis, that all inequalities are because of money, as does the Havildar in *Untouchable*, despite his higher caste. And further, not all belongings to the same caste and class respectively love Bakha and Munoo. At times, Munoo himself grows apathetic toward his fellow-sufferers.

Anand wanted to ignore the metaphysical search for the cause of the ills of the world and stay with the practical. This search leads to barren speculation. The whole of *Coolie* shows the futility of this quest: Why does man ill-treat man? What is that which makes one man superior to the other? This makes for his confusion in the novel. Anand wished us to leave our curiosity to know what lies underneath the phenomena aside and attend to what is observable. Munoo, being a child, is ever curious to know the causes conceived as existing beneath the surface of events and as possessed of superior reality to the appearances grounded upon them. Munoo, therefore, represents not only the infancy of an individual, but also of the entire human race. Even science invokes all sorts of hypothetical entities which are just as "metaphysical" as things-in-themselves the philosophers find behind the sensible universe.

Munoo's journey, his detour from hills to plains and back to hills, is an allegory of the evolution of individuals, as of societies and cultures. On the individual level, it is a pilgrim's progress; on the racial, an evolutionary social process. Munoo as an innocent child begins this journey from a scratch; his is a journey from innocence to experience, but it is questionable whether he really attains knowledge of the social process, for he remains inquisitive till the end, as he was in the beginning, because he wants to know the hidden laws. He is, therefore, even mystified by new discoveries. His mind, as he progresses on the path of knowledge, comes to consider all phenomena as mystical and imaginary. As Cowasjee has also observed: "The magic of the book is in Munoo's innocence, in his naive warm-heartedness, his love for comradeship, his irrepressible curiosity and jest for life. He belongs with some of the most endearing juvenile characters in modern literature with Victor Hugo's Gavroche and Dickens' David Copperfield. And through him the whole misery of India speaks.

In effect, *Coolie* is a tale of unheard sufferings of Munoo, mainly confused by his poverty. It is the tale of misery of an orphan who has no choice but to become a *Coolie*. As he moves along from one experience to another, he finds that the social scene moves backward. It seems to be stuck in the pre-scientific state. This social scene, of course, is a step ahead of the castes and determined by supernatural, arbitrary cause, and though he moves to the metaphysical and finally positivistic stage, there is little progression in the social response to the misery of the child, except for a dim realization of it by Mrs Mainwaring in the end.

Still Anand believed in social dynamics. By implications, he rejected all hypothetical constructions. For him, natural laws are sounder than metaphysical laws, because they are no more than descriptions of how phenomena do behave. They are not explanations

of why they behave as they do. Why human beings behave they do is something we cannot know. The causes of things are unascertainable. This is true, not only with respect to why and wherefore of the universe in general, but with respect to each particular phenomenon occurring in sense-experience.

In this regard, Anand is closer to de-construction, as Jacques Derrida also denies both theological and metaphysical constructions. This is what deconstruction mean. Such preoccupations as natural laws are quasi-human they; only delay social progress. Like Derrida, Anand demolished what he called structural thinking, that is, there is a centre, a fixed origin of things. As Derrida put it in “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences”, the function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organize the structure But above all to make sure that the organizing principle of their structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure. Anand also holds that any search for structure, i.e. the centre or the fixed origin of cause restricts the play and as a result human sciences do not progress, as the fixed origin such as Munoo discovers beneath human behaviour - money – or egoistic impulses – do not allow people to be altruistic. To say that man is selfish by nature or that we are born selfish gets us nowhere. That is why we social sciences what Derrida characteristically calls human sciences are backward.

Human or social science alternatively curved under Sociology is still backward in comparison with other sciences, precisely because while other sciences – Physics, Chemistry, Biology, have abandoned the search for fixed causes consolidated in a single force, called nature, we still inhuman behaviour search for a fixed centre. Anand’s life’s ambition was to reorganizes society in a way that would be lasting benefit to all classes of people, that would ensure universal peace between nations, prevent economic struggle within each nation, ensure to all a advance society and culture in every way. The proper approach in this regard is to regard Anand as essentially a social reformer. But as we have seen earlier, he is no ideologue of any set of ideology. He is interested in putting society on a *positive* basis, i.e. reform society, as Derrida does, neither looking with nostalgia as Rousseau did, at the absent origin – sad, nostalgic, negative and guilty, nor offering freeplay, joyous affirmation of Nietzsche – the joyous affirmation, as Derrida put it, without truth, without origin. Anand would like to tread the middle course between social static and social dynamics of Augustus Comte, a French philosopher of the nineteenth century. Anand’s novels, *Untouchable* and *Coolie*, in particular, attempt to steer clear of extremes – the nostalgia of the old theological order – its monotheism and freedom from all order. Anand found the present society, the Indian society in the thirties and he must have found it even at the turn of the 21st century, confused, because part of the time men are thinking in terms of one stage – still believing in caste or class system of the old, and the rest of the time in terms of new and liberated thinking, particularly Western. *Coolie* is entirely about this confusion in human thinking. As Anand viewed, India society as depicted in *Coolie* is caught in the vortex of confusion of the incompatible thinking. He believed that order and progress cannot be attained and reconciled satisfactorily until thinking and life are brought completely upon the positive stage which envisages that as society advances, individualistic concerns yield to social concerns, altruism triumphs over selfish impulses and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions.

It is in this respect that society is still backward. Modern man, Anand, like Comte noted, has lost the ability to identify himself with in state and society. He pretends to be

modern, at least in his dress and demeanor, but he is still on egoist. He takes care of his family, but is unaware of the miseries of those who fall outside his familial circle. He is still ruled by vaguer notions. His concern is not with phenomenon but with reality itself. Anand, for this reason, resented being called a realist. His novel describes the phenomenon, what he experienced, and though he had faith in the law of three stages of social evolution, he still seemed to concur with Francis Bacon that the mind must form theories but facts might defeat them. Mrs. Mainwaring is a liberated lady, but her egoism, her selfishness, persisted.

Chapter I

Outline of Coolie

Munoo's journey from the hills of Kangra to the plains, can be put metaphorically, even allegorical, as a fall from paradise, as it were. Munoo was unparadised, so to say, from his village and launched on a whirlpool of experiences to crash finally in Shimla. But Munoo's life at his village home of his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri was none too paradisiacal. He, as an orphan, used to graze the cattle of his uncle. On the morning of his departure for the town to work there as a domestic servant, his aunt called him in her shrill voice, abusing and cursing him, calling him "ominous orphan", asking him to come back and get ready, as his uncle was to depart for the town soon. The piercing voice of Gujri resounded through the valley and fell on Munoo's ears with a frightening effect of its bitter content. Munoo perhaps has learned to ignore her calls, because they must be so frequent and too harsh. His aunt's call was harsh that because its content that he was to go to the town was not palatable to his taste.

Munoo was only fifteen when his uncle and aunt thought fit for the boy to earn money. His aunt in particular wanted a son of her own. His uncle, however, thought that Munoo was grown up and must fend for himself. So, his uncle got him a job in the house of the Babu of the bank where Daya Ram worked as a peon in Sham Nagar.

Munoo did not like the idea, particularly because in spite of the fact that his aunt was always abusing him, in spite of the fact that she ordered him about, in spite of the fact that she beat more than he beat to cattle, he really did not want to go at least, not yet, for he still wanted to enjoy the company of his friends and play — climb trees, play hide and seek, steal fruits and in short enjoy all the scenes and songs of the nature on the bank of Beas river.

Nevertheless, Munoo was caught between two minds — the pool of the hills and that of the dream of all the wonderful things available in the town he had heard travelers to the town spoke about when they came back home. He was specially interested in machines he had read about in his primary books. In fact, the novel, as we have noted earlier, is about confusion of aim and purposes, delays and demurs. Munoo wished to delay his journey to the wider world for no specific reason. He was fourteen, an age, characteristically confused — one is neither a boy, nor a youth, as one whose progress is held in balance — young enough to play and old enough to work. In fact, the whole world of Munoo, his whole milieu is held in check. There is no going back or forward. The village has taken away everything from him and the town has nothing to offer him. He had heard of how the landlord had seized his father's five acres of land because the interest on mortgage covering the unpaid rent had not to be forthcoming because of the short-fall of rains and consequently bad harvest. His father died a slow death of bitterness and disappointment, and his mother was left to die penniless, while grinding gains day in and day out.

Still, Munoo loved to luxuriate in the lavish beauty of nature, but he is equally attracted by the industrial world. He wanted machines come there and tear him from the sandy morning of the still back-waters where he played. He was caught between the world of play and that of work, of the agrarian and industrial, of nature and culture. His uncle, however, drives him out of his *impasse* to take him to Sham Nagar to work as a servant in the household of a bank clerk.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 begins showing Munoo trudging down-hill, as his uncle goads him on. “Walk quickly! walk quickly! Ohe!” shouted Daya Ram. Munoo was slow of pace, as his heart still lay in the natural surroundings of the hills. Obviously, he found the journey tedious. Besides he was bare feet and intermittently sat to nurse his feet, which were sore and weary after ten miles march. However, the sun shone with searing intensity, and he was perspiring under the thick cotton tunic. He felt his blood rather than sweat evaporated as he moved along urged by his uncle to walk quickly. Here, Daya Ram’s egoism rather than need to reach early that made him shout. He shouted. “Come quickly” not so much from the fear of being late as to impress his nephew and the rustic passer-by with the importance his position he occupies in the service of Angrazi Sarkar, writes Anand.

Throughout the narrative, Anand believes that egoistic instincts in human being were originally stronger than sweet sympathy, yet the later would eventually develop with the development with the intelligence and family life. For the family, not the individual, Anand believed is the real social want: in it the individual learns to live and work for other. Clearly this page of social sympathy is yet to dawn. The novel shows only some glimmerings of his stage; Munoo passes still through the egoistic stage. Gujri, his aunt, pushed out in order to bear his own son. Larger social conditions than the family are so difficult to sustain, but they are indispensable.

As his uncle shouted for Munoo to accelerate his pace, the boy cried: there were tears in his eyes as he gazed at his blistered feet and felt a quiver of self-pity go through him. He told his uncle to have pity on him. He sobbed, but Daya Ram, driven by egoism, only wanted to be kind, but could not except promising to get Munoo (a pair of shoes a promise which he did not mean to fulfil) out of the boy’s next month’s pay.

Munoo told his uncle he could not walk and asked him to request the driver of cart to take him on. But the uncle would not make such request fearing lest the driver of cart should want money for the ride. Once more Daya Ram’s egoism come to the force, as he felt too much dignified in his uniform to ask the cart-driver for a favour though deviously he said loudly “No, no, he (the driver) want money if he lets you ride,” so that the cart-driver might hear and offer the ride free of charge.

What could be a better examples man’s egoism, his selfishness, his deviousness? The cart-driver heard Daya Ram and snubbed him: “don’t be too proud of your Chaprasihood and put the boy on the back here,” and added “And you can get on the cart, too. You must be warm in that red woolen coat.” Most human miseries, and Anand shows in the novel, are because of our pride and prejudice, prudishness. Daya Ram would stand on false pride and let the boy suffer. He rather blamed Munoo for bringing disgrace to him. The boy walked fast, tearing a blow or two of his uncle. He avoided stones by hoping about giving occasional relief to his sole while walking on his toes. Soon he grew cheerful, as he found the signs of the town — a large number of tall flat-roofed houses, crowded in irregular groups, minarets of mosques and temple — visible. Munoo’s curiosity to see new things is inexhaustible. On nearing the town, he forgot the inconvenience of the journey. He was happy that he reached the end of the journey.

Journey, as we have noted, is the central motif of the novel. It has, to be so in a picaresque novel that *Coolie* is. And curiosity to know is the main motive behind Munoo's journey. Anand aligns the passion of general curiosity with the passion for discovering the truth. It is like the passion for the chase or for gambling at the passion for knowledge. Munoo is not only a boy, a hill boy at that, who wants to know what lies beyond the hills, but is equally inquisitive about city-life. As he advances on his journey, his passion to know, the 'why' of things gets the better of other motives. Anand found the passion futile, as it eggs us on as it did Munoo, to go beyond what lies on the surface of things. Hence, it is metaphysical.

Munoo's, of course, is a child's curiosity—to know the unknown, the metaphysical, the absent, whereas things are so apparent. That is why, when he comes to know people and places, he becomes disenchanted. He is like Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, who cries "O brave new world/That has such people in it."

That Munoo was curious to know things is shown by his facial expression. On reaching Sham Nagar, the first leg of his journey, he "stared wide-eyed and open-mouthed at the marvel of different carriages, two-wheeled, box-like bamboo carts and tongas... which seemed to him curious, "as some of them — cars — ran without horses on the main road. The spectacle filled him with wonder of all wonders. "What is that, animal?" he asked, rushing up to his uncle to still the thumping of his heart and to seek confidence that knowledge brings.

Anand seemed to ask us through Munoo to develop intelligence of the knowledge of various sciences in order of their complexity, sociology in particular, as it is not only the most complex, but also the latest to develop. Short of the knowledge of sciences, mankind as a whole, like Munoo, live in the pre-lapsarian stage, wondering at phenomena, suspecting it to be guided by some substance from underneath them. This fills Munoo, it did two pre-scientific man not only with wonder, but also with dread.

Munoo, as the human race, still lives in the pre-scientific stage. It is the stage of confusion. The old order of the theological stage is not yet dead and the new positive stage is far from ushering in the dawn of scientific age. Munoo lived through the transitional stage in which the other two co-exist. That creates confusion. Munoo met this confusion on the main road of Sham Nagar – that the bullock cart ran race with the motor-car. The same confusion subsisted in people's perception. This confusion in human behaviour is observed through Munoo's eyes. His uncle who assumed a proud aspect grew humble when he had to deal with the guard of the bank. He now appeared a menial, the lowest of the low. Similarly, when he had to tell Munoo what the railway engine was like, Daya Ram replied in a tone a little now kindly now that he was getting into the world when he could not pass himself off as a master he pretended to be in the hills.

Munoo, however, continued to be surprised on learning how people in the town lived by business, not agriculture. They did not graze cattle, but plied engine. We would utter "How strange" on seeing or learning new phenomenon the railway engine or the gramophone. Everything absorbed his fancy. His gaze was arrested by every new phenomenon, a cycle, he thought to be a steel-horse or a little dog-doll. In his absorption regarding the steel-horse, he nearly was knocked down. The cyclist drew the machine at a terrific speed, and because the road was medley of traffic, he collided with a calf which strayed about among the crowds of men and women at the cross-roads.

Sham Nagar is a typical Indian town, with crowded roads, shops and offices. The confusion is worse confounding. The office of the bank where Daya Ram worked was another world of confused. “Jingling coins, shuffling fans.” Babu Nathoo Ram, the bank clerk received Daya Ram with a faint smile of amusement which soon twisted into a smile of contempt. Obvious, the Babu was happy at the prospect of having a servant, but because Munoo was accompanying another servants, i.e. Daya Ram, Babu Nathoo Ram betrayed his contempt for the duo. This confusion is part of human egoism. Man, as David Hume said, is altruistic by nature, but his sympathies are gravely limited. Anand, following Comte, believed that unless we get rid of our egoistical instincts, we cannot develop social solitarily. In the absence of the latter, society will continue to suffer from layers of servility. If Munoo was sub-serviant of his uncle, his uncle was slave of the Babu, the Babu of the head cashier from England, and so.

Anand wished this hierarchy to go, if society was to enter the positive stage because this is based on nothing substantial but human egoism based of money, status, colour, creed, etc. Anand showed that the present society is confused as part of the time men think they are superior in one context, but inferior and low in another situation. There is no centrality of one term, for example; status is a determining factor in human relationship. The Babu who looked down upon Daya Ram and Munoo, cringed before the British cashier. In this case, race becomes central in the hierarchy of relationships. Anand, like Derrida, later, did not abolish the centre altogether, but posited that it is functional, i.e. there has been a head cashier on a clerk, as there has been manager in a bank, like the Imperial Bank where Daya Ram worked as a peon. But these centers are to be functional, i.e. they serve a function in a system in which they operate.

But unfortunately, we have not yet achieved the stage, where besides working in a system, as for example, that of banking, all functionaries will work, as different parts in a machine do, without metaphysical presumptions that vigorously opposed the gospel of individualism. A man, for Anand, is a social animal. As civilization advances, altruism will triumph our egoism and we realize that public functions are more important than private functions.

Till that time, till the positive stage arrives, mankind is doomed to suffer hierarchy of the great and the small, as if it were causally constituted by abstract forces, consolidated in a single force, called “Nature” with capital “N”, good and godly. When Munoo was asked to bow by his uncle to Babu Nathoo Ram, Munoo, all humility, thought the Babu to be a miracle: “Long live the gods,” he said and wondered at the Babu’s black boots. He further wondered whether the language that his would-be master spoke was the “Angrezi” speech which the village school master said should be learnt by all those who wanted to be babus. From wondering about the Babu’s speech, he fell to admiring his clothes from top to toe. This deification is what Anand condemns. Munoo was not only all reverence for the Babu, he also saw his uncle bowing obsequiously over his joined hands in homage to the Babu.

From the bank, Munoo was dragged to the house of the Babu. One way to the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, Munoo saw nothing but confusion, in the form of irregular rows of windowless houses, dingy streets littered with broken bottles, rusted oil-tins and leaking buckets that lay heaped up all around, with decaying vegetables and yellow papers, piles of stones and crumbling bricks overgrown with moss. Amidst dust and decay stood Babu Nathoo Ram’s house – a bungalow. The house once again filled Munoo with wonder, because the house was part of those buildings which lay shrouded,

as Munoo sensed (a false scent) in an atmosphere of cool, shady trees among neatly trimmed hedges. He wondered who lived in these houses.

Again and again, Munoo betrayed his sense of the miraculous, because he still, like the whole mankind, tended to reach for the causes and substances beneath the phenomena. Anything – riches, and status, English language and its speakers, bungalows, etc. filled Munoo's heart with wonder. Even the wife of the Babu, otherwise a non-descript woman struck Munoo's imagination with her muslim sari, which he had seen none of the hill women drape in it that way, except the landlord's wife in the village. The landlord's wife too belonged originally to the town, recalled Munoo. If nothing else about the house charmed him, he was impressed by the polished corners of table, chairs, pictures which attracted his inquisitive eyes.

But soon, Munoo's romance of the place and its people evaporated, as the wife of the Babu seemed to him to resemble his aunt. And he thought that his aunt never cursed so much as the wife of the Babu did – abusing and beating her child and later Munoo. At this resemblance, Munoo grew apprehensive – what life in this woman's house would prove. He was tired and needed food and rest. His uncle assured him that he would be given plenty to eat. Instead he was given a stale loaf of pancake to eat and a corner in the kitchen with a rag of a blanket to wrap and sleep. In the kitchen itself, Munoo found further evidence of confusion, as he earlier did in the street leading to the Babu's house. The kitchen lay in utter confusion. Utensils were mixed with children's toys, glass bottles big and small further mixed with bottles of medicine. There were sacks of flour and lentils and huge wooden boxes and tins, containing Munoo knew not what. There were two dirty shirts and an alpaca jacket hanging from pegs in the wall, two enormous coloured pictures and a large mirror covered with root wood lay heaped in one corner.

The kind of confusion that Munoo saw in the kitchen and all around the house repelled him, but he was equally surprised regarding the junk in the house. He wanted to see what lay in other corners of the house. His eyes lit with that impish curiosity which had made him go hunting for bird's eggs in the tree, the bushes and rock. Hume compared human curiosity with hunting and gambling Munoo heart fluttered over new discoveries and adventures. Curiosity is like eyes – dropping – peeping through crevices. Munoo was curious in all these ways. A powerful incentive is also found in the passion for prying and peeping which keeps busy-bodies always delving into other people's affairs. The unknown produces less vivid and therefore less pleasurable ideas than the known. Hence, Munoo sought to remove pain by acquiring knowledge of the household of Babu Nathoo Ram. In the village, he felt delighted when stealing fruit from the gardens. He felt the lure of adventure in his bones.

Anand would not hold this passion in very high esteem. Munoo, for example, peered through a half-open doorway to see who lay on the bed. What he could see was an interesting medley of objects in the room, beside the figure of the master of the house spread over the bed. He could also see tables and chairs, instead of discovering where the members of the house relieved themselves. And he relieved himself outside the house. This act of his raised a hue and cry, mostly by the wife of the Babu. The brother of the Babu, called Chote Sahib by Munoo, however, tried to laugh away the awkward situation. The young man also tried to make it easy for Munoo to work, with his humour, and he, indeed, made Munoo feel at home, but the nagging Bibiji did not spare Munoo, taking him to task for every conceivable negligence. This made Munoo's life a hell. He

tried to befriend the Babu's ten year old daughter Sheila by doing monkey dance, but Bibiji was too prudish to allow Munoo to mix up with the members of the house. His aunt too was terrible, but Bibiji was the worse. His aunt despite has churlish nature, loved Munoo, even kissed him at time – but this woman seemed to hate for nothing, said Munoo. He did every chore in the house from peeling vegetables to carry tea, but was neither given enough to eat, nor a good ward of love and affection. This made Munoo miserable. Instead, he was abused and beaten. He felt himself old. He felt good only in the company of Chote Sahib or Sheila. Most of his troubles emanated from his habit of losing himself in wondering at things. He scrutinized everything with wonder and love, tracing the colours, the shapes and sizes of all things, inquiring into their meaning. “What is written in the book?” he wondered, or “How does the clock work?” he questioned to himself. He was especially charmed by the voice in the gramophone. There was nothing in these phenomena to mystify Munoo, except his ignorance of various sciences, the knowledge of which leaves nothing to be mystified with.

Anand wished to recognize society on scientific lives. Already he had suggested the process of undoing untouchability through the introduction of flush system in *untouchable*. In *Coolie*, he advanced further in the direction of the need for acquiring scientific understanding of the phenomena. Munoo even felt mystified by the idea of serving separate tea. He stood enthralled when Chote Babu poured milk from one jug and tea from another. In the process, he forgot to bring the cream. When he was told to do so, he was disturbed in his reverie. Munoo's absorption in new things provoked the lady of the house to abuse him for not performing his job carefully. He, for example, dropped the whole china tea set off all the marvels, the most mysterious that appeared to him was Chota Babu's shaving machine. This spectacle had aroused his curiosity, too, the first time he had seen it. This invited Bibiji's curses for his straying away from the kitchen.

It is not that he did not work hard; he cleaned utensils and swept floor, but his tendency to lose himself by the novelty of things, in addition to the nagging housewife made his stay in the house miserable. He now believed that Bibiji could always find something to abuse him for some fault, the other, the way he placed the pot, the manner in which he handled the broom, or the way he held the potatoes as he peeled them. Except for an occasional humorous remark by Chote Babu, and the silent sympathy of Sheila, Munoo's life resolved itself around the routine of domestic slavery. He had no clear notion as to what he was, except his uncle brought him to be what he had become. It did not occur to himself what he was apart from being a servant. His identity he took for granted.

This was most unfortunate that no reason, except his vague apprehension that there are masters and slaves that Munoo came to accept his destiny. This is the base of the metaphysical stage of thinking. Bakha in *Untouchable* refuses to agree with the Gandhian metaphysical view that a change of heart of the touchables would eliminate the stigma of untouchability. It is vague and mystical in comparison with the device of flush system. The latter is concrete and practicable and scientific too. In *Coolie* Anand meant to not to show the dynamic aspect of the evolution of society. He rather meant to show the bare of the static aspect of it. And while Munoo moved from one city to another, he found the same order prevailing everywhere.

Munoo became fatalist, as he recalled the words of the priest back in the village that men are perverted in their ambitions, and that the boy was to remain a slave until he should come to recognize his instincts. The pronouncement of the priest was primitive and unscientific, as Munoo depending on instinct came to believe that people of the town, as for example, the family of Babu Nathoo Ram, were superior to the hill people. What constituted their superiority, he did not know. This kind of vague feeling is characteristic of the metaphysical stage of social evolution. All that Munoo surmised with regard to the superiority of the people of the town was due to their nice clothes, nice things. That was “enough to convince him that they were marvelous, wonderful people.”

And so, thoroughly, convinced of his inferiority, he “accepted his position as a slave, and tried to instill in his mind that notion of his brutishness, that his mistress so often nagged about.” And “he promised himself again that he would be a good servant, a perfect model of a servant.” But that was not to be. When Babu Nathoo Ram invited Mr. W.P. England, the head cashier of the Imperial Bank of India where he worked as sub-accountant, Munoo was asked to get tea. In his excitement over having the pleasure of Sahib’s company in his master’s house, the sahib of his sahibs, he dropped the tea-set. It crashed into pieces. This was the limit of Bibiji’s anger. Even before he hurried departure of Mr. England, she burst into a volley of curses. She even gave him a slap on the face. Her anger knew no bounds. Munoo became the recipient of double anger – one account of the family’s discomforture, as Mr. English felt ill-and-ease in his stay at Babu Nathoo Ram’s and secondly, Munoo spoiled the show by breaking the china set.

For days, Munoo remained sullen and dejected. The casually performed his duties, but as Anand wrote, his heart was not in the job. He wanted to get away, and he looked forward to his afternoon off. Bibiji kept an eye on him. She did not want him to report to his uncle that he was being ill-treated. But munoo wished to escape this atmosphere, charged with sharp abuse, unending complaints and bullyings, in addition to his yearning for home dishes, particular the lentils and rice that his uncle cooked and of which he had occasional taste on the days he visited Daya Ram’s room. This made him refuse to eat the turnip curry which Bibiji offered him from remainders of her husband’s plate. He announced that he was going to see his uncle.

Bibiji further cursed him and taunted him: “Go and eat rice and dal with your uncle!” Munoo heard her remark thus and sneaked away at the barest mention of the word ‘go’. As he moved out on his way to the place of his uncle, the bitter memories of what he had suffered crowded his mind. He could check his tears, but his heart was full of self-pity. It was a very hot afternoon. His uncle lay asleep. Munoo woke him up by touching his toe and asked for some food. Since it he was not the time for food, he asked for his money because the Babu gave his pay to his uncle. This provoked his uncle to curse the boy for his ingratitude and beat him. Daya Ram had been hardened into cruelty by his love for money, by the fear of poverty and by the sense of inferiority that his job as a peon gave him.

Daya Ram was in a bad temper. He seemed prepared for murder as he gnashed his teeth. He cursed the child for vagabonding, lazing about, and lying. He found Munoo always complaining about his masters. He kicked him again and again as he hurled one abuse after another on the hapless boy and threw him out, saying that he spoiled his good name as an obedient servant of the bank and that he has no sympathy for him, nor has he food to offer him.

Thus kicked by his uncle, Munoo went back. He thought of running away to any place except that of Babu Nathoo Ram, but fearing lest he should be apprehended, he traced his footsteps back. Moreover, he had no money and no place to go. Bibiji was not at home. So he helped himself to some food and lay down to rest. He was full of revenge for his uncle, but soon sleep overtook and he lay on the floor of the kitchen like a corpse. Time healed his wounds of humiliation and once again he regained his zest for life. He was in his humour in no time. He was uncomplaining now. This new attitude made him pick up a row with another servant boy Varma who asked him if his mistress still beat him. And when Munoo said that he did not complain to Varma about her, he was asked whether she loved him. Varma irritated Munoo by making obscene sign of her private parts, he further charged Munoo for stealing money from his mistress's allowances for shopping. Joined by another servant boy Lehnu, Varma struck Munoo with a log of wood and the blow fell aslant on Munoo's forehead. Bibiji found an occasion to abuse Munoo, as she saw him bleeding. She blamed him for his mixing with bad boys like Varma. Chote Babu, however, dignosed the cut, and a doctor as he was, found it dangerous, reaching almost to the skull. He washed the wound and dressed it, though Munoo was content to apply ashes, a treatment recommended by the village barber.

Anand wished to put premium on the scientific treatment of Munoo's wound. Chota Babu daily dressed the would. Sheila also sympathized, though silently, with Munoo's state of health. He was in the limbo of fever and pain. As he became aware he felt as if he had emerge from centuries of forgetfulness. He faintly remembered that his uncle had come to inquire about his health. He hated his uncle, hated everyone except the Chote Babu and perhaps Sheila. For the latter, he had a vague sexual feeling, the way she addressed him 'Come, ohe monkey, come and eat your food, in particular. He also liked to watch her, especially the outline of her figure behind the poor concealment of her wet muslim dhoti, as he came out of the bathroom. But he felt guilty, for he had learnt in the village to regard every female as 'sister'. All the same, it was a futile desire, as he had no money to be equal to her status. He cried: "if only he had money, if only the Babu did not give the pay which was due to him to his uncle, Daya Ram, he would have saved the money and run away to become a banker. . . ." His state was like that of Bakha who had a longing to wed the sister of his friend, but 'the case within case stood in his way to marriage, as the girl belonged to a washerman's family, a caste higher to that of the sweeper's in hierarchy.

It is for this reason *Coolie* is said to a novel about cash nexus, as *Untouchable* is about untouchability. "Money", Munoo observed, "is, indeed, everything." And his mind dwelt for the first time on the difference between himself, the poor boy, and his masters, the rich people, between all the poor people in his village and Jay Singh's father, the landlord.

He recalled so many cases of the poor in the village who lived and died in utter poverty, despite the labour they did to earn their livelihood. He remembered how his father looked pathetic before his death and how his mother moved the mildstone till she died. How empty he himself felt without her warmth. The poor are numberless in the village. We wondered whether all those poor people would die like his parents and leave a gap in his belly as the death of his mother and father had done. In the town, of course, there seemed many more rich people than poor people. Munoo thus formed theories, but facts would defeat them, for soon in Daulatpur and later in Bombay, he would come

across crowd of poor people. Still he was right in saying that villagers are poorer the people than in the people in town, and that villages outnumber towns. Hence, surely, there were more poor people in the whole world than rich he concluded.

Munoo thus vaguely thought that there were only two kinds of people – the rich and the poor. Caste, he said, did not matter. He reflected: “I am Kshatriya and I am poor, and Varma, a Brahmin, is a servant boy, a menial, because he is poor. He was emphatic that caste does not matter. Munoo’s mind, as it reflected on the problem of the rich and the poor, still belonged to the metaphysical stage. It was, for example, vague, as metaphysics appeals to vague forces of nature, and since theology is replaced by philosophy, the latter stresses absolute answers. Munoo thought that his conclusions so authoritative: “No, caste does not matter.” “The babus are,” he further said, like the sahib-logs, and all servants are alike: there must only be two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor.

Anand himself would not subscribe to this thinking. He in *Untouchable* seemed to reject Marxism espoused by Bashir, who said that Gandhi was not radical enough. It is not that Anand liked to support Gandhi’s view of the change of heart required for the elimination of untouchability. Gandhi was vague, as Munoo in *Coolie* is. They are abstract, find they would do, reality, fixed and eternal, as Munoo, for example, discovered that money alone matters or that there are two classes of people – the rich and the poor. If that is the case then there is no possibility for man to be altruistic, as, for instance, Chote Babu’s sympathy for Munoo. Of the four members of the family. If Bibiji was nasty and the Babu indifferent, Chote Babu and Sheila were positively benevolent. This even Munoo admitted, but he still appeared dogmatic about ‘reality’. Sheila really liked him and was amused by his funny dance. She wanted him to play with her and wished in one of those playful moment that he had bitten her on the cheek. This followed a shower of curses hurled by Bibiji.

This was the last of Munoo’s stay with Babu Nathoo Ram’s family. He slipped out of the Babu’s house in the twilight, immediately after the family had withdrawn into kitchen after the incident. He ran down the hill, passed through the confusion of big shops and small shops to reach the railway station. He ran, down by the railway light and before he could compose himself, he was already inside a compartment of a train bound for unknown destination, but he was thankful to be in that moving thing.

Chapter 3

Soon Munoo want to sleep. He slept the whole night, buried amidst the congestion of luggage. India, as Anand showed, was in a stage of confusion, passed as if did through the metaphysical stage. One could see confusion of things and ideas everywhere. India is, indeed, still passing through this stage. Where Munoo lay the whole of the night was a cramped place with all kinds of boxes, trunks, beddings, bundles, bedsteads, mounds of foodstuff, clothing and knick-knacks, bound in sheets of cotton, etc. The people travelling in the compartment also belongs to all religions and there were Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and as the day dawned they saw with a shock Munoo curled up at the feet of a passenger, Prabha Dyal. All of them wondered in the name of their respective God: who was he? Where did he come from – hell or heaven. Prabha Dyal at whose feet Munoo lay the whole night found in Munoo a son-figure, as he was childless. Moreover, Munoo, like him, belonged to the hill. This affinity made him feel good. But he was the object of taunts of his partner Ganpat who in his spite referred to Prabha Dyal's compliancy and ironically congratulated his companion for finding a full-grown son in Munoo, and therefore, he had not to run after collecting herbs to regain potency. Ganpat had also a dig, saying: "It is you who are impotent, and not your wife who is barren!"

Prabha Dyal ignored Ganpat's jibs – and asked Munoo's name and his antecedents. He spoke in the hill-man's accent that he had not forgotten it, though he had left home early and lived in the city of Daulatpur, working his way up from a coolie in the streets to the proprietorship of a pickle-making and essence-brewing factory. Happily, Munoo told that he was called Munoo at his village Gopipur and Mundu at Sham Nagar, that his father died and then his mother died too and that he has run away from the house of a bank clerk where his uncle put him as a servant "we had better to be him with us", said Prabha to his partner Ganpat, who, we have seen from his satirical remarks, was none too benevolent a fellow. This is immediately proved when he objected to Prabha's taking the boy along. Ganpat said that Munoo could be a thief, a rogue. However, he agreed to take him with them, as they needed another boy at works to help Tulsi, Maharaj and Bonga, to run errands and do odd jobs. Ganpat added: "And, he seems, he will be glad enough to have the food and we need not pay him." For Munoo, it was an escape; so he agreed to go with them. Prabha, however, patted the boy and assured him that they would take care of him. Munoo's theory that only money mattered is proved untrue in the case of Prabha and later in the case of his wife. He felt toward the boy. He had suddenly recognized a kinship with him, the affinity his soul felt for his unborn son. Only he tried to make himself believe that it might be possible to regard this complete strange boy as a son and he tried to imagine what his parents were. Thus, Prabha tried to establish an identity with Munoo. Man, is perhaps Anand thought, is benevolent by nature, but his sympathies are strictly limited to his near relations. Prabha's love for Munoo belonged still to the elementary stage. He saw in Munoo a surrogate son. Anand, like Comte, thought the family to be the basic unit of society. All our social relationships are familial – of parents and children, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, and so on. These relations are perhaps instinctive.

Prabha's attachment with Munoo was instinctive. A chord of sympathy ran in his whole being. He recalled the images of his own parents who died in poverty, like the

parents of Munoo. "They must have been poor," he thought of Munoo's parents, "but, then, all hill folk are poor," Ganpat, on the other hand, was a rich man's son, but turned a liberatine. He disgraced his family by gambling, drinking and whoring. He did not marry. He had no family life. He would, therefore, not be able to appreciate family ties, not be able to develop social ties. Ganpat made fun of these ties. He could not think of any other terms, except those of master-slave relationship. He thought of employing Munoo in various capacities, but Prabha, on the other hand, could not help being naturally paternal to the boy.

Thus, accompanied by Prabha and Ganpat Munoo reached Daulatpur. Munoo was excited on reaching the city, but he was equally afraid of being in an unknown town.

However, we know by this time, that Munoo has an inexhaustible fund of curiosity to know things, now, though it was not as strong now as it had been when he landed in a town of Sham Nagar. The town still being hilly was also no so over-crowded. Daulatpur in comparison was an old town. The factory where had to work was also dingy. It was a virtual hell, a hole of burning furnaces. But the meal he was served consisted of rice, both plain and sweet and dal and vegetables, tamarind pickle, all hill dishes which he had missed in the Babu's home. The factory, nevertheless, was hell-hole. Munoo was to be virtually lifted to descend into the strange, dark, airless outhouse of the factory, which sank like a pit into the bowels of the earth. Munoo thought that it was a well. He was happy despite the place of work, that he was rescued by Prabha. He felt good in Prabha's company, as he earlier did in the company Chote Babu at Sham Nagar. On the very first day, he almost got bunt while messing about near the ovens, when Tulsi was emptying boiling water out the cauldron. Prabha tried to use him for errands outside the pit, as far as possible.

Daulatpur, as we have seen, is an older town; being a feudal city, it was even more staggering a scene of confusion of things, characteristic of the metaphysical stage, as we have noted earlier. In the face of this confusion, Munoo had one feeling: that of holding his sheet-anchor, so that he might not get lost. In fact, Daulatpur was a maze of a town with its turnings right and left. The faces of the people in its streets, specially their colours mixed together, distinguished out by the varied colours and shapes of their clothes. His mind was bewildered on further seeing all conceivable variety of sweets, clothes of different patterns, locks of different sizes. Prabha introduced him to various shopkeepers for delivering essences. Munoo started reading the signboards of shops. Every shop, he found, had invariably two, three and sometimes four boards. There was a whole row of doctors with various degrees written out in huge letters.

Anand described this medley to underline the confusion of the metaphysical stage through which India as a country passed and is still passing. We shall have a glimpse of worst kind of confusion of traffic in Bombay. Munoo saw a shop of tailors followed by that of jewelers, of fruit having a variety of fruits. Next sat an ascetic with his ash-smearred body and shaggy hair, naked except for a rag around his waist. The crowd became thicker and more varied, as baggy-trousered Mohammedans alternated with loin-clothed Hindus and trousered babus. Lest he should be lost in the confusion, Prabha held Munoo's finger for the latter continued to retain his tendency to be bewitched by the scenes of novelty. On the way home Munoo thought of the varied succession of the day's event. He felt he was in a strange world. The prospect of visits to the bazaars was exciting. There were so many things to be looked at, strange things stranger than those he had seen in Sham Nagar. Daulatpur, for Munoo, was a wonder city. He

all through the journey took confusion for wonder. The greater the confusion, the greater Munoo's wonder. His wonder grew as he recalled the mention of Daulatpur in his history book, that it was founded by Maharaja Daulat Singh, a contemporary of Rama. The whole line of kings who successively ruled the town passed through his mind's eye. He felt confused and bewildered by its masques and temples, its old shops and new shops. The metaphysical stage betrayed this confusion of the old and the new, because, being a transitory stage, it showed the co-existence of the past and what was to come. Munoo wished to live in the new, in the positive stage of railway station of English quarters, plain and simple. He wondered why the British government had not razed the old city and built shops and houses like their bungalows.

Anand also like Munoo wanted the India of confusion to be pushed to clarity and simplicity. He wanted Indians to realize the positive stage so that they emerge from the negative stage of decay and disintegration. As India stood, in thirties and as it stands today, all the three stages – theological, metaphysical and positivistic co-exist. Hence, India has ever remained in a state of confusion. That has been and is its bane. We have refused not to be charmed by pre-scientific thinking. Still see an ascetic walking besides a trousered gentleman, a marauder running along a bullock-cart on the same road.

Meanwhile, Munoo was given work in the underground factory. Ganpat was callous about exacting work. He was particularly harsh with Munoo, because he was the darling of Prabha and his wife. He liked Parbati. She had patted him on the head and even given him cream to eat with his bread as an extra dish. But she was so quiet. He was afraid of her, afraid and shy.

Munoo was happy that his master and mistress were kind. This feeling made his work in the factory tolerable. Ganpat's presence, no doubt, was an irritant. He always grumbled that the work in his absence slackened. He would shout at the boys. At times, he would beat them. Munoo formed a view that while rest of the people were from the hills, and therefore were good, Ganpat was a city man. This could be the reason for his bad temper. He resembled nagging Bibiji at Sham Nagar when whenever Ganpat spoke harshly to the boys. He was even nasty with his neighbours, especially Rai Bahadur Sir Todar Mal. After a hand-to-hand fight with the son of Rai Bahadur, Prabha rebuked Ganpat for picking up a quarrel. Munoo always referred to Ganpat as goat-face.

Munoo got used to life in the primitive factory. It was a dark, evil life. He rose early at dawn before he had had his full sleep out, having gone to bed after mid-night. He descended to work in the factory, tired, heavy-lidded, hot and limp, as if all strength had gone out of his body and left him a spineless ghost of his former self. But he had learnt to be efficient. His first job to sift the cinders from the ashes, then help Tulsi to light the fires. The goat-face Ganpat would come bullying the boys, asking them to hurry up. He would come anytime during the day to see if the boys were doing their best. Munoo often wondered what was the matter with him: "Why did he always remained burnt up with a frown on this face, abuse on his tongue and his bullying fist upraised?" he did not know that Ganpat was a rich man's son, born and brought up in luxury. Munoo further theorized that Ganpat's ill-temper was due to his poverty, as his father gambled away his fortune and left nothing for the boy to fall back upon. But this speculation led Munoo nowhere as far as the reality e.g. Ganpat's nature was concerned. But he could not help speculating, that Ganpat cultivated a tough skin and bullying manner to

word off his downfall on the one hand, and to amass wealth and riches in the world. Anand seemed not to be happy with Munoo's speculations, because Ganpat on the basis 'reality' discovered by Munoo appeared to be a potential murderer. This made Munoo terribly afraid of the goat-face. He eventually became melancholy, betrayed he did, the symptoms of depression. He felt he could neither face nor talk to anyone in the mornings, least of all his master and mistress, that he would break down if they said one kind word to him or looked at him tenderly. He would feel good in the absence of Ganpat. With other coolies he felt free to sing and play. He washed his hand and combd, but the fit of deep depression came upon him with the arrival of Ganpat. Ganpat was, indeed, a terror for the whole lot of coolies. He kept a vigilant eye on them and punished them for being lazy.

Thus, Munoo, as also other coolies, worked from day to day in the dark underworld, full of heat of blazing furnaces. Munoo especially was content to think that he was taking enough exercise, still wondering that he had not grown to be a man. He was a little sad to realize that there had not been any appreciable change in his height and girth since he left his village. To this end, he worked for long hours, from dawn to past midnight. Indeed, they all worked hard – Tulsi, Maharaj and Bonga. During winter, Munoo, however, felt more comfortable. He loved to sit by the fire and watch the flames leaping from the surface of the coal. Towards late spring, he became very happy indeed, as mangos – green and unripe came to the factory for making pickles. Munoo had a special taste for mangos, and since the factory needed unripe mangos, Munoo had no option but to eat the unripe ones. As a result, he got sore eyes. Ganpat took him to task, but Prabha comforted him saying: "You should have buried the unripe mangos in the straw for a few days, fool, and eaten them they were ripe." Ganpat blamed Prabha for spoiling the boy and charged the latter for having no idea of business. Munoo was laid up with fever and sore eyes for a few days. Parbati took motherly care of the boys. It was particularly a period of peace, as Ganpat left Daulatpur for collection. Munoo during this period enjoyed the care and concern of the mistress of the house. Here was almost nothing touch, but Munoo sensed "an extra element of reaching out to the unknown". He, as part of his metaphysical ethos of India society, could not help searching for the unknown Parbati's motherly love. His adolescence was also a transitory stage between childhood and youth – a period of awakening along "the curve of desire", as Anand put it, "into the wild freedom of love which is natural, which acknowledges the urges of the heart, which seeks fulfillment, like the animals, and which mocks at the subterfuges of illusion and the limitation of morality."

With care and medicines administered by the loving hand of the mistress, Munoo soon recovered to work once again into the inferno of the factory. Ganpat took longer to return and when he did, Munoo's sufferings increased. Ganpat arrived with something on his mind, which Munoo vaguely felt to be disturbing. Indeed, Ganpat came back with a design against Prabha and his pet Munoo. He was particularly angry with Munoo, suspecting his motives. He found Munoo looking at the former. Munoo's curiosity to know brought Ganpat's on him. It so happened that Prabha sent fresh jam to Lady Toder Mal through Munoo. Ganpat took it to be an excuse to punish Munoo, and through Munoo Prabha. Ganpat beat Munoo. Munoo cried. Ganpat found this occasion to break his ties with Prabha. He kept the collection with him and left Prabha to face debtors. Prabha tried to be as good-nature and friendly as possible to patch up the quarrel, but Ganpat was bent up to ruin his partner. Prabha in no time faced bankruptcy.

He was not able to pay debts. He was heart-broken and was taken ill. He was taken to the police-station, beaten and insulted. Munoo and Tulsi supported their master in the hour of need. But they too were helpless, as coolies were so numerous and jobs so few. They belonged to all religions. Munoo's habit of forming theories on the basis of his discovery of reality made him conclude that religions did not matter, for there before his eyes, he could see a Hindu coolie accepting a Mohammedan hubble-bubble. If the acceptance of hookah and water were a test, surely the coolie had no religion. But Munoo was mistaken. The theological stage exists besides the metaphysical, as he himself vaguely felt that they would not eat food from each other's hand. For himself, however, it did not matter, he thought. And anyway, whether it mattered or not, all that he was concerned now was to find a job.

Anand wanted Munoo, and perhaps all of us to give up the habit of searching for reality of things beneath the surface and instead attend only to the observable conduct of the people. It is always possible for people of different religions orientations to share things, but this should not be taken to mean that they have crossed over to the positivistic stage. There is something that binds them to the old, as, for example, the coolies can share hookah, but not eat from each other's hand. Societies thus ever remain stuck to the old order, as they advance toward the future possibilities. This is what derride also meant by his concept of *difference* i.e. difference in what is similar and similarity in difference – differing and deferring and differing. Munoo also admitted that “only the mixture of type excited him. He had seen many Hindu hill coolies together, but he had never seen Muslim and Sikh coolies. He wondered if the Hindus did not resent the violation of their religion by mixing with the Mohammedans. He hoped they did not, for he secretly recalled how he bought a pot of mutton curry with swollen bread at a Mohammedan cook-shop one day. He secretly entered the shop, but there was nothing strange in violating the prevailing custom, except the sense of guilt. It seemed to him that religion did not matter, Munoo said once again. Earlier, he had said that caste did not matter. Both caste and religion do matter; they are part of the status of Indian society from within which advance towards humanism is made.

Munoo and Tulsi made many efforts to earn so as to comfort their master and mistress, though Munoo being too young to carry heavy load could not earn much. Even together, they could not pool much, as the competition was great. Meanwhile, Prabha was persuaded to go back to the hills, as his condition grew worse and the doctor advised him to go away to the hills if he wanted to live. It was an awful parting. Prabha cried, as did Munoo and Tulsi. Munoo stood as sadly, as his master, mistress and Tulsi boarded the train. He was left alone and miserable. This state of aloneness and haplessness, and having nothing to eat, he turned toward a shrine – the shrine of Bhagat Har Das, as he knew he could get free food there. He also wanted to become religious, though he had a short while ago said that religion did not matter.

But Munoo wanted food more than blessings of religion. He did not buy flowers for offering. He was interested only in food distributed at that hour of the day. A Brahmin who served water to him cursed him for not throwing a copper. Munoo would not mind curses, as he was used to them. Later he took chapattis and dal and satisfied his hunger. He did, however, long for spirituality. He met an ascetic who promised him to make his discipline and eventually a great teacher in his own right. But soon the spiritual man turned out to be a debauch. Munoo felt embarrassed. It was already dark. He slept the night on the board of the closed shop, not daring to go to the empty house

where Prabha lived although the latter told him to spend time there, for he had paid the rent for the whole month. The child did not go, fearing lest there should be a ghost, or he might be taken as a thief. In the morning he walked toward the railway station, thinking that he would be able to earn money for the day by carrying a load from the station to the civil lines, as he had done yesterday.

Munoo asked many passengers for engaging him as a coolie, but before he could get a job, he was scared away by a policeman because he did not possess a licence. He wandered through the British bungalows, appreciating the beauty of the houses and then wandered through the modern bazaar, wondering whether one needed money or education to become a sahib. Munoo liked to evolve some theory of reality. He was shaken out of his theory-forming habit by a British lady asking him "Look where you go!" she seemed to be avoiding contact with the air about him that she considered to be polluted. By this time, Munoo had developed a strong sense of inferiority before white people. Munoo hoped to emerge from this complex, because he had enjoyed the privilege of walking through a superior world, read up to the fifth class and served in a Babu's house. How naïve he was!

Munoo had not stopped being charmed by the superior world of riches and romance. His reverie was broken by the announcement about the last show of a circus in the town that evening before it leaves for Bombay and from there for England. Munoo decided to go to Bombay, a wonder-city one should visit before one died, said a coolie to Munoo, adding that one could earn anything from fifteen to thirty rupees a month in a factory there. Munoo took the first step toward the dream world of Bombay by moving toward the site of the circus. He avoided the entrance to the circus, as he did not want to waste the money (a rupee) Prabha gave him. So, he entered it through a tent. He befriended an elephant driver and with his kind help bonded the train bound for Bombay, again wondering: "why are some men so good and the others so bad, some like Prabha and the elephant driver, others like Ganpat and the policeman...?"

It is, as Anand would say, futile to search for the origin or cause of the good and the evil. But being a child, symbolizing the infancy of human race, as far as the development of human sciences is concerned, he could not help wonder at the basis of every new phenomenon. There was nothing mysterious in the elephant-driver's kindness toward Munoo, for, as he himself put it: "I am glad to help you, because when I was at your age a man helped me to steal a ride from Calcutta to Madras..." Similarly, Prabha's sympathy for Munoo was precisely because he too had been a coolie from the hills. A common cause unites people later in a strike in Bombay. Likewise, when Hindus and Mohammedans share hookah in the vegetable market of Daulatpur, it is the common cause which brings them together.

But Munoo tended to indulge in abstract speculation, passed as he did, like most of us, through the metaphysical stage while travelling in the train along with the circus, Munoo felt excited as he approached his city of many wonders. The elephant-driver, however, warned him: "The bigger the city, the more cruel it is to the sons of Adam." At a glance, Munoo found the city a confused medley of colours and shapes and sizes. The same was the case with buildings of Bombay, vying with each other to proclaim the self-consciousness attained by their architecture. Amid confusion of all kinds – of men and material – it appeared to him, on seeing a coolie asleep in the street that the romance of money strewn about the streets of Bombay sounded falsely hollow. Before him appeared the grim fear of the night coming and finding him alone and friendless in the streets.

Anand constantly showed the horror of human loneliness. He was, therefore, against individualism, and perhaps also against democracy. His opposition of democracy may first appear strange, but he believed in social cooperation and in social unity, not in individual right. Like Comte, he regarded the metaphysical period as an age of disintegration, an age which places too much faith in reason and does not understand the importance of group like, but talks too much about sovereignty of the people.

All alone and friendless, Munoo walked on through the crowded streets, acknowledging the superiority of the clean-clothed rich people. He still carried a rupee coin rolled up in his loin-cloth. He felt thirsty. He thought of having a soda-water bottle. The man gave him the bottle, but treated him badly. Munoo thought that he was, after all, not a untouchable to deserve the ill-treatment at the hand of the soda water man. He thought that he was a Hindu kshatriya, a Rajput, a warrior. This thought put some confidence in him, but that was of no use in a world of selfish individuals fending for themselves. In the rush of people in the street, he spotted a poor old man dragging a loaded woman, who was dragging a boy, while a frightened little girl shrieked in the middle of the road behind them. He at once went in sympathy to rescue the girl, sand-witched between the dangerous stream of traffic. The old man thanked Munoo for his act of kindness. He learnt from the old man that he worked at Sirjabita cotton factory six months ago, before he went to fetch his family from the village.

At once, the chord of brotherhood was struck, both were in the same plight – coolie searching for work. Munoo took no time to become a member of the family. They called each other ‘brother’: “Ah, come, brother,” said the old man, “if you can sleep the night with us, we will all go together to the factory in the morning, and then I will present you to the big Mistri Sahib. And we can take a hut near the Meel and you can lodge with us.” This is what Munoo wanted in that lonely world. Munoo went with them searching for a corner somewhere to sleep. The old man, Hari, Hari Har, knew Bombay too well. They were late and therefore they found it difficult to find a corner. The streets were full of men. They went further and further and at last they found some place to stretch their legs. It was, of course, a dingy place. Munoo wanted to run to get fresh air, but sleep over-powered him. A cool breeze blew though the street only at dawn. But then it was the time to get up. The children were also shaken out of the sleep, as they too had to get used to early rising in order to go to the factory to earn their living: “Thus only can we make both ends meet,” said Hari. They together dragged their way to the factory, Munoo carrying the boy on his shoulders, and the girl on the Laxmi’s (Hari’s wife) arm. Jimmi Thomas, the foreman, offered them work on reduced pay. He sensed their dire need, though he eyed Munoo for special favour. Popularly called Chinta, Chinta Sahib, Jimmy Thomas was a greedy fellow, thriving on extracting gifts from labourers, even while employing them at a reduced pay. He was equally greedy and cruel in extracting work for long hours. He also lent money on an exorbitant interest. Besides he earned by renting huts to the coolies of the factory.

Anand thus shoed all the ills of the economic system of exploitation. The whole family was employed at last on sixty rupees. The foreman then gave ten rupees in advance on an interest of four annas in a rupee, which sum he would add to the regular monthly commission. He rented one of his huts on a rent for three rupees a month. Chimta Sahib was the chief mechanic, besides being an important man for hiring and firing labour. In short, he exploited his position to extract gifts. He also ran an money-lender’s business. And lastly he was a landlord who owned hundreds of straw huts in the neighbourhood and rented them out to the coolies.

The hut rented out to Hari was not high enough for Munoo or Hari's wife to stand in. It had a mud floor just level with or even lower than the pathway outside, overgrown with grass which was nourished by the inflow of rain-water. There was no window, not has the hut a door to boast of. Now that Munoo was inside the hut, his dreams of a glorious Bombay were shattered. He felt suffocated and struggled to breathe. The grocer, a Sikh, was equally exploitative, the factory was another inferno, like the one he worked in Daulatpur. Shift of places – from Sham Nagar to Daulatpur and from Daulatpur to Bombay, therefore, does not matter. India, as a whole, is even at present, passing through transition of social progress. It is passing through an amorphous stage of conflicting values. Bombay, the economic capital of India then and now is a another hell – it had, as Munoo saw imposing structure and huts. It is the same with other metropolis. The hut Hari got for a house was so suffocating that Munoo almost swooned. The working conditions inside the factory were sickening. He recalled the same feeling obtainable in the dark sheds of weavers in his village. The poor lived in hell everywhere – villages or towns. Munoo worked in the hell of the kitchen at Sham Nagar, the underground pickle factory at Daulatpur and the cotton factory at Bombay.

Anand repeatedly used the word 'inferno' to characterize Munoo's India. In fact, all societies even Western passed through hell, except that Indian society is more backward than those of the developed nations. Munoo fortunately, soon got used to the working conditions. He took his work as a poison which was good for his body – it helped him, he thought, "to cast off his liquid shape." Anand, like Munoo was not depressed beyond repair over the working conditions in the factory. In fact, Munoo-like, Anand found a silver lining in the darkest of clouds. On the first-day in the factory, Munoo was bathed in sweat. But while other coolies had taken off their tonic, he did not know how could he do so while his hands were engaged. Munoo never did shirk work. On the contrary, he worked hard at all stations of his detour; only he appeared odd to the predominantly egoist society. Most people could not take him to be a child, passing through precariously the period of his adolescence. He did meet kind people on the way - Chote Babu and Prabha for example. In the factory at Bombay, his fellow worker, a wrestler, turned out to be another kind person, besides Hari. He warned Munoo: "Keep your senses; your will lose your life if you do that." Munoo in his carelessness tore his shirt into tatters across the wheel that gyrated. Hari also rushed up in panic and dragged him away. It is not that every coolie sympathized with Munoo. It is not a question of riches and poverty when we make a kind gesture to others. Hari's son got injured, as he ignorantly touched the belt of a machine in the spinning-shed. The father came running, panting and panic stricken. Munoo himself heard and could not sympathize. He just looked blankly into Hari's face and remained dumb.

Anand meant to show by this gesture of Munoo that exchange of sympathy is not an easy passage among the poor. They could be as well egoistical. Hari has been so sympathetic to Munoo as to take him as a member of his family. Even with Prabha, Munoo's devotion was comparatively less than that of Tulsi's for his master. When Prabha, Parvati and Tulsi were to depart Munoo stood no doubt sadly. But then Anand wrote: "He felt miserable and alone, as if he had already been cut off from them for ever. Reflecting on Prabha's kindness with particular reference to his last gesture of giving a rupee to the boy, Munoo reflected: I wonder if he learnt to be kind by his devotion at the temple." Munoo also went to the temple in the evening, not to learn devotion to humanity, but to have food distributed to the poor.

Anand unlike Munoo, favoured for a religion of humanity. It would have priests like Prabha, not like the person who distributed free water or the saintly figure who used a lady go between for making young brides of merchants pregnant. Munoo's model of religiosity was not Prabha. He seemed to have learnt nothing in terms of benevolence. He still looked for, his own comfort. He, as we have seen, did not say a kind word to Hari to console the latter, nor did he inquire about the safety of the child. This is all the more pertinent in view of the fact that he himself had a narrow escape. On the contrary, it was the wrestler who asked Hari whether the latter had taken the child to the doctor. As Hari had gone to take care of the child, Munoo's heart went out to him. He felt he must go and bear the child on his back to the hospital, because the old man will get tired. He grew apprehensive: "What of the boy died on his shoulder before Hari got there? But Munoo still thought about himself. He felt it would be unbearable to live with Hari and his wife if that happened because they might count their misfortune with their association with him. He thought he was unlucky. He thought of his loneliness, as he had no connection with any of the coolies. He still dreamt of the glamour of the city. The illusion gathered force from the money – 25 rupees a month – Chimta Sahib offered him, that he would be able to fulfill his heart's desire. While keeping his desires and hope secret, he felt good in the company of the wrestler Ratan who offered him his friendship. He did not feel lonely now that he found in Ratan a friend. Inside the factory, he found Laxmi weeping. He could not weep. After the shift he went to the hospital, but where Hari had learnt to be patient and Laxmi had no anxiety of her own, Munoo alone was conscious of the heavy atmosphere of waiting-room. He was troubled by the unending rains.

Rattan took the whole family to his place, as Hari's hut was gutted. Because of Hari, he picked up a quarrel with Chimta Sahib. Ratan was an independent minded person. He did not bow down to the foreman. He had the confidence of his own personal strength, and of the union. He was a good worker and deserved full pay at the end of the month. He felt agitated when he was threatened with a pay-cut for damaged cloth, or for being late. In fact, there was no love lost between Chimta Sahib and Ratan. One day Chimta Sahib discharged Ratan, as the latter came late to the factory. Rattan shook the arm of the foreman. He then rushed to the office of the union. Meanwhile, coolie's rallied around Ratan. Another union, not of Onkar Nath, but of Muzaffer and Sauda come to Ratan's defence. The latter union was Marxist in its persuasion. When Hari asked "what should they do?" Sauda suggested that the coolies must walk out of the mill and refuse to work till their working hours are shortened, their pay is increased, their children given schools and till they are given houses. The management of the mill pre-empted the strike and notified that the mill would go on short time, i.e. there would be no work for the fourth week. So, no wages will be paid for the fourth week.

The workers heard about the notice, they begged and prayed, but the management remained adamant to their entreaties. Munoo thought perhaps it was Ratan's dismissal that had been the cause of the uproar. In his naivete he thought of mediating by seeing Chimta Sahib in his bungalow. The foreman thought that the coolie had come to stab him. He shouted for help and threw the wine bottle he was drinking from at Munoo. The coolies were not left with any other option but to go on strike. Onkar Nath, President of congress – led union tried to pacify the coolies, but Sauda, Munoo's ideological thinking that there are two kinds of people in the world: the rich and the poor, swayed the crowd. Munoo felt that long ago, at Sham Nagar, he too had had similar thoughts

about the rich and the poor. But he could not put them across like Sauda Sahib. But as the crowd shouted in defense of strike, a rumour spread that Hindu children were kidnapped by Pathans. Sauda tried to counter the rumour but a voice rose declaring “but a Hindu child has been kidnapped, Sahib – a Hindu child”; it was followed by many voices, accusing Mohammedans for defiling Hindu religion.

The meeting broke down. Whatever progress the union leaders made in the direction of uniting coolies suddenly back-tracked. Mohammedans also shouted vengeance on Hindu. The Marxist division of mankind into two classes – the rich and the poor was pushed backward. Now, it was not between the rich and the poor, but between two religious communities. The theological stage intervened with the emerging positivistic stage. Confusion, as a result of this intervention, ensued. It was sheer bedlam. Munoo clung to Ratan’s tunic. He seemed suddenly to have forgotten the fresh air that blew when coolies demanded their rights. In the sentient, quivering centre of his mind this conflict summoned the uncertainty of that moment when Prabha was arrested. He could hear the shouts “Kidnapped! Kidnapped” followed by killings on both sides.

In terror, not knowing what had happened, Munoo ran for his life. He thought of Ratan, Hari, his wife and children. He, however, did not mind being away from them. He did not want to go back. He could still hear voices vowing “Allah ho Akbar”. He started to run. He saw a old man, a Hindu, stabbed to death by a group of Mohammedans. Munoo ran blindly. He was not out of danger. The Pathan killers were prowling the area. He saw a frontal battle between the Hindus and Muslims. He thought his death was certain. A Mohammedan left him for dead, as he lay hidden under the cover of a tram. He could hear cries of the half-dead around him. He was rescued from underneath the tram by men of Social Service League, as they rescued a crowd of beggars, pampers and collies from streets where they ordinarily slept. The doctor of the League examined Munoo’s body. A volunteer gave him a cup of milk to drink. He got up and began to walk. Nobody seemed to take any notice of him. He walked toward Chowpatti bay. He mounted a broken wagon and found plenty of space to lie and sleep.

He woke up late next morning, as there was no one to disturb him. But his conscience that he must do something pricked him. Since he did not know or what to do, he thought himself doomed and lost. Anand, however, would not agree with Munoo that one is doomed. Munoo was not a derelict as he felt like at this stage or had ever been so. It is the backwardness of society that made him feel so. A thought when did he never feel lonely. Anand believed that the loneliness of the heart could be removed by zest and enthusiasm for work and by entering the lives of others, as Munoo did earlier. It had been a mark of his character that his zest for work ever made him part of the lives of others. With the thought, his love for work returned with greater vigour. Anand, like Comte, thought that individualism that brings existential loneliness could be removed by working with others. It is a step toward positivism, marking the third stage of social progress possible.

Munoo thought in this direction. He said that he had always come to something when he began to move, to act. For instance, he had met Prabha when he ran away from Sham Nagar. Similarly, he had met Hari and later Ratan. But there had been days, months, years, when he had gone on working and wandering alone. He decided to go back to the mill to see what was happening. As he got up to move and walked toward the mill, he found everything normal. He wondered whether last night’s riots had ended. He thought it could not be the case. Perhaps they were cheating him with a conspiracy

of silence. He wanted to ask someone. He heard a constable telling a Parsee that the rumour about the kidnapping was groundless, and that the police had restored peace. Munoo could overhear leaders talking of the ravages of the last night. He, as per his natural tendency, was inquisitive to know the exact situation. He could still hear shouts and shots from afar. At the end of the road he saw an uprise. His instinct told him that he was safer, for the noise of the shooting seemed to recede. He was tired, dazed and lost. It was in the state that he was knocked by a car. The car belonged to Mrs. Mainwaring. She was terrified out of her wits as to what to do with the boy. She checked his pulse; it was all right. Her driver advised her to leave the boy on the roadside. But fearing the attack of hoobgans for knocking down a person, she thought it fit to take Munoo along. She also wanted a servant at Simla. The chauffeur lifted the boy and put him in the car, despite his reservation, because he recognized him to be a Hindu, and being a Mohammedan, he did not care whether he died or lived. If he had met him alone, he might have killed him directly.

In panic, Mrs. Mainwaring thought of going back to Simla in order to avoid any trouble on account of the accident.

Chapter 4

Munoo recovered his health before reaching Simla, though he was mentally, and even physically broken. He recalled the conditions under which he had to live, particularly the intensity of struggle and the futility of revolt against the privileged and felt sad when he thought of Ratan, Hari and Laxmi. He felt himself to have grown old in the struggle to live. But for Mrs. Mainwaring he was still a young boy with supple body. He was exactly the kind of boy she needed as her servant. She especially liked his dark eyes. She pinched him on the arm and patted him on the forehead. There was something of a playful sexuality in her for Munoo. He was just the boy for her, just the right servant – neither too old nor too young. She thought she would be good to him because she was good hearted.

But despite her good-heartedness, she thought of Munoo nothing more than a servant, a boy servant. Mrs. Mainwaring was born of an Englishman and a Muslim washer woman. Her father was a sergeant in the English army. His name was William Smith. Since she was of a mixed breed, she always suffered from an inferiority complex about her origin. He wished to be a pukka English woman, but because of her dusky complexion, she was miserable at school. Luckily, a young German photographer fell in love with her very dusky hue. But her husband was captured and kept in an concentration camp during the war, leaving behind a daughter and a son she mourned the lose of her husband for some time, but since she had never really gone out to him. She mourned his loss not that she felt for him, but because of her guilty consciousness which had sunk deep into sub-consciousness through her Christian training. Nevertheless, her mixed origin, particularly her maternity, always troubled her. Her warmth, her intense capacity for desire, must have been due to the blood of her pagan grandmother in her. She was, at the same time, equally frigid. The fundamental contradiction in her nature resulted in perversity. She indulged in a strange, furtive, surreptitious promiscuity. She gave herself to people and then regretted having done so afterwards.

Her character thus betrayed the same confusion as the rest of the social ethos. She then married a Muslim, a Persian captain in the Nawab's army, the state when she taught in a school. He really loved her, but her ambition to regain her English nationality again began to disturb her. She mixed up with all sorts of people, particularly English officers in the cantonment of Zalimpur. This provoked the jealousy of her Muslim husband, who beat her and kicked her out of his bungalow. She found an excuse to marry an English officer Guy Mainwaring, with whom she had then been carrying on. He was much younger than herself. After divorcing Aga Raja Ali Shah, she married her young lover and proposed that they should spent their honeymoon in England. She called England her 'home', there she gave birth to a girl child of darker complexion than Guy expected. He suspected the paternity of the child and she confessed. After six months leave, Guy rejoined his regiment at Peshawar. She came back to stay at Simla on the excuse that she wanted to get a diploma in teaching, besides looking after the education of children. Guy had no will to deny her wishes, as he was excessively in love with her. So he rented a flat near Annandale at Simla to which house she returned from Bombay with Munoo.

Munoo who had always been charmed by white people, Mr. England at Sham Nagar, to begin with, was thrilled to be in her company. To cap it all, she was a woman too. As

a young man he felt strong, inexplicable joy in her proximity, as he earlier did with the company of Sheila and Parbati. Mrs. Mainwaring held a greater charm for him; she pinched and patted him and displayed her coquettish smiles. But the sense of his inferior status would not make him bold to think of anything more than her kindness. He at best, thought himself to be fortunate. As a menial he started doing house hold chores – sweeping the sitting room and varanda, happy in the contemplation of a rich life of a servant. She, on her part, wondered what he thought, or whether he thought at all.

She could have found the direction of Munoo's thinking from his bemused behavior of doing various chores on his own, but she wondered over the spectacle, whether there lay something beneath what he appeared to be. The kind of thinking had also been Munoo's bane, and perhaps of the whole social milieu. During this stage of social development, men are attracted as well as repelled by things they know and do not know. This constitutes a vague response toward others – men or things. For instance, Mrs. Mainwaring would love to have asked him to come and talk to her, but that she might be misunderstood, she settled for known attitude of a master for a servant. After all he was a man servant.

Nonetheless, she continued to feel attracted by the regular curves of his body. She wanted to give herself to him, but she was divided within herself between her pagan body and Christian mind.

Like her, Munoo also felt attracted and spellbound by her presence. He would sneak into her bedroom, arranging things, but kept himself always at some distance. Anand was particularly interested in the poetics of this paradox which, he found, stood in the way of harmonizing differences. Both would walk in their differences, but would not come together. Some difference stood between them, mostly the difference between the rich and the poor, the master and the servant. Anand was conscious of some difference, as now Derrida in his formulation of deconstruction, points as he does, multiple layers of differences. Mrs. Mainwaring could not overcome the difference between a master or mistress and a servant.

So, the boy was employed as one of the rickshaw puller. He, indeed, belonged there. They were kind to him, not his mistress. Munoo was happy to pull the rickshaw, for he had an opportunity to see wonderful things. Unskilled as he was in the job, he felt his legs breaking with fatigue all the way back on the very first day of rickshaw pulling. He had fever too. She was obviously disturbed as a mother. She tended him with motherly care. She pushed the difference between them in the background during his illness. She had him removed upstairs and put him into bed where her own baby slept. He requested the Medical officer of Simla to visit the boy daily. But on recovery, he reverted to his position as a servant boy and a rickshaw coolie again. The difference between them was deferred for a time being. As Derrida would say: we differ and defer and defer and differ. What was curious, Munoo did revert to his servile position quite willingly "since how kind Memsahib had been to him, the deep-rooted feelings of inferiority to the people who lived in bungalows and wore Angrezi clothes had never been dispelled."

Munoo's sense of inferiority throughout his journey was thus metaphysical. In fact, all kinds of differences are sought to be seen as metaphysical, rooted ironically in absent origins or causes. They haunt us, as they did Munoo. He went from day to day without break, pulling the rickshaw as the forth coolie. Besides, he had other chores to do at home – dusting, sweeping the bungalow and also running errands for his mistress. She

was happy to be living in India, as servants aplenty are available. Moreover, they are still servants – servile and obedient. They are available, not so, at almost no cost. It was not the case in England. She did enjoy the luxury of being in India, but she was haunted by another kind of difference, that she was not a pure bred English – for one because of her Indian mother, and secondly her paternity was Irish. Therefore, she was refused admission to the Lemon Jack Club at Simla.

Munoo meanwhile, got habituated to his work, though he was not so well. But he was obliging. He was quite happy when his mistress ordered the rickshaw to slow down for shopping on the Mall or when she asked him to fetch things to the rickshaw. Other coolies were indifferent to her demands. But when he come back from the drive, he felt sad and alone, as if he did not belong. His back seemed stiff, so that he could neither stand nor sit. He now spat blood. He had caught consumption. The metaphysics of the great people, and his own feeling of inferiority betrayed him into deeper consequence. Anand used for this metaphysical feeling of inferiority, the term – “ingrained inferiority”. He wondered at Mr. Mainwaring’s superiority when he came to Simla on a short leave. Munoo liked the sahib as the latter bore an affable look, though Munoo did not a pat or a smile from him. But the sahib was nice. Munoo questioned: “Why were not get all sahibs like him?” Munoo, like Anand, felt that by being good the rich and the great lose nothing. But most sahibs, Munoo thought, were not like Mr. Mainwaring. Mr. Merchant, the Medical officer, for example, was an egoist. He would make Munoo do difficult tasks.

In his excitement of servitude, Munoo starting spitting blood. He would still oblige his mistress, but he felt frightened and depressed. “Am I really dying,” he asked himself: he did not know what the disease was, but the congestion in his chest that he had been feeling for days and the blood he oozed from his throat conformed that he was not well. Luckily, Munoo found a benevolent soul in Mohan, a coolie, like Ratan, in the crisis of his life. Indeed, he wrote to Ratan who wrote back, advising him to come back to Bombay. But Munoo found himself too weak to undertake the long journey. The Memsahib, as usual, had been busy attending a ball. She, however, felt concerned; she come out of the dance hall with Major Merchant and learnt that the boy had been taken home because he spat blood. She too had been a victim of social hierarchy even at the Governer’s ball. She was herded aside with the Indian crowd.

The doctor examined Munoo and ordered for the latter’s segregation. Mohan came to look after him. Mrs. Mainwaring also came down with gifts of fruit and flowers during the first few days and even nursed him, cheering Munoo’s depressed spirits. She suffered from pricks of conscience too, but she was not allowed to be kind and good. The Major forbade her to go down to the but. Munoo did mind her absence. But since he was really sick, he felt good and kind toward her. He became self-absorbed. We wanted to live. He, on recovery, thought of going back to Ratan. Every attack of hemorrhage left him weaker. The weekly visit of the doctor was not reassuring, but Munoo could see a strong kindness in Major’s eyes behind the mask of authority that the doctor wore on his face. He felt he might recover. But during another downpour, he felt bad. Mohan assured him, but then Munoo vomited blood. In the early hours of one unreal, wild night he passed away. And Anand wrote: the tide of life having reached back to the deeps.

Questions

1. *Coolie* As A Novel of Social Protest

All literature is essentially a criticism of society. If Matthew Arnold attacked philistinism of society, Mulk Raj Anand wrote to denounce the society based on all kinds of distinctions – of caste, colour, creed, and last but not the least, the distinction between the rich and the poor. While Anand took up to examine the evil of caste in India society – tracing six thousand years of history in the life of Bakha, an outcaste, compressed in a single day in the life of Bakha, an outcaste, in *untouchable*, he diagnosed the ills of money culture in Indian society of all hues – rural and urban in particular and society of any country and culture in general. *Untouchable* has in this regard a limited focus.

Of all the distinctions, the novel focuses on the distinction of the rich and the poor. Munoo, the central character of the novel, is the poorest of the poor. He is, to begin with, a child, and that too an orphan, whose parents died in utter poverty, leaving him nothing to fall back upon. He was hardly fourteen when his uncle and aunt thought of getting him engaged as a domestic help. The novel opens with his aunt calling for him to hurry up as his uncle is shortly to depart for the town of Sham Nagar where the boy is to be engaged as a servant in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a clerk in the Imperial Bank of India, where his uncle worked as a peon. His name is Munoo, but his uncle alternatively calls him Mundu, a child servant, in the hills and the Punjab. No wonder that Munoo has already become a Mundu in his uncle's house, as he grazes cattle. Nevertheless, he could combine play with work in the village. But he would have to dispense with play in his capacity as a servant.

Munoo grows sad over his prospect in the town. He tells his friend Bushamber: “My aunt wants me to begin earning money. My uncle says I am grown up and must fend for himself...” Obviously, Anand protests against the money culture of society which employs children to work as domestic servants. As a novelist with a mission of reorganizing society in a way that would be of lasting benefit to all classes of people, Anand is not against work, but labour that takes away the play of one's childhood, or aspirations of one's youth or the dignity of one's old age.

Munoo is engaged as a servant as if orphans or the poor were destined to work as slaves. In fact, the social set-up as sketched in the novel, is a slave order. At Sham Nagar, Munoo was not the only child servant; there were other boys, all from hills, working in neighboring houses. It appears as if servility is fated. His uncle is slave to the clerk, the clerk to the chief cashier, the chief cashier to the manager of the Bank. Anand is not against order in any society, but he protest against slavery which people accept as given.

Incidentally, India was still a slave country when Anand wrote the novel. *Coolie* was published in 1936. Because of the British rule perhaps, or even otherwise backward societies like ours are stuck with slave order. People of hill, because of their poverty, are slave to the town people, as the latter are cleverer and more selfish than the former. Ganpat belongs to the town. He ditches his partner Prabha, the hillman. Many of the coolies in Bombay are from hills. There is, however, nothing mysterious in the phenomenon. In reply to Munoo's question as to how the town people get their food in the absence of fields, his uncle said: “They earn money by buying wheat which the peasants grow and by selling of flour to the Sarkar, or by buying cotton and making cloth and selling it for profit. Some of them are babus who work in offices, like the

babu in whose house you are going to be servant.”

India had been and is still predominantly an agrarian country. Hills are not even agriculturally viable. It is because of this reason that coolies flock from hills to work in towns. The novel thus is not a mere story of one coolie, but all those who in their poverty are reduced to this status. That's, why perhaps Anand did not prefix the word coolie with 'the' article though the novel is essentially a study of the life of Munoo. Munoo's as Bakha in *untouchable* (Anand avoided defining the caste, precisely for the reason that he wanted Bakha's, miseries to be read as miseries of all untouchables). Coolie thus is about all coolies, however different their religion or caste. Munoo says, indeed, that caste does not matter. He is a Kshatriya, and the other coolie was a Brahmin, but on the level of poverty, they were coolies.

Coolie thus is a generic term for all those who are menials – whether they work as domestic servants or carry load, or work in factories or even ply rickshaws. Munoo does all the jobs of a coolie and is therefore representative of all coolies. In whatever capacity he worked, he remained a slave, an object of discrimination. Anand's protest is particularly directed against the rich, though other kinds of discrimination are not ruled out in the novel. To begin with, Munoo is childed because he is ignorant of the ways of the town-people. He is inapt and uncouth, a village lout, in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram at Sham Nagar. Then, at Daulatpur, he is especially hated by Ganpat because he was favoured by Prabha, who being from hill could see his reflection in Munoo. It is not that Munoo was not loved. Prabha and his wife Parbati showed paternal love to him and so was the case with the elephant-driver, who helped Munoo to reach Bombay. He made friends with Hari and later Ratan in Bombay. Similarly, Mrs. Mainwaring had a special corner for Munoo in her heart. But her love was ambiguous and vague, as was the case the love of Chote Babu and Sheila at Sham Nagar. The question that Anand raises is that in most cases, Munoo suffered from the confusion in social attitudes.

Society, as Anand visualized, did not originate from Hobbesian war of one against all, but rather from an instruct of social sympathy, particularly in a family. Even Munoo's aunt, as the boy frequently recalled latter, loved him; she would take him into her lap, as did Parbati, and later Laxmi. Sympathy as Anand found, has its origin in the differentiation of sexes among animals, as among human beings, and their care for their offspring. But it is equally true that egoistic instinct in human beings grow stronger than social sympathy. Munoo's aunt had yet no child. She wished to love him as her own son. But her desire to have her own son made her push Munoo to servitude. Sheila bore sympathy for him, and wanted to play with him, but the family attitude, particularly her mother deterred her from expressing her sympathy for Munoo. Parbati and Prabha thought of adopting the boy, but they, guided by the original instinct, did not bring themselves to adopt Munoo. The case of Gujri and Parbati is the same; they would like to have their respective sons, rather than adopt Munoo. Mrs. Mainwaring, being a liberated woman, wanted to flirt that with Munoo's young body but had reservations regarding his status as a servant.

Indian society, as any, is thus confused between egoism and altruism. It is rarely that any society is developed to the extent to regard to social ties on the family lines. Even the British society, as Anand saw, had layers of social discrimination. It could not accept Mrs. Mainwaring unto its fold. At the Governor's ball, she was herded in the company of Indians, for she was not a thorough bred English. Her complexion was

dusky, as her mother was an Indian washer woman. This is another level of discrimination. Mrs. Mainwaring would cringe for acceptance by the English. She called England her 'home'. For the same reason, she married an English man in the first instance. But after his arrest during the war, she divorced him to marry an Indian Muslim. However, for her desire to get recognition as a British lady, she married a British soldier. Munoo too like Mrs. Mainwaring is a victim of the romance of the colour of skins. When he, for the first time saw Mr. England, the cashier of the bank at Sham Nagar, he was enthralled. Later he was held spell-bound whenever he looked at a white skin. He could not suppose the foreman of cotton mill to wear greasy clothes, for he, the child imagined, must belong to the unearthly race.

It is a curious fact of racial and social discrimination that the higher order – the rich, the white-complexioned, the higher caste people, are romanticized by those who are the victim of this order. Munoo's sense of wonder in this regard is inexhaustible. He is never disillusioned. He finds people rich and provided for as destined to be superhuman. This makes him long to be of their kind, though equally metaphysically, he thinks that he is fated to be poor. Thus, the divide between the rich and the poor, as of the race, colour and creed, he feels, is infallible.

Nevertheless, Anand is not so hopeless as Munoo is. He believes that with the development of intelligence mankind will be able to realize that the whole society is a big family. Therefore, individuals do not constitute society. It is the society as family in which the individual learns to live and work for others. But Anand is not a naïve optimist. He knows that social consolidations other than the family are difficult to sustain, and they are indispensable. As the individual shall come to realize that he is a single member of the race, he will, in the dread of his loneliness, appreciate the importance that society has for him and see that development is possible only by mutual cooperation. He will come to feel that he is a co-worker with other men in a great social whole. Then even the lowliest occupation will acquire dignity, as the worker comes to realize that through his work he is sharing in common task for the general welfare. F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot thought of the same common pursuit. Like them, Anand seems to think that the problem of social cooperation in an industrial society is primarily intellectual and moral: if everyone can be led intellectually to recognize the common good and the necessity for cooperation, he will be morally inspired by the feeling of common humanity.

Anand's protest against the society based on discrimination is, therefore, not violent. He does not advocate Marxian revolution as a means to end poverty, because he felt that if classes are sought to be abolished, caste or creed, or colour distinction would arise to defeat any revolution, as it happened in the case of the strike of workers in the Bombay mill.

Anand perhaps felt that no general concord in society is possible so long as there is confusion of the old and the new. A classless society is a new concept sought to be established in the existing structures of caste, colour and creed. Anand thus protested against human thinking which is muddled because of the co-existence of the old. Unless the old order – the theological, and the transitory order – the metaphysical thinking, is transcended, there cannot be social cooperation.

Munoo is the victim of social apathy because society as a whole has yet to enter the positive stage of mutual sympathy. His journey falls through the negative stage. Anand is a sociologist and a historian of society. In Bakha's case, he traced six thousand years of social discrimination in one day in the life of an unfortunate untouchable. Munoo is

not an untouchable, but he is poor. He belongs to the low class, rather than low caste. The world, according to Munoo, is divided into two classes – the rich and the poor. To be poor is as bad a stigma as to be lowly born. In spite of his tender years, supple body and dark eyes, he is still regarded as an untouchable. The foreman at the cotton mill in Bombay engages Munoo for his fine physique only to get more hours of work. Mr. Mainwaring also finds his body usable.

Munoo's poverty keeps him apart from the rich. He is an untouchable in the class-conscious world. He is to be a slave whether the country is rural, or urban, feudal or modern. Munoo's poverty not only keeps others apart; he equally grows conscious of his low status. He dreads going near Phabha, for example, wondering why he could not wholly accept the affection of the master. The gulf between himself and others appears metaphysical, i.e. natural right. This gives him the feeling that is perhaps born to be a slave, as the rich are born to be masters. Their right to slave the poor is a natural. This thinking overemphasized egoism and individual rights, and did not sufficiently recognize altruism and duties to society. Unfortunately we have inherited this metaphysical thinking, that nature does this or that, that laws of nature are good, etc from the days of Enlightenment. Rousseau and the Romantics then carried it over into their social contract, 'natural right', the sovereignty of the people, etc.; they, however, made important advances like opening the democratic vistas which overthrew all traditional authority in the state and the church by popular revolution. Such an attitude might be defensible for a transitional period but it cannot result in the long run in anything constructive, because the metaphysical belief in the superiority of nature amounted to dubbing all cultural or social thinking 'corrupt', thus creating structuralist desire for a center implicit in the privileging of nature over culture. Derrida calls this privileging of nature over culture "an ethic of nostalgia, for origins, an ethics of archaic and natural innocent". Such privileging creates a center – the privileged position, as, for example, of the rich over the poor, restricting the freeplay between the two.

Anand in *Coolie* protest against this privileging of the rich.

2. *Coolie* as an Indian novel

Coolie is typically an Indian novel written in English by one of the pioneers of the genre – Mulk Raj Anand. It is the story of a boy called Munoo who as an orphan journeys across India – from the hills of Kangra to Bombay and back to Simla, the summer capital of the British rulers. Indeed, it is the story of the soil of India – its appalling poverty and inequality, chaos and confusion, heat and dust. But Anand is no India-baiter. He loved India, though he is pained to see Indian society in particular, still stuck with the metaphysical thinking, a stage pulled apart in two extremes of the theological and positivistic or scientific. Its more aggravated form could be seen in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, but more particularly in her prose writings collected in *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. Her India is a bundle of contradictions – nuclear tests and child marriages, big dams and not a drop of water to drink. Anand's India was still of the 30's and 40's, and therefore was short of betraying the extremes of Arundhati Roy. Nevertheless, in an otherwise poverty ridden country, some could afford the luxury of music of gramophone records, entertain their children with mechanical dolls and ride a bicycle, while Munoo had no shoes to walk in. This contrast was particularly glaring for hill-people.

Anand projected paradoxical India from a child's eye and thus defamiliarized what would otherwise appear quite familiar. Munoo is not only a boy of fourteen, but also a

hill boy who was exposed to the wider world for the first time in his life. His journey begins from a small town to a bigger and the biggest, i.e. Bombay and ends in the cool breezes of Simla where he thought he was saved, but Simla brought about his end.

Since Anand dealt with pre-independent India, the first contrast that came to his view was between the rulers and the ruled. Munoo lives in layers of contrasts, beginning with that of hill and town people. The difference between the white masters and the black slaves was wide enough to fill not only Munoo, but all Indians, with a sense of their own inferiority. Munoo instinctively desired for contact with Mr. England when the latter paid a visit to the house of Babu Nathoo Ram. He in his desire to speak to Mr. England forgot all barriers between high and low. But the Babu reminded Munoo of the difference between the Sahib and the dirtily clad urchin that he was, suspected of carrying some disease, even leprosy.

Since then, Munoo, throughout his journey did not for a moment forget the difference between high and low, as still all Indians pay homage to the white, irrespective of their status back in the west. This complex has become ingrained, as Anand would like to say. The same complex existed, as it does today, and in perhaps a more accentuated manner, in the form of migration from villages to towns and from towns across black waters to America, in particular. Sociologically, India passed and is currently passing through the negative stage. There is, for example, no common faith or goal that could give coherence and strength to the community. Divisive forces of caste and class rule the roost. Religion has become sectarian. Peasants drift to the cities. Sociologically, it is what Anand would call a time of dissolution and decay.

It is, however, not to say that India has since the time of the writing of *Coolie* in 1936 has not made any gains. India got independence in 1947, composed its own constitution in 1950, made advances in industrialization, thus breaking the old cycle. India is now a democratic republic; it claims to be the world's greatest democracy and rightly so. We are now a free nation of which Anand at the time of writing *Coolie* must have some inkling as the struggle for freedom was being waged. But Anand made no reference of it, simply because he knew it will bring moral and political chaos. Coincident with the rise of libertarian thinking and laissez faire economics and politics, being currently witnessed, democracy in itself without the sense of community, promises nothing, but confusion worse confounded. Anand could visualize this state of affairs in the thirties and forties.

Coolie is thus a critique of Indian society from the sociological point of view, particularly from the view of Comtean sociology which looks forward to both social statics and social dynamics together. While the social statics reveals the close connection between the ideas and customs and institutions of a country and their mutual interactions, Anand showed at that point of time that Indian society as a whole is not thoroughly egoistical, as is reflected in the institution of free food served in temples where Munoo partook of food and water, but even those institutions, particularly some of the priests had already gone corrupt.

Anand's rejection of democracy, viewed it, as he did, as an metaphysical fiction, may at first appear contradictory, but it must be remembered that he believed in social cooperation, while democracy breeds individualism. It does not help organize society on the basis that social unity is primary to individual rights. Individual rights with the social order meant nothing to Anand, particularly when metaphysical questions of the superiority of certain classes or castes are thought to be based on underlying substances.

Such fictions as the rich are naturally superior, as Munoo abstractly, representing the whole poor classes think, rule supreme. Such thinking of viewing the higher classes with gaping sense of wonder negates scientific ideals. Anand wished Indians to develop scientific attitude, as Nehru and earlier Vivekanand did to trace scientific rather than abstract reasons for Indian's poverty. Bakha agreed with the poet Iqbal Nath's suggestion that only the introduction of flush system could eliminate untouchability, and not abstract reasoning that the Hindus would change their hearts, as Gandhi thought. In *Coolie*, Anand seems to say that we should spurn the idea of asking questions about origin and ends, i.e. metaphysical question and settle down to the business of analyzing the circumstances of phenomena. Munoo's misery is that he gaps at the phenomena, a child as he is. At times, he analyses his situation and even deduces laws, for example, the world is divided between the rich and the poor, but he does not see this knowledge divided into several areas of caste, creed, colour *ad infinitum*. Anand's main concern in the novel was to preserve the unity and integrity of man's pursuit, or else the differences in the Indian society are bedeviling. Mrs. Mainwaring had been a victim of colour discrimination, had she realized this she would not have subjected Munoo to class distinction. The two kinds of discrimination. are the two aspects of the same phenomena. The Babu at Sham Nagar subjected Munoo to servitude, but he himself wanted the same treatment from Mr. England.

Anand wished India to enter the scientific stage, so that reason could be subordinated to scientific observation. He is a committed writer, committed to the amelioration of the people held up by metaphysical reasoning which gives birth to as many theories as there are observers. Here, we dispute about India's endemic ailments, without arriving at anything pragmatic and positive. We contemplate rather than act. Our programmes fail on the anvil of implementation.

Coolie is, indeed, an Indian novel written about india's endemic problems, particularly methodological. Anand not only used familiar Indian scenario, but also thought through vernacular, almost translating Hindi into English. It he is not Indian, it is only in terms of sociology, which is not English, but French.

3. Munoo's character or Munoo as a Picar

or

Coolie as a Picaresque novel

A picar is a rogue, often a waif who travels on the road of life, both literally and figuratively. Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones are the first picar in English literature. The aim of a picaresque novel is to expose hypocrisy and affectation prevalent in society, thereby. Like Joseph and Tom, Bakha and Munoo are young boys, who pushed by their curiosity to know things help Anand to analyse the phenomena of caste and class subsisting in all strata of society. His is, as we have seen, a sociological study. Munoo is an orphan, living with, as the novel begins, his uncle Daya Ram and aunt Gujri in a village in the hills of Kangra. The boy at fourteen was studying fifth class when he was weaned away from school to earn for his living, as his uncle thought that he was grown enough to feud for himself. In fact, he got him engaged as a domestic servant in the city in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram, a clerk in the Imperial Bank, where he himself worked as a peon, to earn five rupees a month for himself.

With this intention on his part, Daya Ram dragged the boy to Sham Nagar down-hill. His aunt, however, agreed to push him out to make room for her own son to be born.

Thus began Munoo's fateful journey. Poverty because of his orphanage made Munoo a picar. Since family, according to Anand, is the basic unit of society, Munoo found no home either in a family or society at large. His uncle got him engaged at Sham Nagar, but turned out to be a nightmare. It was not a home but a junkyard – a medley of people and things. In fact, Munoo's whole journey lay through a confused terrain, because part of the time men thought in terms of the old, and the rest of the time in terms of the new.

Coolie exposes social contradictions through Munoo's picaresque journey from one place to another, covering a substantial part of Indian society. Babu Nathoo Ram invited, for example, Mr. England, a tall man to his low-ceilinged, eight foot by ten room to sit: "Mr. England just missed hitting his head, he stood inside the room looking around at the junk. He felt as tall as Nelson's column in this crowded atmosphere.

Anand saw nothing but confusion in the rest of Babu Nathoo Ram's home. If the Babu wore black shining boots, Munoo went barefoot. Munoo, the picar wonders at others riches as against his own poor existence and accepts his destiny for granted. Anand seems to question Munoo acquiescence, his submission to what appeared to him unalterable. Munoo, for Anand, is a generic name for all poor, homeless people who acquiesce to the rich and the great, though unwillingly. Why do they do so is almost mystical to them. They do not analyse the phenomenon, but seek the cause of their poverty beyond the physical. Finding no cause because there is none, they are bewildered, as Munoo does:

Munoo, like his social milieu, passes through the metaphysical stage of social development, and therefore cannot analyse human behaviour as it appears rather than seek causes of human egoism elsewhere. For instance, he himself would like to look like Babu Nathoo Ram, an official in the Bank, whom all people saluted, though who never spoke a kind word to him, rather than like Chote Babu who was a doctor and was very kind to Munoo.

Munoo liked himself to become like the rich he met on his way. Anand gives an opportunity to Munoo and to the reader to observe one's own mind, one's own aspirations. There is, indeed, a chaos of desires. Munoo loves Chote Babu for the young man's good-humoured disposition. This is because of the co-existence of theological, metaphysical and positive stages in the mind of Munoo and in the minds of all who have yet to emerge from hang-over of two earlier stages. Once Munoo gives up to be like Babu Nathoo Ram or Mr. England, he would be settled in his desire to love and be loved; he would give up the desire to be proud and haughty.

Munoo's detour across the country is therefore a metaphor for the progress of the soul – a pilgrim's progress, from egoism to altruism, from individualism to group life, from alienation to integration. A few month's journey of Munoo is not only his alone, but of the whole mankind, encompassing a course of centuries, during which, with many setbacks, the positive stage has been advancing while others have been receding. The fact, for Anand, is incontestable. Some may deplore Anand's historical humanism, but none can destroy the advancement made by the human race. Of course, the journey has not been smooth. Nor should anyone be in illusion regarding homogeneous progress of all nations alike. The old of religion with its supernatural bug-bears, has certainly declined, though more in the west than in the east and the rise of scientific thinking in place of metaphysical speculation has definitely taken place. This augurs well for the future. Already, post-structuralism have awakened a new response to study social

sciences from a non-hierarchical angle, by making the center functional, rather than fixed. Center according to Derrida, is a historical illusion. Mrs. Mainwaring assumed centrality in her own world of a few menials, but outside this circle, at the Governor's ball, or in any gathering of English men and women, she is only half English, more Indian, and less English. There is, indeed, no room for egoism in the world. The center is in both inside and outside.

This progression is no mean achievement. Vagueness, characteristic of earlier stages, has given way to clarity, to exactness and precision. For all the comforts at Simla, Munoo wanted to go back to Bombay, because his relationship with Ratan was based on no mysticism as was the case with his association with Mrs. Mainwaring. The later cost him his life. Charmed by the presence of the dusky beauty who tickled him to keep him in servitude, he plied the rickshaw, novice as he was in that art, rather too hard, harming his lungs. With Ratan, he was in an unambiguous relationship. Ratan was to him as a friend and a father-figure.

Coolie is truly a picaresque novel in the tradition of *Gil Blas* and *Tom Jones*. Like them, *Coolie* too is typical concerning the escapades of a boy considered to a picaro in Spanish, a waif who lives by his wits and shows but little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventure. Like a picaresque novel, *Coolie* is realistic in manner and episodic in structure. Naturally then, various incidents in the novel happen to Munoo, not that he creates them. So, the novel is composed of a sequence of events held together largely because they happen to Munoo. As a picaresque novel, *Coolie* is satiric in aim, deflates as it does, the romantic Munoo experiences in the presence of new world of riches in the urban milieu. Munoo is no rogue, but himself the victim of the world's rogueries.

Short – Questions

1. Women characters in *Coolie*.

In *Coolie* Anand has generally portrayed women characters rather favourably. But he is not oblivious to their hard-heartedness. Munoo's own aunt Gujri pushed Munoo out of her home in order to make room for her yet to be born son. She is known for generally treating Munoo as a burden and that is why as soon as he attains the age of fourteen, her husband engages Munoo as a domestic help in the house of Babu Nathoo Ram. It is here that Munoo confronts a nagging woman in the wife of the Babu. Munoo has not been immune to curses of his aunt earlier. But the curses of his aunt ever amounted to wishing Munoo dead. Indeed, she was a terror. She would invariably call Munoo, Mundu, a servant, though his aunt also sometimes did. Bibiji, as Munoo called Babu Nathoo Ram's wife nagged about everything Munoo did. She seemed to hate him for nothing, Munoo thought he was mortally afraid of her, so much so, that he would not criticize her even in his mind lest she might somehow come to know of his thoughts and take him to task for it. Besides, she was a hard-task master. She would want Munoo to work at a stretch – doing one thing after another.

Another female in the novel is Sheila, the daughter of Babu Nathoo Ram. She is a young school-going girl. She was nearly of Munoo's age. Munoo felt a kinship with her. He would like to play, giggle and dance in her company, especially his monkey-dance which Sheila liked. But the wall of master-slave relationship stood between them. Munoo hated everyone in the house except Chote Babu and perhaps Sheila. She was nice, though elusive, particularly the way she giggled at his inaptness and antics. She

would ask him to “come, ohe monkey, come and eat your food.” This sounded nice and familiar in a house where he received nothing but abuses. The picture of her as she came out of bath soothed his mind during his illness following the injury he suffered on the head with his clash with the neighbouring domestic servant. His sexuality was awakened as he remembered his “tracing of the outline of her figure behind the poor concealment of her wet muslin dhoti, which stuck to her limbs. He had learnt to regard every woman a sister in his village, but he wanted to forget to call Sheila his sister. He wanted to play with her, but he did feel a sense of shame as if he were a thief eavesdropping in someone’s secret place. For all his attraction for Sheila, Munoo was conscious that his love for her was a hopeless passion, because he was poor.

The third woman he came in contact with was Parbati, the wife of Prabha Dyal. She presented to Munoo a direct contrast to Bibiji at Sham Nagar. She was childless. Munoo liked her. She would pat him on the head and given him cream to eat with his bread as an extra dish, as she did, on his very first day at Daulatpur. But she was a passive figure – quiet, serene, and silent. Munoo was afraid of her, afraid and shy.

Like her, Laxmi, the wife of Hari, was also a passive creature. But she gave Munoo her love as mother and as mistress. The most important of women whom Munoo met in the last leg of his journey was, of course, Mrs. Mainwaring. Munoo met her as he was hit by her car a day after the riots in Bombay. Her driver, a Mohammedan, wanted the waif to be left on the road, because he recognized Munoo to be a Hindu boy, but Mrs. Mainwaring (May was her maiden name) fearing some trouble on this account, wanted the boy to be taken to Simla, cutting short the stay in Bombay. Moreover, “If he has no place to go, I want a servant,” said Mrs. Mainwaring. Though Munoo felt to have grown old by the stress of living through yesterday’s riots, he was a young boy to her. She pinched and patted him. He had a supple body, with a small, delicate face and with a pair of sensitive eyes. Munoo was now fifteen and a boy of fifteen was just what she wanted for a servant.

Mrs. Mainwaring was descended from an Anglo-Indian family. Her father was born through a Moslem washer-woman. She sought Colonelcy in the army of the Nawab of Zalimpur. Here he married the daughter of an English engine driver. May was the only child of the union, for the colonial’s wife left him after May’s birth because she was expecting another child by someone else. Throughout her childhood and youth, May remained troubled over her origin. In fact, the whole of the novel is about the troubles of looking back or looking beneath for origins and ends. She was troubled over her Indian blood in her from her grandmother’s side, but she had pretended to be ‘pukka’ in order to overcome her inferiority complex. But she could not hide her dusky hue. This contradiction in her character results in sexual promiscuity. In her attitude towards Munoo, she suffered from the contradiction that she was like him, as he too was inferior because of his poverty, but she thought she was his master or mistress as well. So, while she wished Munoo well, she could not think of him more than a menial. For all her pinching and patting of Munoo, she put him, besides others, to the task of driving her rickshaw, a task which he her performed so passionately that it sucked out his life in him.

2. Sympathetic Characters of *Coolie*.

In the world dominated by egoism, Anand did not rule out some benevolent souls. In essence, contrary to our expectations, they are in good number - Chote Babu, Prabha Dyal, Hari, Ratan, and last but not the least Mohan, besides good women like Parbati,

Laxmi and even Mrs. Mainwaring. This presence of a sizeable number of good-hearted people in *Coolie* confirms Anand's view that mankind is naturally benevolent and that it is the backwardness of society, dominated as it still is, by religious bigotry and metaphysical beliefs regarding the origin of complexes of superiority and inferiority, which restrict natural responses. For instance, the first good person that Munoo meets, Chote Babu at Sham Nagar, is a doctor. He is an enlightened soul, precisely because, as a scientist, he does not trace the cause of Munoo's poverty in nature, but in socially condition. He has no prejudice against Munoo's being a servant, through his friends have. Prem Chand, as his name is, he is a loving figure. Munoo felt comfortable with his presence in the house. He is a handsome, well-built young man, easy-gaited and easy-mannered, as Munoo watched him taking things in the strides, diffusing tension with a distinct sense of humour of his own.

Prabha Dyal is the next sympathetic character Munoo meets in the train he tried to escape from Sham Nagar. He at once struck affinity with Munoo belonged as he, like Munoo did, to the hills. He also came to the town as a coolie but eventually set up a pickle factory in partnership with Ganpat, a prodigal. He was childless and had been trying herbs for regaining his wife's fertility. But Ganpat, vicious as he is, taunted him for the former's own inpotency. He once contemplated over the possibility of adopting Munoo, but for no explicit reason could not. Anand perhaps meant to show that even the like-minded maintain some difference of high and low. For all his good-will for Munoo, the latter continued to work in the underground factory, a kind of hell. Through his failure to maintain his status as a master of the factory, Anand meant to say that center is functional, for to-day's master may be reduced to the status of a coolie.

Hari, whom Munoo met in Bombay, is like the latter, a poor villager who had earlier been working in a cotton mill, but had gone back to bring his family. Munoo met Hari when the latter was seen trudging his way with his family – his wife, a son and a daughter – in search for a corner to sleep for the night. Munoo at once found a family, as if it were his own. In Anand's view, family is the basic unit of society. In a way family is a microcosm of society. A good family is one which accommodates a orphan or two. Hari took Munoo in the family as did Prabha, but the difference between them was that Prabha still maintained some distance, like his wife. Hari not only had no reservation in taking Munoo as if he were a member of it, but also got him a job. It is obviously because they had an affinity between them; they were both poor.

Ratan is perhaps the most sterling sympathetic, as he shows character his sympathy for Munoo, and in fact for all the poor. He is a single, strong-bodied and equally strong-willed person, a wrestler by avocation, though a factory-worker by vocation. But what distinguishes him is his concern against injustice, perpetuated by the rich. For this reason, he is a rebel. He has a 'big heart', the quality that characterizes his whole personality. Of course, he lacks discretion, for his heart flows involuntarily, as he finds injustice being done to him as well to others of his kind. For his genuine revolt against exploitation, he had become an eyesore with the foreman of the cotton mill in which he works. He is equally ready to accommodate the poor like Hari and Munoo in his room, when the latter's hut is gutted with water. For his social concerns, he is dismissed. The organizes a strike, which fizzles out because of the trick of the management of the mill to twist it into communal riots. Still, Ratan is a rock of defense of the poor. Munoo later in Simla remembered the friendly and father like figure of Ratan and wrote to him, desiring if it was possible for him to return to Bombay. Tatan advised him to come

back, but unfortunately Munoo could not, as his health fast deteriorated. Mohan, though himself a coolie stood by Munoo till the last. Unlike Ratan, he is not so expressive in his sympathy, but he reminded Munoo from time to time that the later was not too well. Mohan was a fellow-coolie of Munoo, but was for long in the job. Therefore, he know that rickshaw pulling needed training to pull it with less efforts. But Munoo in his enthusiasm, and for the romance of carry Memsahib, pulled it with all his strength, wasting his energy. Mohan reminded Munoo that he would let them kill him. He told Munoo that latter was an ignorant slave. He wanted to drive his sense into Munoo' head. He had social sympathies and was, therefore, critical of all coolie for their ignorance. But he was no as naïve as Ratan to organize a strike.

3. English Characters in *Coolie*.

As Saros Cowasjee in the introduction to the novel put it: "A strain of 'criticism' of this author (Mulk Raj Anand) is that he does not fully understand his English characters and they are not convincingly sketched". He then asks: "But when in Indian fiction is there a more authentic picture of a colonial English man than we have in Mr. W.P. England in the second chapter?"

Cowasjee is very right that Anand's thumb-nail sketch of Mr. England when he very reluctantly pays a visit to the house of Babu Nathoo Ram is quite authentic. It is so because the novel as a whole is a critique of any shade of egoism - Indian or English. The latter have a greater share of Anand's criticism because they are doubly snobbish - one that they are a class apart in riches, and status, and secondly they have the colour complex. To cap it all, they are the rulers in India. Anand, however, does not raise the latter question, though he does take into account their sense of difference from the Indians, particularly when they are subordinates Mr. England's visit to Babu Nathoo Ram's place confirms it. First of all it took the Babu a number of efforts to draw the attention of his senior - the chief cashier in the Bank where he was a clerk. When he did agree, Mr. England was none too happy to be with an Indian family, found as he did, in a state of utter confusion. The English society in comparison had, by that time, sufficiently entered the positive stage. So the visit of Mr. England is partly a critique of Indian homes in particular and the social scene in general. But the visit also betrays the British snobbery. When Chote Babu asked Mr. England to suggest courses of studies he should pursue in England, Mr. England knew none, as he had not been to university. But he still pretended to be knowledgeable. His own house was none too big and grand; it was both small and humble.

The next English character we meet is foreman of the cotton mill, nick-naked Chimata Sahib. Unlike Mr. England, he is the specimen of an Indian character, combined as he did in him, a money-lender and mean job-giver, exploiting the workers in all possible ways. He not only rented huts unworthy for living, but also expected, even extracted, rather begged for presents from the poor workers. Besides, he extracted salutes from he workers who filed past him. Cowasjee also found this sketch rather unfavourably done. According to him, the character of Mrs. Mainwaring is also a caricature. This, he said, was deliberately done. However, there is nothing unnatural in the character of the foreman, as he over the years, had messed up English and Indian traits of an exploitatire employer. Mrs. Mainwaring is also faithfully sketched. She is as confused as any other character, between her aspirations to be 'pukka' English and her dusky complexion inherited from her Indian grandmother. Cowasjee perhaps could not appreciate her pull of the opposites in the context of the novel.

Unit IV

Anita Desai – Voices in the City

The very subject — Indians writing in a foreign language, English — tends to create either outright dismissal or amused curiosity even in Indian critics. An Indian writer is forced to feel either apologetic or defensive about his endeavour. But English is a rich, highly flexible, supple and adaptable language. It is beautifully the language of both reason and instinct, of sense and sensibility. Therefore it would be false to assume that Indian sensibility cannot be expressed through the English Idiom. Basically language performs the task of ‘connecting’ as Anita Desai herself says.

The body of literature produced in English by Indians was initially looked at as some exotic growth and not as a part of Indian literature proper. The two major arguments in support of this view are: that these literary works are written in an alien language and that these are generally written for the foreign readers who crave for a different reading taste. It was also considered that this being the product of a set of writers who are very much Anglicised either in their mode of living or in their intellectual make-up and thus far removed from the real Indian life and tradition, it cannot and does not reflect any Indianness or any Indian problem.

But the English language is not confined to the British isles or Americas. There are a number of Indian writers writing in English who have already occupied position of eminence. Their writings are not a sprinkling of English words here and there, but they have also acquired Indian idioms, syntax, and captured Indian sensibilities.

A Brief History of Indian Women Novelists in English

The history of Indian Women novelists writing in English has been short yet tortuous and circumspect. Initially, women were a doubly colonized lot—firstly citizens of the colonial India and secondly shackled by the hegemonic male-dominated society. The innate biases against women, substantiated by religious tests both Hindu and Christian, were largely responsible for the tardy progress in women writings. Nearly all religions propagated woman as inferior to man, the temptress—the “fitna” who ought to perform larger than life role of mother, sister, wife etc. So either she was all negativity or all super human. It took a very long time, specially after India’s independence and also during freedom struggle. That Indian women writer created a small niche for herself. With the passage of time, due to socio-legal reforms, Indian woman writer also gained place of prominence. Initially, they wrote fiction about pre-independence era. Then came writings which were totally woman centric. Gradually a time came when women wrote as individuals rather than gender-motivated spokesperson. The present day women writing reflect the liberalized and intellectual emancipation which women have achieved and therefore their focus of attention has widened. However there is nothing wrong if women novelists talk largely about interests of women—after all, women can understand each other’s predicament better than the male counterpart.

As an initial point in fiction writing, Toru Dutt comes to our mind as the first woman novelist, although she died very young.

Anita Desai — The Novelist

Anita Desai is one of the most renowned Indian writers writing in English. She was born in 1937 to a Bengali father and a German mother. She started writing from the tender age of seven. She has published eight novels, short stories, articles and literary pieces in journals and periodicals. She has won a number of awards abroad as well as in India. She won Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain* and the award for Excellence in Writing in 1979 for her novel “*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*” from the Federation of Indian Publishers and the Authors Guild of India. Anita Desai is not keen about observing mundane, superfluous surface realities. She made clear her focus of interest in her interview with Yashodhara Dalmia:

“Ones pre-occupation can only be a perpetual search-for meanings, for value, for dare I say it-truth. I think of the world as an iceberg- the one-tenth visible above the surface of the water is what we call reality, but the nine-tenths that are submerged, make up the truth, and that is what one is trying to explore. All my writing is an effort to discover, to underline and convey the true significance of things. Next to this exploration of the underlying truth and the discovery of a private mythology and philosophy, it is style that interests me most — and by this I mean the conscious labour of writing language and symbol, word and rhythms — to obtain a certain integrity and to impose order on Chaos.”

Essentially, Desai is a novelist of existentialist concerns and describes “the enduring human condition.” She reflects upon such existentialist themes as maladjustment, alienation, absurdity of human existence, quest for the ultimate meaning in life, decision, detachment and isolation. She focuses on how women in the contemporary urban milieu fight against discrimination of various types but some do surrender before the relentless forces of absurd life. Desai seems to be deeply involved in her novels as she always considers important, the inner emotional world of her characters. To aid her singular literary interests she therefore resorts to symbols and images. Through symbolism and imagery she tries to concretize the varied complexities of man-woman relationship and also the varying states of human psyche. Desai is a great artist and has employed techniques of stream of consciousness, flash-back, montage and reveries which are suitable to her existential themes and her externalization of internal emotional turmoils and tumults. Consequently, her novels do not follow a story line with well constructed plot and tightly knit structure. There are episodes, happenings, incidents, encounters and reminiscences. Her characters are both typical as well as individualistic. They are typical as they suffer from a universal predicament of isolation and uncertainty. They are individualistic as they appear to be more sensitive and reflective in nature rather than the mass of common humanity around them. Her canvas is also reasonably large and it encompasses a large variety of characters representing various hues and colours of humanity. In fact, Anita Desai turned novel into a serious, intellectual endeavour rather than an object of mere entertainment. In her hands, novel is a mature, evolved and creative genre fit for expressing sombre and reflective thoughts. Desai is thus a highly evocative, intense and engrossing novelist who makes the modern reader aware of a new perspective to perceive life. Her protagonists lead a tortuous and exacting existence which is made comprehensible through Desai’s own keen and profound sensitivity towards life.

Voices in the City (1965) is the second novel of Anita Desai. It has a complex structure of symbols and stereotypes. At the same time, it is a realistic picture of a decadent city

“Voice” is a voice in the wilderness failing to build any contact between him and the world. Nirode admits the force behind his attempt, “where is the will to get up, select another ladder and begin the journey of absurdity all over again?... Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant; equally worthless.” Nirode reduces his needs to the barest minimum and thus rebels against any imposition of time, place, status or occupation on his personality. He is shabbily clad and instead of buttons uses staples to put his shirt together. During his illness he comes very close to death and looks so delapidated that his sister, Monisha, comments shockingly:

“I realize... he has progressed beyond me. Here is a combination of acquiescence and renunciation I have not yet made. Here it is, in this plant gesture, this wind gesture of a weak, invalid hand. Back he goes into the captivity of friendship, concern, criticism and world. Yet he will never again be a part of it as he once was with such passion and anxiety — this gesture has removed it, all to a safe distance from his self.”

Later, Nirode shares with Amla that he had opted for this sense of rejection not due to morbidity but in order to maintain his sanity, “at the end of it I realised that the only thing I wanted to protect, what any sane man needs to protect—his conscience.” But he also acknowledges that his pursuit of failure and isolation was wrong. Later, in the death of his sister, Monisha, Nirode is awakened and connected to normal human life once again. The springs of connectivity which had dried up within him once again get refurbished and invigorated. “He seemed unable to remain still or silent, he was filled with an immense care of the world that made him reach out, again and again touch Amla’s cold had when he saw it shake, or embrace the old woman in the battered wicker chair when he saw her sleep. He pressed them to him with hunger and joy, as if he rejoiced in this sensation of touching others flesh, others’ pain, longed to make them mingle with his own, which till now had been agonizingly neglected.”

This desire to touch and feel and get involved with others caused a sense of excitement as a “religious fanatic is excited by the death... of a saint.” Monisha’s suicide is an attempt to break the monotony of a routine existence. It is an attempt to give meaning to her death, therefore her suicide is accompanied by self-knowledge through suffering and self-assertion. This suicide is at least her one action of her own choice and volition. It is through this self-willed deliberate act that she is able to shake off the complacency and apathy entrenched in the psyche of Nirode. To some extent, even her husband, Jiban, also feels compelled to confess that he had failed his wife in their marriage.

Amla is the youngest of the three. She is charmed and mystified by the aloofness and nullity expressed by Monisha. She is never able to comprehend or analyse the real malaise behind the apparent withdrawal of her sister from normal life. Amla comes from Bombay as an energetic and vivacious lass but does realize that Calcutta, as a city, saps up the energy and vitality of life from within a human being. Nirode’s transformation comes as a rude shock to Amla as much as does the frustrated existence of Monisha too. Amla’s relationship with Aunt Lila turn tense when she falls in love with Dharma, a married man, much older than herself. However Amla too has to go through her moments of remorse and disillusionment. Mother exercises a strange, bewitching influence on the family. She is referred to as a beautiful socialite, fond of good life. She is a refined and accomplished lady married to an idler whose only satisfaction is in criticizing his wanton-natured wife. Mother offers financial help to Nirode but he refuses angrily. She has a self proclaimed admirer in Major Chadha who showers praise and gifts on her and earns the wrath of the three children. The mother

folks consider her (Monisha) as strange and insolent and criticize her actions openly. They even blame her of being a thief, an allegation to which even her husband connives. She does not have any well-defined faith in some religious ideology, so she is rather rudderless. Her predicament makes her reflect: “Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood Over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum — is that, then, life?” Monisha is also haunted by thoughts of death. She feels that love is missing in nearly all her relationships with others be it Jiban-her husband, Nirode, her brother or her mother. She has lost the verve to enjoy small, ordinary things. So she fails to respond like other spectators, men and women, to bawdy and lewdly suggestive songs sung by strolling street-singers. It is not that she had never possessed “this essential instinct of theirs. It is only that she has lost touch with mundane things now.” She feels, “They put me away in a steel container, a thick glass cubicle, and I have lived in it all my life, without a touch of love or hate or warmth in me. “As the pain of a wasted life weighs heavily on her heart, she hurries out of her, “stale room, filled with sounds of other people’s emotions” and commits suicide.

On the other hand, Nirode is more a victim of some self-created complexes and afflictions which lead him to degeneration. He is an artistic, sensitive and independent young man but the insecurities which he carries from his childhood have made him unsure and unaware of his own potential. Comparing himself to his lucky younger brother Arun, Nirode considers himself to be deprived of the amount of money left by their father for educating abroad one of his children. Arun was good at studies as well as games, so he could get that amount and left the grotesque city of Calcutta for brighter avenues. As a child, Nirode had once fallen from a horse and declared to his father that he would never play games or ride a horse again — an expression which denied him his father’s beneficence. Nirode is reminded of this incident time and again, making him take refuge in “shadows, silence stillness” for “that was exactly what he would always be left with.” He tells Professor Bose, “I don’t know. How can one survive? It seemed hard.”

Another problem which Nirode faces and which causes his undoing is his obsession with his mother. His childhood had been regulated and conditioned by his love for her and hatred for his father. After the father’s demise he wants to be support and succour for her, but the mother is more inclined towards her paramour, Major Chadha. This makes Nirode exceedingly jealous and in his failure to receive her love, he starts detesting and fearing her. “To think that all through his life he had despised his father and adored his mother, only to turn after his father’s death, to pity for him and loathing of that same, unchanged mother — this moved him now.” In his role of a lover-son, the mother’s image of her indulging in wanton escapades and amorous relations his, constantly gnaw at soul. Caustically, he suggests Amla to “go home to mother a while, and grow up a bit by listening to her experiences of love.” This deeply entrenched loathing for the mother severs his relationship from the family. Nirode tells his friend, Sonny, “Look, do me a favour. Don’t keep bringing my family in, Sonny boy...I neither inherited nor do I now borrow a single damn thing from `my’ family. May they rot, may they flourish — as long as they leave me alone.” He refuses to take any financial help from his mother and later when she desires him to sign the papers of transfer of money in his name in a bank, he tells Monisha, “Tell her to go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques... I’m done with signing my name, believing my name, or having a name.” But despite his extreme alienation from his mother, he cannot rid

OR

How far is Desai's art and technical excellence portrayed through *Voices in the City*?

OR

What is your assessment of Anita Desai with reference to her work *Voices in the City*?

3. Characterisation in *Voices in the City*?

OR

Do you think that Desai's characters exist more as abstractions outlining mental conditions rather than living, breathing beings.

OR

How do various characters symbolise various facets of life in the cosmopolitan Calcutta in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*?

4. Imagery and symbolism in *Voices in the City*?

OR

How does Desai narrate inner experience with the help of symbols and images in *Voices in the City*.

OR

How do symbols and images help Desai to concretize inner experience?

OR

How does imagery and symbolism aid the novelist in delineating psychological dilemma in *Voices in the City*.

5. A Sense of alienation is expressed by the characters despite living in Calcutta, an overcrowded city — explain with reference to Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*.

OR

Explain Anita Desai's concept of alienation.

OR

How does Anita Desai express the theme of alienation in her novel *Voices in the City*?

6. Describe how *Voices in the City* is an existentialist novel?

OR

Discuss Anita Desai's Existentialist vision with reference to her novel *Voices in the City*?

Short answer type questions

1. Symbol of 'Voices.'
2. Symbol of 'City'.
3. Role of Nirode.
4. Role of Monisha.
5. Role of Amla.
6. Charactersketch of Dharma.

of the reader. Nearly all the characters appear to be trapped under the weight of the “monster city.” All of them grapple with the monster for their survival. Calcutta is like a potentially powerful protagonist against whom the energies of all the protagonists are pitted.

The novel is replete with various depictions of various facets of Calcutta. The following extract presents the nocturnal Calcutta to the reader.

...Beating his way out of the swarming apathy of Howrah, Nirode strode down the bridge, dodging the traffic that made the bridge roar and rattle beneath his feet like the tunnel of bones and steel. Trams crashed murderously past him, handcarts rolled recklessly, maniacally by ...

Striding off the bridge into the coagulated blaze of light and sound and odour that was the city of Calcutta, Nirode cried, “Unfair, life is unfair and how faint and senseless it sounded in all that tumult of traffic and commerce about him...” One more scene of the nocturnal Calcutta depicted with all the squalid details is very graphic. “... They wandered past the empty food stalls, the prostitutes who still stood at the corners, now and then crying out in harsh, arresting tones of nightjars, into the wide streets where vendors and beggars lay sleeping, wrapped in white sheets, against empty barrows and on doorsteps. From some concealed nightclubs came the frenzied sounds of drums and castanets... At a traffic signal an urchin stood trying to peddle his last bunch of roses, their petals already veined with the dark purple of asphyxia. Under the mauve gaslight several watchmen had gathered to play cards and in intense silence, their dice rattled like small skulls.”

Desai paints the various faces of Calcutta through all the major characters with characteristic disgust. Monisha describes some significant details of Calcutta in an expressive manner:

“Quick, quick, out of here, out on to the street-straight into the thick quilt of pungent blue smoke that rises from the countless fires that are lit on the city’s pavement. The rickshaw coolie, the street sweeper, the tanner, the beggar child with his limbs cut off at the joints, the refugee who litters the platforms.. with his excrement and offspring. They share one face, one expression of tiredness, such overwhelming tiredness that even bitterness is merely passive and hopelessness makes the hand extend only feebly, then drop back without disappointment.” Like Monisha, Amla also observes the ugly aspect of Calcutta everywhere:

“At every turn, on every road, the city thrust its ugly apathy at her like a beggar thrusting his mutilated hand through the wisdom and laughing because he knows she must pay him her conscience money. Every where there was the tip-tilted rubbish bin, the nude child playing in an open drain...”

Desai’s keen perception and observation does not miss any aspect of the routine life of Calcutta. The dark alleys, waters and bridges, lanes and by-lanes, bazars and hubs have been remarkably etched by Desai for the reader’s consideration. All the important landmarks of Calcutta that attract the passing tourist have been vividly depicted. Howrah, Fort William, Chowringhee, Esplanade, Victoria Memorial Cathedral park, Belur Math, the Jain temple, the Kali temple, China Town, etc. This composite picture of diverse places help in creating an authentic milieu of the Calcutta in the early sixties. The culture of a corrupt commercial life of Calcutta is presented through the bohemian attitude of idlers, party-goers, inconsiderate and unconcerned social animals.

spirit and response. Monisha's relationship with Calcutta is one of suppression and revulsion. She addresses the city thus.

"Do you hear me, city of Calcutta? City of Kali, Goddess of Death Not one word from you. I said, not a sound, no shirk, no groan, no cry. I came here for silence, my few moments of night silence, so cease you moaning and wailing a while.. Thank you. Now leave me to the sky. Leave me to gather the stars, frosty and distant and cool." The city of Calcutta has many appearances viewed differently be various characters in the novel. Jit is aware of the colonial past of Calcutta, the residual colonial memories, the Anglicized influences of the English companies exploration of sensibility..." In *Voices in the City* Desai probes the influence of Calcutta on the mind of her characters. The 'monster' metropolis tortures its inhabitants, agonising and distorting their psyche. All of them perceive the dullness and dreariness, ugliness and sordidness brutality and cacophony of Calcutta and react hysterically. At time Calcutta appears frightening and forbidding in its appearance. Nirode describes the nocturnal Calcutta as "this dark pandemonium." "He shuddered and walking swiftly, was almost afraid of the dark of Calcutta, its warmth that clung to one with a moist, perspiring embrace, rich with the odours of open gutters and tuberose garlands." Nirode seems to be threatened by the presence of Calcutta.

"...On all sides the city pressed down, alight aglow and stirring with its own marsh-bred, monster life that, like an ogre, kept one eye open through sleep and walking...."

A similar negative reaction is generated in Monisha too whose craving for privacy and solitude is denied by the cacophonous welter of noises. But all that she gets is "this mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sound" that jars terribly on her nerves. She feels that "this haunting burbling life of this city has been contrived solely to drive me mad." She cries helplessly, "There is no escape from it." She is forced into thinking: "There is no diving underground in so over-populated a burrow, even the sewers and gutters are choked, they are so full. Of What? Of grime, darkness poverty, disease? Is that what I mean or the meretriciousness, the rapacity, the uneasy lassitude of conscience? Voice in the City is a protracted saga on Calcutta. It is not merely a cosmopolitan place, it is an entity, an animal, a vibrating, living thing. It is a force, a power and an existence. It has all the attributes of a physically powerful source which challenges whoever comes across. However it is not just a physical presence, it is also metaphysical in its dimensions. The city of Calcutta is compared to goddess Kali- the deity of death and destruction. The procession of the goddess is being carried through the meandering lanes of the city with people chanting zestfully psalms in praise of the goddess. But the goddess expresses more awe and fear rather than compassion and piety. Similar is the case with Calcutta. It is like a giant sized monster, appalling in its size and enigmatic in its form. The more you tried to placate and understand it, the more challenges it hurled your way. The general sense of negation and pessimism which is generated by the city is all-engulfing. Not just Nirode, Monisha and Amla but also Dharma, Jit, Sonny and David experience a sense of nullity living in Calcutta. Their life of carefree bonhomie, partying and socialising is just a safety valve to let off excessive feelings of frustration and suffocation. They are all, deep down inside, dissatisfied and alone. Since Desai has equated Calcutta to

Voices in the City is truly an epic on Calcutta. Anita Desai analyzes the city with her penetrative and perceptive vision. No part or aspect of the city is left unexplored. The place engenders a certain kind of mindset in the people who live therein. The relation between the geo-physical background and the psycho-mental landscape has been brilliantly sketched by Desai. Desai's Calcutta also brings to the mind the hopeless picture of Eliot's "wasteland" — a place devoid of values, and life-sustaining hope. However Eliot does hint at man redeeming himself through religious faith. No such possibility of restoration of human values in Nirode or Amla (since Monisha is no longer alive) has been presented by Desai. Calcutta remains an outstanding and omniscient symbol all through the work.

Q.2 Anita Desai's contribution to Indian novel writing in English with reference to *Voices in the City*?

OR

How far is Desai's art and technical excellence portrayed through *Voices in the City*?

OR

What is your assessment of Anita Desai with reference to her work *Voices in the City*?

There have been women writers such as Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Jhabvala and many others. None has such fine feminine sensibility as Desai, so her female characters are more sensitively created and carefully delineated. Another contribution of Desai to literature is her lyrical way of expression. Among the Indian novelists experimenting consciously with the English language, Desai has a unique place. Whereas Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharya have tried to make English close to Indian languages and thus to make it more adaptable to Indian needs, Desai has raised it to lyrical heights. She seems to convey that Indians are capable of writing in a language which can be put at par with the language spoken by native English speakers. Another Indian scholar, Srinivas Iyengar believes: "Since Desai's preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream-of-consciousness of her principal characters." Her liberal use of symbols and images can be attributed to her preference for depicting the internal mental landscape of female protagonists.

Desai lays no special emphasis on the plot construction, on the well-made novel with the conventional notion of a beginning, middle and an end. Story, action and drama mean little to her. She feels that a story "imposed from the outside simply destroys the life of characters, reduces them to a string of jerking puppets on a stage." So whatever action is present in her novels is part of the integral whole composed of the human psyche and the human situation. One of the most important aspects of Desai's work is her ability to fuse form and content. In her work, says B.R. Rao, "one senses the presence of a pervasive and controlling imagination fusing the different parts of the work into a unified vision. Technique for Anita Desai is neither an after thought, nor is it mechanically imposed on recalcitrant content. Form becomes a mode of discovering content." Since the form and content are not formulated to convey external reality, so simple narrative style,

surface. That is why it is more near Truth than Reality itself. Art does not merely reflect Reality — it enlarges it.”

Thus the main thrust of her writing is on the inner life of the individual, on numerous inner impressions, fleeting fancies and thoughts. Therefore the search for truth, for Desai, consists in the life of the mind and the soul — the inner life — and not in the life of the body — the external depiction of life. Primarily interested in exploring the psychic depths of her female characters, Desai portrays her characters as individuals “facing, single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence.”

Anita Desai feels strongly about the existential predicament of her characters. They are singular and sensitive beings and are not as strong as their creator herself is. This is true with reference to the present novel *Voices in the City*. Nirode, Monisha and Amla feel strongly the power and grip of the city on their livers. It attacks their psyche, their desire to life and their hopes. Desai paints beautifully this internalised action with her incisive probing into the minds of her characters. The city brings out the worst traits in everyone. Try as hard as they can, their psyche and will is defeated and they get lost, confused or even commit suicide. Desai has brought in a large number of simultaneous strands of sub-plots — related to Nirode through Jit, Sarla, David, Sunny, Dharma and Gita Devi, Monisha through her marital family and Jiban and Amla through her friends and acquaintances. However Desai does not confuse the reader in a maze of sub-plots. This is her attempt to make the mental landscape of her protagonists clear to the reader. That explains her making the canvas of her novel rather large and including very many characters. But at the same time, it would not be wrong to assert that these characters are nearly of the same shade and colour. They all are inhabitants or even survivors of Calcutta and their lives are a long drawn tale of inactivity and reflection.

In *Voices in the City*, Desai employs the more conventional third person mode of narrating the story of the three *voices in the city*. The novel presents the bewildering variety of sights and sounds of the city of Calcutta. In the opening pages of the novel Desai describes the commotion and confusion on the railway platform. The red-shirted coolies, the tea vendors and the station master in sweat-stained white clothes, all tired and overworked, the large number of passengers with enormous luggage looking for the right carriage — this is a picture of chaos and confusion. Somewhere in the same city the three protagonists struggle against odds and try to exist. The city is an antagonist — a huge monster, against whom the destinies of people are pitted. The dirt, damp and deprivation is evoked through powerful word-pictures. Monisha is perturbed by “the mindless, meaningless monotony of empty sound, hour upon hour.” Even the birds are affected by the contamination of the city. They are “a vision of disaster, symbolized by the stirring birds who were not afraid, who waited.” Dharma also experiences the same feelings about this city. Desai neatly categorizes her major and minor characters into two groups. The major characters symbolize the elite who are bohemian, affectatious and worn out. The minor characters are monotonous, insipid and senseless. However both the major and the minor characters form the social fabric of which Calcutta constitutes. Some of these feel strongly about the things around them, consequently their reactions are strong, even volatile. Others are

Kalimpong. So he reacts violently when he receives her letter. Later in Part IV, when he goes to the airport to receive his mother who has arrived on Monisha's death, he is once again ensnared and charmed by her beauty and clings to her in a prolonged embrace. But he also hates her for her amorous liaisons and coquettish ways. He equates her to Goddess Kali as the mother has the indifference and detachment bordering on fierceness as displayed by the statue of Kali. She seems to be satisfied with Monisha's death and therefore maintains a cool indifference. In Part II, the diary technique, lends a tone of immediacy and anguish to Monisha's account of her pensive, agonising and lonely married life. Monisha is Nirode's married sister whose well-off but indifferent husband, Jiban, has neither the time nor the inclination to look into her solitude. Her incapacity to bear a child, her noncommunication with her incompatible husband and the rigid and stern attitude of the in laws. All these compel Monisha to chose between death and a degraded existence. Part III deals with Nirode's younger unmarried sister Amla. She is a career-oriented person who comes to Calcutta after completing her professional training to work as a commercial artist in an advertisement firm. Amla feels sorry for her married elder sister who seems very unhappy and alienated in her married life. Since she (Amla) is of a happy, jovial temperament she enjoys going to parties, dinners, cocktail parties and so on. But slowly she too realises that she had been pursuing a mirage and she tells Nirode, "... this city. This city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it..." She develops an emotional attachment with Dharma, the painter friend of Nirode, also working as his model. However she repents coming to Calcutta after her disillusionment with Dharma in their amorous affair: "Why ever did I come to Calcutta? Why didn't I stay away in Bombay or go home to Kalimpong?" Part IV, dealing with "Mother" is the briefest section in the novel and brings before the reader the complete physical and mental picture of the mother of Nirode, Monisha and Amla. She is a beautiful, indifferent and awe-inspiring character, specially to Nirode who has always remained under her powerful influence.

Thus the structure of the story is kept cohesive and intact with the help of the overarching symbol of the city. Calcutta acts as the background of all the subplots related to different characters. It is omnipresent omnipotent and all-inclusive.

Q.3 Characterisation in *Voices in the City*?

OR

Do you think that Desai's characters exist more as abstractions outlining mental conditions rather than living, breathing beings.

OR

How do various characters symbolise various facets of life in the cosmopolitan Calcutta in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*?

In the present day Indian writing in English, Anita Desai is indisputably a serious and committed writer of a very high order. In her novel, she skilfully explores the mental and emotional scene. Her characters fight the ubiquitous forces of absurd realities and feel terribly oppressed with the burden of living helplessly in the contemporary chaotic milieu. Delving deeper into the complexities of human existence, Desai endeavours to evaluate the various formidable factors that render life unendurable.

emerge before the reader but rather with the help of internal action — ideas, emotions, gestures and expressions. Since the characters are highly individualistic so they display unique, unusual and extraordinary responses. Hence one should not expect Desai's characters to be of mundane nature with superfluous material concerns. They are strongly-strung, reflective and meditative individuals.

At the centre of Desai's novel is Nirode, the main protagonist, a typical Bengali youth who has turned caustic and impatient towards all the well-off and successful people around. A small-time journalist who leaves the job to edit a poetry magazine and then takes up writing drama is basically an alienated soul at heart. Bitter and brutal, he is specially disgusted with his mother at Kalimpong living flirtatiously with Major Chadha. He skirts the bohemian world of booze, jazz and women because he is an introverted romantic who gets a masochistic pleasure out of intellectual dissipation. He is confused about his priorities in life — so he is neither a productive artist nor a revolutionary. A rootless nihilist, he has nothing to hold on to. So his remarks appear hollow protestations and empty diatribes. He follows no religion, creed or doctrine. He is an archetype of a half-baked intellectual who does not know which way to go. Part II entitled "Monisha" is an account of the equally dissipated and disintegrated life of Nirode's married sister. In order to make her story more effective and realistic, Desai resorts to the method of diary. It is from Monisha's long and self-searching entries in the diary that we construct the "graph of her psychic life. She realises that the absence of love had mad herself and Nirode "such abject rebels, such craven tragedians!" The void becomes more broadened with time. She has neither a child nor any faith nor anyone in her marital household to share her dilemma. The arrival of Amla — her playful and daring young sister, does not really change anything. Amla has nurtured a kind of idealism for herself and seeks to turn it into a reality in her new role as a commercial artist in an advertisement firm. Hence the three main characters hardly indulge in any action as they are too lost in their own musings and reflections. Other characters such as Jit Nair, Sonny and Dharma further add to this tale of inaction and indifference. Thus although the plot of the novel revolves around three characters — namely Nirode, Amla and Monisha — it only records their listlessness and deprivation rather than any activity or action on their part.

With Desai's insistence on exploring the inner life of her characters it is a natural adjunct that her characters look more like mental states rather than living, breathing human beings. They are more of abstractions, thoughts and ideas instead of active characters. They exist and act only on mental plane. They remind the reader of characters of Samuel Beckett in his play "Waiting for Godot" who have nothing else to do but wait. As to who they wait for or how long they shall continue to wait — they cannot answer. Similarly, Camus characters too come to mind whose sense of non-commitment and non-involvement is so acute that they remain perennial outsiders. Hence Nirode is not an ordinary failure in the sense of being an unsettled, unemployed idler. It is his defeatist mental state which strikes the reader. He wants to live on without purpose, with no mission. His idea of 'princedom' is three drinks and a room. Since life has denied him even this much he craves for these minimum amenities and feels contended. That he has been denied opportunities is not the case. He does not want to avail of opportunities is the reality. Nirode is neither a genius, nor a moron, he is neither an intellectual

in some shabby place. Her offer of monetary help conveyed by mother to Nirode is vehemently rejected by him. Living in the city, Amla realises gradually that Calcutta is a sick and decayed place and it puts its decaying influence on all those who come to inhabit it. She tells Nirode that the city has a withering effect on the inhabitants. So she feels sapped of all her vitality and vigour living in Calcutta. The city dries up her enthusiasm and love of life, her courage and conviction and makes her simply a disillusioned and uncertain soul. Monisha's suicide comes as a very rude shock to her and shakes off all her complacency. She had never imagined that the city could have such a degenerating and mutilating effect on anyone. Amla is another outstanding female protagonist depicted by Desai. She symbolises the naive and credulous individual who is tricked into dreams and ambitions all of which fall down like a house of cards. When she arrives in Calcutta she brings a lot of hopes and dreams with her. The first shock she receives is to see the wasted and forlorn lives of her two siblings. Furthermore, Nirode's continual indifference and Monisha's self-defeatism goad her even more. Then comes the devastating news of Monisha's suicide. Added to all this is the lukewarm response she gets from the firm where she is supposed to take up a job. All these discouraging happenings change Amla into an uncertain and fractured entity.

Mother adds another dimension to Desai's character portrayal. She is more of an idea rather than a living being. Desai has devoted the whole length of a section to her. She comes before the reader as a sophisticated and accomplished lady whose desires and ambitions have been ravaged by a careless, inconsiderate husband who was a squanderer and an idler. Desai describes the incompatibility of the couple. Mr and Mrs Ray, Nirode's parents are a perfect example of living together with only a great amount of alienation to share between them. While Mrs Ray sits with her head bowed and eyes closed in pleasure, listening to the music of the Shehnai player, Mr Ray falls asleep with "his head drooping forward and his mouth open and wet," which naturally breeds "terrible contempt and resentment in her eyes." When Mrs Ray is busy in her garden touching flowers, Mr. Ray sits against his cushions, "idle and contended... in his malice. When the father is no more, she (mother) invites and encourages the flirtations of Major Chadha who pretends to play cards with her but actually would like to seek physical intimacy which the Mother does not necessarily deny. Nirode feels specially repulsive towards her coquettish ways and refuses to have anything to do with the money she throws his way. Mother defies the conventional mother-image as a caring, sacrificing and compassionate kind. She is more of an individual in her own right who does not let her demands of luxury and attention go unheeded. She maintains her independent identity and asserts her freedom by living alone in Kalimpong, enjoying nature and Major Chadha's attentive advances. When she arrives in Calcutta on the death of Monisha she maintains her cool indifference and aloofness towards the children. Nirode is still awe-struck and mesmerised by her presence and clings to her a little longer as a way of a welcome hug. "She is still beautiful", he ponders and is petrified of her beautiful sway. The mother, however, does not show any signs of emotion and keeps up a tough, unrelenting exterior. Monisha's death seems to have hardened her even more and she looks to have further withdrawn into her cell. She goes past Nirode and on reaching home, straightaway goes to her room. Nirode equates her to Kali, the Goddess of death and destruction

images by her. But her symbols and images are present in her novels not for aesthetic or literary value only but as integral and innate features. Desai herself is a very sensitive and intelligent writer and portrays equally emotional and singular characters whose mental turmoil and psychic queries interest her more rather than their superficial social activities. To such a novelist, symbols and images are indeed very handy, even essential modes of expression and evocation. It also makes her novels extremely lyrical and rhythmic. Her prose is enriched with the musical cadence of highly metaphorical language replete with symbolism and word-pictures. Thereby even the complex description of intricate characters seems interesting and engrossing. *Voices in the City* is replete with symbols and images which make the novel open to a variety of interpretations. It is a psychological, social and environmental expression of the novelist whose artistic vision enables her to perceive more than the apparent reality and thus enrich the reader's understanding too.

Desai makes use of a variety of symbols in *Voices in the City*

(a) Symbols related to colour :- Dark colours, specially black, has been used to connote states of mind of the characters. Nirode's "dark and demoniac dreams" befit the "dark pandemonium" of Calcutta. Other symbols related to dark colour are described in a variety of ways — "darkly shadowed", "in the half-dark", "dark warehouses", "dark wintry evening", "dark doorways", "great black wave", "busy black chimneys", "this black city", "black squalor of the grimed city", "black umbrellas", "a black, four-postered bed", etc. Jit wears dark glasses and seems to be "hiding always behind guileful dark glasses and great pipe." The "black-browed" Monisha feels, "I'll have only the darkness. Only the dark spaces between the stars, for they are the only things on earth that can comfort me, rub a balm into my wounds." She further says, "Sleep has nightmares. This, this empty darkness, has not so much as a dream. It is one unlit waste, a desert to which my heart truly belongs." Then, watching the street-singer, she feels that "a glance of those enormous and brilliant black eyes would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless shadow." The street singer's emotions seem to "spread through her eyes like dark lakes." White is another recurrent symbol in the novel. Amla is the creature of sunshine and feels thrilled with monsoon shower and sweet winter breeze. The city scene is sometimes endowed with black and at times with white colours. While Nirode and Jit pass by, the city seems to slide past them "in alternating cubes of white and black." While Aunt Lila's voice is described as "black and white", the Bengalis, in general, are described as dressed in "white," "off-white," against a black background. Dharma's world appears to be white to Amla who notices his white house protecting the quietitude of the interior against the noisy street outside.

(b) Symbols related to people, city and things :- The characters in the novel are also symbolic in nature. Nirode and Monisha symbolise loss of personal entity amidst the hum-drum monotonous routine of life. Both are tightly strung and sensitive individuals one of whom turns into an idler and another commits suicide. Amla symbolises the vivacious, vibrant spirit of life which defies the powers that try to contain and stall it. Sonny and his father symbolise the decadent Zamindar's life in Calcutta. Sonny's father treats his son, Nirode and David to a lavish meal recounting his glorious past. He recalls the dancing girls and their patrons of the

was that of the Eternal Mother, the Earth Mother, a face ravaged by the mot unbearable emotions of women, darkened and flanged and scarred by them, giving that large eyes an eternally unfulfilled promise of vision, of understanding, of boundless love..... a glance of those enormous and brilliant black eyes would dissolve and disintegrate her into a meaningless glow.”

The metaphorical comparing of Kali with the street singer renders the eternal and the transient into one identity. Kali’s symbolic fierceness and magnificence is conveyed potently through the word-picture of the street singer given by Desai. Thereafter, in the final analysis, Nirode’s mother is symbolically compared with Kali. Although such an image looks incongruous but on certain planes the image holds true. Like the goddess, Mother too has raised herself beyond temporal bonds. Kali’s anger and mother’s dispassionate behaviour too have some identity. Kali is not the image of a woman docile, subdued and tamed — she is the Goddess in her angry, volatile disposition. So also is mother — not the Eternal Mother, the giving up and the benevolent kind but a Mother whose expressions evoke fear and awe. So this image though slightly far-fetched, does appear to fall in place.

Some other images have also been employed in the novel to convey the idea of release from the tyrannical oppression of the city atmosphere. The images of wind, river, rain and kite are of this category. In this longing to be free from the suffocating stronghold of Calcutta, Nirode wishes to be as free and unhindered as the kite flying in the open sky. He ruminates:-

“One must be a king kite wheeling so far away in the blazing empty sky as to be merely a dot, almost invisible to the urchins who stood below, stones in their fists, ready to be aimed at and flung.”

To conclude, *Voices in the City* is a symbolic rendering of Anita Desai’s artistic inclinations in a plethora of symbols and images. Since her basic concern is with the internalised action, she selectively makes use of certain singular and unique kinds of images and symbols to make concrete her ideas about the milieu of her work. It is a cumbersome endeavour to narrate states of mind and the sub-conscious. It is equally difficult to concretize abstractions and make them comprehensible as well as communicable to the reader. The dilemma and tumult going on within the psyche are the most difficult ones to manifest. These, Desai has been able to convey brilliantly with the help of literary devices of symbols and images. These form an intricate part of the mental milieu to which her characters belong and which she successfully presents to her readers.

Q.5 A Sense of alienation is expressed by the characters despite living in Calcutta, an overcrowded city — explain with reference to Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City*.

OR

Explain Anita Desai’s concept of alienation.

OR

How does Anita Desai express the theme of alienation in her novel *Voices in the City*?

Alienation as a recurrent and predominant theme finds an overpowering place in Desai’s novel *Voices in the City*. Alienation is the sense of rootlessness felt by an individual even within a familiar social milieu. In the present novel, Calcutta is

about your neck, stifling you. It's suffocating me." When the next issue of the magazine becomes a success, Nirode has past that stage of involvement in it and the sense of meaninglessness seems to be his attitude once more. None of his interactions ever move him towards happiness or involvement — whether he visits Dharma and Gita Devi's house or Jit's place — his sense of alienation makes his reactions very grim and negative. He opines, "Nothing existed but this void in which all things appeared equally insignificant, equally worthless." Strangely enough, Nirode cannot get rid of his mother-fixation so that his revulsion for her has a compelling sense of attraction in it. Monisha gives him a sane advice, "Cast away involvement, I plead with him silently, cast it away and be totally empty, totally alone." Surely, Nirode wants to live without success or despair and it is, "a greater victory, because it brings you, in the end, silence and solitude, and those are the two most powerful things of all." The death of Monisha, creates another dimension of alienation in Nirode. It makes him realize the real meaning of life — it is recourse into silence and solitude. Monisha has done that and now she is beyond everything. The detachment of his mother even in that moment of loss of her daughter evokes further alienation in Nirode. He feels himself to be moving towards the same goal which Monisha seemed to have pursued and achieved. "I know why I'm living, at last, I know now where I'm going-towards her, towards her. She is waiting, can't you see." This sense of oneness is evoked in him only by Monisha's death — a happening which indicates that his sense of alienation is indeed deep set and enormous.

Monisha is another character who deeply feels the sense of alienation from her surroundings. Her mental turmoil is disclosed through her diary. At the end of the first part of the novel, Nirode is informed through a letter of her arrival in Calcutta. Nirode feels, "Monisha in Calcutta, and over the still cemetery a pale drawn breeze wandered silently in through the window." Cemetery is associated with death and death pervades in Calcutta to which Monisha is coming closer. Monisha feels nauseated and shackled by the people around her in Calcutta. Her existence seems to be questioned and threatened at the altar of conventions, family reputation, marital status and such other codes of society. She fights for her freedom — to rescue herself from, the clutches of all. But she encounters a sense of helplessness and despair and fails to find any meaning in her existence. She feels longingly:

"If I had religious faith, I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay. The family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived — a life dedicated to nothing — that this husk is a protection from death. At yes, yes, then it is a choice between death and mean existence, and that, surely, is not a difficult choice."

Monisha too, like Nirode, seeks the meaning of life and avoids commitments — even the commitment of true love. They feel love very demanding and elusive — may be because it did not exist in the relationship between their parents. Monisha's sense of alienation stems from her incompatibility in her married life with Jiban. Instead of understanding and compensating for her sense of loneliness, he aggravates her agony by ignoring or taking her for granted. This injures the sensitivity of the young woman who feels emotionally mauled. She feels, "I am still unable to decipher any meaning in this long, dull warbling rolled out quite flat

friends. She comes to know that Monisha is regarded as a strange, exceptional woman with the queer habit of remaining aloof and indifferent to everyone and everything in her husband's house. Thus Amla gradually develops an understanding of life, the city of Calcutta and the effect it has on her dear ones.

Alienation is thus an important theme of the novel although the impact of alienation seems varied in degrees on different people. Nirode and Monisha are more intensely engulfed by it and thereby feel maladjusted and alienated. Their desire to live has been sapped away by circumstances and they appear as weaklings. In comparison Amla has the grit to sustain and endure life and also to withstand the challenges it throws. She is therefore wiser and braver. As far as Mother is concerned she is her alienated best amongst the rest of the characters. Her initial attempts to help Nirode by sending him cheques is spurned by him. Thereafter she seems to have developed her separate entity and attitude towards her life. Her liaison with Major Chadha, her love of comforts and tastes and her aloofness even in the moments of Monisha's death talk about her sense of alienation. She too seems to have withdrawn herself from the world of affection, commitment and responsibility and substituted it with a world of lustful self-satisfaction. So the nature of her alienation is entirely different from that experienced by her children.

Anita Desai, as a sensitive writer, understands how alienated one feels even in an over-crowded set up. She has presented poignantly the dilemma of some alienated individuals through her characters. Alienation as a theme finds prominence not just in American literature but equally in Indian writings. Alienation is a mental state, an individualistic reaction to the pressures around. It varies in its effects from individual to individual. Desai's characters show more symptoms of suffering from the sense of alienation and non-belongingness than one usually comes across. Hence the reader finds alienation as an outstanding issue discussed in *Voices in the City*.

Q.6 Describe how *Voices in the City* is an existentialist novel?

OR

Discuss Anita Desai's Existentialist vision with reference to her novel *Voices in the City*?

Voices in the City is an existentialist novel that illustrates Anita Desai's views that there lies inherent in life "the terror of facing single-handed, the ferocious assaults of existence." The novel deals meticulously with "the ferocious assaults of existence" in the "monster" metropolis, Calcutta, on the three major characters in the novel — Nirode, Monisha and Amla who feel agonised by their meaningless existence. Nirode is a Bengali young man who has turned bitter against many good things in life. He has turned an introvert and withdrawn in his own cell. He contrasts his failures with the "bright" successes of his brother, Arun and prefers to live in "shadows, silence, stillness" for "that was exactly what he would always be left with." Living life as the "anonymous and shabby clerk in a newspaper" his only ambition is for "three drinks and a room" which he considers "a principedom." Thereafter, Nirode starts editing a literary magazine, 'Voice', which does not work out well for him and he takes up writing as his career. He writes a play which is bound to be a flop, forcing him to open a bookshop in a dirty

What force of will does it require to shed, as I believe my brother has, at least to an extent, shed, the unnecessary, the diverting and live the clean, husked, irreducible life? If I had religious faith I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay. The family here and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived — a life dedicated to nothing — that this husk is a protection from death. Ah, yes, yes then it is a choice between death and mean existence, and that, surely, is not a difficult choice.” Monisha’s plight keeps on increasing with the passage of time and she questions:

“Is this what is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain, never to arrive at a solution? Only a conundrum — is that, then, life?”

In her existentialist quest, Monisha realises that it is the absence of the element of love that has made herself and Nirode “such abject rebels, such craven tragedians.” Thus Monisha’s life is a plethora of mishaps and incongruities — her overcrowded household, an apathetic city, her incapacity to bear a child, her isolation from her nonchalant husband, and the consequent loneliness within her — all these make her existence unbearable and suicide is her ultimate option.

Part III of the novel deals with “Amla” whose spirit of wanton playfulness and gay abandon is converted into existentialist brooding as she gradually discovers the type of life she leads in Calcutta. She also ponders upon the effect of this “monster city” on her brother and married sister. Amla arrives in Calcutta to work as a commercial artist in an advertisement firm. When she first meets Monisha, Amla finds some change in her sister brought about by this city of Calcutta. It looks as if something “had laid its hands upon her (Monisha), scarred and altered her till she bore only the faintest resemblance to the quiet subtly uncaring elder sister Amla had remembered.” She further ruminates that “this monster city that lived no normal, healthy, red-blooded life but one that was subterranean, underlit, stealthy and odorous of mortality, had captured and enchanted — or disenchanting — both her sister and brother.” To a large extent, Amla too is an existentialist, although she tries to find some way out of the “absurd” situation she finds herself in by leading a gay life, attending parties, dances and get-togethers. She participates in aesthetic conversations with the painter Dharma but is rudely shocked to learn of his apathy towards his daughter and wife. With an agonising sense of bewilderment and frustration, Amla tells Nirode, “This city, this city of yours, it conspires against all who wish to enjoy it, doesn’t it?” Her observation denotes a futile attempt on her part to live a cheerful life as an outer facade with in her mind feeling frustrated and choked. By no means is she immune from the existentialist feeling of nullity and hopelessness. The following extract further vivifies her dilemma:-

“Despite all the stimulations of new experiences, new occupations, new acquaintances and the mild sweet winter air, this sense of hollowness and futility persisted. Daily it pursued her to the office, hid quietly under the black mouthpiece of her telephone, shook-ever so slightly — the tip of her pencil as she traced the severe lines of a well-draped sari, then engulfed her in the evenings when she attended parties at which she still knew no one well and at night when she tried to compose her unsteady thoughts for sleep.”

2. Symbol of 'City'

'City' is another powerful symbol in the novel. City stands for Calcutta — a place which is attractive and repulsive in the same breath. It is a city that offers challenge and opportunity but it is equally a place that threatens and destroys. It nourishes, preserves and then destroys. It remains an enigma all the same. 'City' offers broad scope to the novelist to explore human psyche as well as the effect of the social milieu on that psyche. Calcutta has been variously described by Desai. It is a common backdrop for the novel. It is the city where Nirode's youth is being wasted gradually as the place does not offer anything substantial to him. It is the city where Monisha feels the acute pressure of family, in-laws and society which ultimately claims her life. Calcutta is equally an inviting, soliciting place where Amla comes to try her luck in the profession of advertising. The same 'city' has been a world of glamour and lustful longings for Sunny's old father who nostalgically misses the old Calcutta of nautch girls and luxuries. The city has also been referred to as 'Kali' — the goddess in its fierce and angry form. The goddess' facial expressions and gesticulations declare her mood of anger and vendetta which she seeks by imposing punitive actions. So also the city awaits to devour many a haggard soul after having exhausted him (or her) of energy and life. The City of Calcutta is somewhat of a silent protagonist who must either be resisted or surrendered to. Desai's preoccupation with Calcutta and the effects it has on the inhabitants reminds one of R.K. Narayan's Malgudi or Hardy's Wessex. Malgudi is a relatively peaceful place where life goes on in its routinized, often hilarious manner. It offers the protagonist the advantage of a milieu which is otherwise not turbulent or antagonistic towards its residents. On the other hand, Hardy's Wessex is as sombre and dark in lineaments as is the mindset of Hardy himself. It silhouettes a place which is largely agrarian but where life is not a stagnant, unchanging one. Wessex witnesses emotional storms and sensational commotions. However in Hardy's case too, Wessex does not have that larger than life entity. Desai, for may be the first time, gives a place a larger than life dimension. Calcutta is some kind of determining agent for the lives of its protagonists. It is a dirty city, sprawling, vibrating and tense. It makes the people very nervy and edgy. It can extract volatile reactions from them. It can also breed indifference and apathy as displayed by Jiban's family towards the woes of Monisha and by Monisha's mother who fails to show any signs of emotions even in the event of Monisha's death. Thus Calcutta has been treated by Desai in a queer yet imaginative manner. The novelist records meticulously the life and happenings in the 'city' and the influence of these on the humanity around. Calcutta is as much a city of dark and dull alleys as it is of the bohemian party lovers, artists and intellectuals. It has assimilated within itself people of all the strata of society. It dispenses justice towards all and its ways are rather unscrutinable. Thus Calcutta seems to be playing the role of some divine agent trying to keep mankind in its place.

3. Role of Nirode

Nirode is one of the main characters and the chief male protagonist of Desai's novel *Voices in the City*. He is the brother of Monisha and Amla. He is a sensitive and artistic young man who has lost all mooring and meaning of life. When the novel starts, Nirode is seen grumbling against the better lot of his brother Arun who had been bequeathed with their father's property and thus was going abroad for further studies. Nirode feels that he is condemned to live a suffocating and unenterprising existence in Calcutta. Nirode seems rudderless as he keeps on changing his profession from one to

that she fails to react even to the song and dance of the street singer. She too acknowledges the negative effect generated by Calcutta on her psyche. Desai has always been interested in delineating the agony and pathos at the heart of woman, specially married women, who feel more inhibited and shackled by the constraints of the society. Like Maya in *Cry the Peacock* and Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain*, Monisha is another traumatised being. It is partially her own sensitive self and partially her circumstances that turn her into an introverted character. As all her efforts at establishing connectivity with the outside world fail, she decides to assert herself through her death. But in her final moments of pain and agony she realises that this is not what she had desired. She succumbs to her burns and dies. Thus Monisha is another case who has forgotten what she wants. As there are no priorities in her life, she opts for whatever appears as the most tenable solution. Desai has presented the predicament of her character very forcefully and poignantly. Monisha never gets a chance to display her true potential. All her attempts of being an individual entity are rebuffed. Jiban realises after her death that he was responsible for her fate but it is too late by then. It might appear that the city of Calcutta and its suffocating life-pattern got the better of Monisha. This is true to a large extent but one should also keep in mind that to Monisha death appeared as a way-out, not as a defeat. Since that is the possible option open before her, she opts for it. Monisha's character is truly sensitive and touching.

5. Role of Amla

Amla is the young and vivacious unmarried sister of Nirode and Monisha. She is full of plans and vision when she arrives from Bombay after completing her studies and joins an advertising firm in Calcutta. She has a positive and healthy attitude towards life and would like others also to share her bright and sunny approach. But at the same time she does realise that Calcutta exerts a strangely defeating and despondent influence on its inhabitants. She is surprised to see the sad state of affairs of Nirode and Monisha. Both seem to have lost the zest for life and gone derelict. She questions Nirode about his livelihood and is rather appalled to find him still drifting in uncertainty. She is at loss to understand the problem nagging her sister who appears to be a mere ghost of her earlier self. This bizarre transformation in both her siblings does befuddle her and at first she cannot comprehend it. Her emotional involvement with Nirode's painter friend, Dharma makes the reality of life dawn on her. She had considered Dharma to be some kind of an ideal with whom she could communicate on all planes. His artistic disposition and sensitive demeanour greatly influenced the young girl. She is swayed into considering him as a reliable and honest friend. She is badly disillusioned when she comes to know the reality behind the apparent. She comes to know that Dharma is rather callous and inconsiderate towards his wife and has disowned his daughter as she had refused to go by his will. Thus his artistic nature was pure artifice and he was a very different man than what he appeared. The advertising firm in which she is so enthusiastic to work also turns out to be a damp squib. Hence alienation and disillusionment are gradual in the case of Amla. She seems to be less attached to her mother and more to her brother and sister. At the death of Monisha she is ultimately convinced that Calcutta is definitely a discomfiting and suffocating place. If we look at the type of life Amla leads she appears to be something of a bohemian like her brother. She seems casual and unconcerned and enjoys life in parties and get-togethers. But she is not only this much. She is far above than a superficial being interested only in mundane activities of life. She feels the frustration of her brother and the hopelessness of her sister. However

His interest in the intricate designs of the vegetables undergoes a change overnight into the human subconscious manifested by way of dreams. Thus Dharma is another complex character portrayed brilliantly by Desai. He fits in properly in the bohemian set up of Calcutta. He is, in fact, a product of the city and his mind set is ruled by the nuances of this place. Dharma is related to both Nirode and Amla being friends to both. But at the same time he vocalises another aspect which Desai associates with Calcutta. Dharma remains an ordinary, middle-rung character with no special attributes nor does his character show any growth throughout the plot of the novel. He remains, however, an important minor character.

7. Role of Jiban

Jiban is one of the minor characters of the novel although he should have been given more space being the life-partner of Monisha — who is one of the important characters. However the role of Jiban is insignificant since he hardly does any action worth our attention. He is a conventional type of a man who refuses to come out of the mould into which he has been born and brought up. He is symbolic of the pretentious bourgeoisie mentality which believes more in show off than in reality. Jiban fails to understand the needs and ambitions of his wife, Monisha, and wants her to perform the functions just as other ladies of his house. Since he belongs to a well-settled, resourceful family of Calcutta, he has inherited their thinking as well. Monisha's father had married her off to him because he felt she would lead a comfortable life. It had happened on the contrary. Jiban was busy with his official work and Monisha was just as an essential furniture item of the family. She belonged to a family which had given her vision, dreams and ambitions, none of which could be appreciated by Jiban. Desai has reflected more on the plight of Monisha than on Jiban in her novel *Voices in the City*, so the reader does not come to know much about him individually. He hardly has individual traits and looks more as a symbolic character. He is symbolic of the forces whose indifference and callousness leads to Monisha's suicide. Jiban never bothers to know what Monisha really wants. They do not have children which is another reason for their having drifted apart. So ignorant and unconcerned has he turned that when his mother calls Monisha a thief and accuses her of stealing money, Jiban takes sides with the mother and complains that she (Monisha) could have at least told him before taking the money. This hurts Monisha intensely and she grows even more alienated from him. In fact there is acute lack of communication and extreme passivity in their relationship. Jiban has never cared to probe her psyche, her hidden emotions and her insecurities. He expected her to accept the household and its norms mechanically. Jiban is thus a living example of a typical well-off individual who is not accustomed to asking and looking for questions. He is more comfortable following the beaten track. As a character Jiban does not attract much attention. His reaction to Monisha and towards life is rather passive and rigid. He refuses to acknowledge that his wife is an independent individual with a psyche of her own. After Monisha commits suicide Jiban confesses that he had overlooked her problems and had been quite ignorant and oblivious of Monisha. He holds himself responsible for the sad plight of his wife. But this repentance has come too late and is of no avail. Jiban's insensitivity had caused Monisha her life. Desai is more committed in analysing female psyche rather than male mindset. Her haunted protagonists are usually women. In the present novel also Jiban exists more as a shadow and it is Monisha whose complex mental scenario is Desai's centre of attraction. Thus though Jiban fills the slot of Monisha's husband, none of his actions

of uprightness, indifference and retribution. She is very much the progenitor but she is equally an isolated figure too. Desai has depicted three important women characters in her novel. All three symbolise three different mental states. The Mother appears to be the most distinguished of them since she looks to belong to some altogether different world.

9. Ending of the novel

The ending of the novel is grave and evocative. The reader has gone through the saga of Nirode, Monisha, Amla and their family. The listlessness of Nirode, the alienation of Monisha and the disillusionment of Amla have all been delineated brilliantly by Anita Desai. The eerie-figured mother with her detached apathy has also been discussed. Monisha's alienation leads to her suicide which is a very rude shock for Nirode and Amla who had never imagined that she had become that desperate and lonely. The Mother arrives on this moment of grief but she looks so detached and aloof as if this tragedy had no personal repercussions for her. In the ending of the novel all the characters previously mentioned in different sections come together. Only Monisha is physically absent. The novelist talks about the strange impact of her suicide on the other two sibling and the mother. Nirode is suddenly transformed into a new being. He seeks to touch and connect himself with his kith and kin. This feeling had been badly missing in him earlier. His habit of recoiling within vanishes away with the death of Monisha and he feels like comforting and consoling Aunt Lila who is mourning the death. Amla also has her moments of realisation. She is now fully convinced that this strange city devours whosoever comes within its clutches. She is also aghast to realise that her sister could be undergoing so much of pain and isolation which led her to take that extreme step. Mother reacts in her own typically aloof manner as if she was above and beyond any tragic happening. The ending also evokes the image of goddess Kali — the form in which she seeks revenge and imposes punishment. Mother, the city and Kali appear to be synonymous on a certain plane as all the three appear as punitive forces with little traces of benevolence and forgiveness in them. Desai's novel is a long and painful story of varied experiences undergone by different characters who suffer in one way or another. In the bohemian city of Calcutta, they either have too little opportunity or they do not seem to be taking advantage of the opportunities which come their way. They are young, hopeful and positive but life in this maddening, squalid place turns them into the ghosts of their former self. The ending of the novel brings before the reader all these aspects of the story. Since Nirode has been rejuvenated and revitalized after Monisha's death, he expresses his desire to live. But at the same time he is aware of a figure in white looking at him from the upper verandah. That figure seems to be the shadow of the dead Monisha which beckons Nirode to come her way. So the novel does not end on a positive note. Instead, the death-wish experienced by Nirode so very often assumes a new form and manifests itself. Amla too is present and looks at the figure in white. Whether it is vision or reality is for the reader to decide. But Desai would like to make it clear that past is not dead and gone, it would persist and live on. Its impact on the lives of Nirode and Amla would also be there. *Voices in the City* is a grim tale of the sad lives of three young people. There are hardly any casual or light moments in the novel. The ending of such a sad story is equally sombre. Desai gives her final verdict in the death of Monisha. Jiban's realisation that he had been responsible for her death has come too late. Any comfort which Nirode and Amla could derive from the presence of mother is also sadly missing. Thus

and the emergent ones not fully evolved.”

Dodiya and Surendran.

2. “The Novel is a vivid picture of India’s social transition.”

Deccan Herald

3. “Anita Desai is one of the best known and highly regarded novelists working in English in the sub-continent. The style she has evolved is lucid, tight, undramatic... her imagistic phase acquires an ambiguous and terrible power — the words hold down the events forcibly.”

Arts Guardian, London

4. “... grips the reader from the very first page... Calcutta evidently can be as good a centre of Bohemians as Paris... a readable novel, without many false notes.”

Tribune

5. “... has a vitality that highlights a compulsive creative talent... There is a convincing fury about this novel.”

Sunday Times, London

6. “...succeeds in creating a living, imaginative and eloquent impression of India Today.”

The Times, London

Bibliography

Novels by Anita Desai :

1. *Cry, the Peacock*, 1963
2. *Voices in the City*, 1965
3. *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, 1971
4. *Where Shall We Go This Summer ?* 1975
5. *Fire on the Mountain*, 1977
6. *Clear Light of Day*, 1980

Suggested Readings

1. Usha Bande, *The Novels of Anita Desai*
2. R.K. Dhawan (ed.), *The Fiction of Anita Desai*
3. Jasbir Jain, *Stairs to the Attic: The Novels of Anita Desai*
4. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*
5. Ramesh K. Srivastava, *Perspectives on Anita Desai*.
6. M.K. Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature*.
7. Madhu Sudan Prasad, *Anita Desai : The Novelist*
8. J.K. Dodiya, K.V. Surendran, *Indian Women Writers: Critical Perspectives*.
9. Amar Nath Prasad, *Indian Women Novelists in English*.