
UNIT 1 NON-FICTIONAL PROSE: A SURVEY

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall trace the beginnings of Indian English Non-Fictional Prose. While surveying the field we will document important prose writers of the pre-independence era as also those who are currently writing. You will also be acquainted with the **Forms and Varieties of Prose**. After reading this unit you will appreciate the fact that whether fictional or non-fictional, prose should be read as closely as verse.

1.1 INDIAN PROSE WRITERS

Indian English literature began as a by-product of the Indo-British encounter. Indians first started learning English for the purpose of trade and commerce. Expository prose writing, letters, and speeches were the first to be published. The first Indian author in English, Dean Mahomet, published his memoirs, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, in 1794. There have been outstanding Indian orators like Vivekananda, Tilak and Srinivasa Sastri. Indians have published biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, and humorous sketches in addition to scholarly monographs in various fields of knowledge. Many of the contemporary novelists and poets have written good prose. But the achievements in poetry and fiction have drawn attention away from non-fiction prose writings.

Dean Mahomed (1759-1851) was born in 1759 into a family claiming traditions of service to the Mughal Empire. After the death of his father, at the age of eleven, he joined the East India Company's Bengal Army as a camp follower, and attached himself to an Ensign Godfrey Evan Baker. Over the next fifteen years, they travelled all over the Gangetic plain, from Delhi to Dhaka. Dean Mahomed became a market master and then a subaltern officer, as his Anglo-Irish patron rose to become the captain of his unit. When Baker sailed home to Cork in 1784, Dean Mohamed went to Ireland with him. He settled down there, and married an Anglo-Irish girl. He read widely, and it is possible that Addison's and Smollett's accounts of their travels in Europe encouraged him to write. In 1794, with the help of public subscription, he published his book, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet, a Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of the Honorable The East India Company*. (In the East India Company's administration, most of Bihar, including Patna, were part of the province of Bengal). At that time, the most common way of publishing a book was by subscription -- the author would collect money from the book-reading public to pay for the cost of publication. Dean Mahomet (to use the spelling he favoured) adopted the epistolary form; the book is in the form of thirty-eight letters. *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* is probably the only account by an Indian of life with the East India Company. The book ends with his arrival in Britain.

The Travels of Dean Mahomet, the first book ever written and published by an Indian in English, is a memoir, a popular genre in non-fictional prose. It is in the form of thirty-eight letters. The epistolary form is just a convention; different portions of the first person narrative, the various "letters", begin with "Dear Sir". The first letter (the first chapter of his *Travels*) begins with his birth and childhood. He claims that he was descended from the Nawabs of Murshidabad. Subsequent chapters clearly describe the towns and villages they passed through, the dress and occupations of the people, and the activities of the various classes of men in the Bengal Army. His language is graphic and without stale diction when he is describing events in his life, or scenes from the army camp. But when it comes to descriptions of nature, Dean Mahomet turns to clichés he has picked up from his reading of English nature descriptions. This is not surprising, as early writers in the settler colonies like Canada, Australia and New Zealand experienced the same problem of the dichotomy between the language (though it was their mother tongue) and the place they were writing about.

The book was written more than two centuries ago, just when the Mughal Empire was fading away and the British was taking over. Dean Mahomet describes various aspects of life in India, always laying stress on the beauty of the country and the nobility of its people. He describes "the Mohammedan ceremony of marriage", the caste system, the custom of offering betel leaves, and the goods manufactured in different parts of the country, such as the fine cloth of Dhaka. But the tone is always that of a neutral observer. One often finds the author taking over the European's values along with his vocabulary: the Indians (probably Adivasis) who attack the Bengal Army's convoy, are described as "a savage clan" and "unfeeling barbarians". The tribals armed with bows and arrows are no match for the British guns, and they are punished brutally: "some being whipped in a public manner, others suspended on a kind of gibbets, ignominiously exposed along the mountain's conspicuous brow, in order to strike terror into the hearts of their accomplices". Dean Mahomet says that they "justly received exemplary punishment".

The beginnings of Indian English writing are not fully documented. For long, Cavelley Venkata Boriah's "Account of the Jains" published in 1809 in a journal has been considered the first published work by an Indian in English. M.K.Naik (in his *A History of Indian English Literature*, 1982) and K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Indian Writing in English* (1962) supported this view because *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* had been forgotten. It is only in 1996 that a historian, Michael H. Fisher, brought this work to light. His scholarly work, *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1795-1851) in India, Ireland and England* has chronicled the life of this unknown Indian, tracing his later life as the first Indian entrepreneur in England, and the role his wife Jane played in furthering his business of running a coffee house and later a medicinal bath. But it is difficult to correctly place Dean Mahomet's work in the tradition of Indian English writing. He is chronologically the first, but we do not know whether later writers like Raja Rammohun Roy were aware of his work.

Raja Rammohun Roy's essay, "A Defence of Hindu Theism" (1817) is the first original publication in expository prose in the history of Indian writing in English. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) was the greatest social, religious and cultural reformer of the period. The son of a rich landlord, he studied Arabic and Persian at Patna, and Hindu theology and philosophy at Benares. He knew many European languages, and had read the Bible in Greek, Hebrew and Latin. He was a polymath, who wrote in Bengali (his mother tongue), Persian, and Sanskrit in addition to English. In 1828, he founded the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist Hindu movement. He fought for women's rights, and led a movement against *sati*. His articles about the "practice of burning widows alive", and his "Address to Lord William Bentinck" (1830) played a big role in framing legislation to ban this cruel custom. He wanted to modernize India, and realized the importance of knowing English. He was one of the founders of the Hindu College (which came into being in Calcutta in 1817).

His "Letter on English Education" addressed to the Governor-General Lord Amherst in 1823 is a fine example of his prose style. His writing reveals clear thinking and logical argument. He was a master of English prose, the first in a long line of distinguished Indians who used English prose to promote social and political reform.

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Bengalis have made an outstanding contribution to early prose writing. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), the father of the Bengali novel and author of *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), the first Indian novel in English, wrote several essays in English. With the growth of English education, a larger number of Indians started writing distinguished scholarly books. Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) a member of the Indian Civil Service is remembered for his verse translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He wrote novels in Bengali, two of which he translated into English: *The Lake of Palms* (19023) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909). His non-fiction prose works are equally distinguished, his most famous book being the two volumes *Economic History of India* (1902 and 1904). He was also the first Indian (the second, now that Dean Mahomet's work has come to light) to write a travelogue, *Three Years in Europe 1869-1871*, published in 1872. He was also the first to write literary history: *The Literature of Bengal* (1879). His friend and contemporary, Surendranath Banerjea (1848-1925), one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress was a powerful orator; his speeches have been published as early as 1890.

Three Bengalis, who distinguished themselves in the fields of religion, poetry and national awakening, were masters of prose. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was named Narendranath Datta by his parents. At the age of eighteen, he became a disciple of the great mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and took the name Vivekananda. After Sri Ramakrishna's death in 1885, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, an order of monks devoted to social reform. His speech at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 brought him international fame. His *Complete Works*, the first volume of which appeared in 1907, consist primarily of speeches and lectures. He spoke of the spiritual uniqueness of India, and the greatness of Hinduism, but he spoke even more forcefully about the current degradation of India, its causes and cure. His language has an astonishing modernity about it; the idiom is so fresh it is difficult to believe that he spoke a hundred years ago. He used simple diction and short sentences. His imagery was taken from day-to-day life, not art or literature. Here is a passage from a speech condemning Hindu insularity:

Our religion is in the kitchen, our God is in the cooking pot and our religion is, "Don't touch me, I am holy."

He used a kind of incantatory repetition very effectively, as in this piece on "The Secret of Work":

If a man's wants can be removed for an hour, it is helping him indeed; if his wants can be removed for a year, it will be more help to him; but if his wants can be removed for ever, it is surely the greatest help that can be given him.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the brightest star in the firmament of Bengali literature and culture. He was a poet, playwright and novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. He composed hundreds of songs and was also a painter of merit. His autobiographical works in Bengali, *My Boyhood Days* and *Reminiscences* are among his early works. Tagore's prose writings in English were primarily in the form of lectures, though his letter to Mahatma Gandhi, "The Great Sentinel", is an outstanding composition, upholding the values of humanism in the midst of political turmoil. *Sadhana* (1913), his first prose work in English, is based on lectures he gave on Indian philosophy at Harvard University. Of his many collections of lectures, *Nationalism* (1917) is the most relevant today. Tagore makes a distinction between society (the "spontaneous self expression of man as a social being") and nation (the

"political and economic union of people"). He warns Japan and India against imitating the west. In fluent prose which has an almost poetic power, Tagore denounces the economic imperialism of western nations, which has destroyed the social fabric of India. Tagore absorbed the best of ancient Indian thought and spirituality. He was passionately concerned with modern India, but he did not believe in narrow patriotism. His prose is characterised by deep thought expressed in lucid language.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) is better known as a seer and poet, but he has to his credit many volumes of prose writings on philosophical, religious, social, and cultural subjects. He has been called "The inaugurator of modern Indian criticism" (the words are C.D.Narasimhaiah's) because of the range and originality of his writing. Aurobindo Ghose was sent to England for his school education at the age of seven by his Anglophile father. He studied classical languages at Cambridge, and got a First class First rank in his degree. He qualified for the Indian Civil Service, obtaining record marks in Greek and Latin. He also learnt French, German, Italian and Spanish. He came back to India in 1893 and started teaching English at Maharaja's College in Baroda. He resigned his position when the British partitioned Bengal in 1905, and took an active part in the nationalist agitation. He was arrested in 1908 as a terrorist; his mystic experience at Alipore Jail in 1909 (he called it "Narayana Darshan") made him give up politics. He settled down at the French enclave of Pondicherry, and continued his yogic quest. He was joined by a French woman, Mirra Richard (later known as the "Mother" in the Aurobindo Ashram), who recognised him as the guru she was searching for. In 1926 he had a great spiritual experience, the descent of a new consciousness. He retired into seclusion, but continued his literary work; in addition to poetry (including the epic *Savitri*) he produced many poetic dramas, and more than fifty volumes of prose, comprising essays, speeches, correspondence and translations from Sanskrit.

Sri Aurobindo's essays can be divided into three broad categories: religion, social issues and literary criticism. His most famous works in the field of religion and spirituality are *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948) and *Heraclitus* (a comparative study of Greek philosophy and Vedantic thought). Many of his essays on social issues first appeared in *Arya*, a monthly he founded in 1914. Books on social and cultural issues include *The Renaissance in India* (1920) and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953). His literary criticism appears in *The Future Poetry* and in letters. His critical approach is a synthesis of the best in western and Sanskrit traditions of aesthetics. He is quite original in his assessment of individual poets; he recognised the achievement of Walt Whitman, calling him "the most Homeric voice since Homer" long before the English academic establishment accepted him. Two other writers who have made important contributions to Indian literary criticism are Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (you will read him in Unit 2) and M.Hiriyanna, author of *Art Experience* (1954) and other books on Indian philosophy.

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed Indians using English very effectively in public speeches. Nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahadev Govind Ranade were great orators. Perhaps the greatest orator of the period was V.S.Srinivasa Sastri (1869-1946), a leader of the Moderates. He was known as "the silver-tongued orator of the Empire". He also wrote a number of biographies, including *Life and Times of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta* (1945) and *My Master Gokhale* (1946). Sarojini Naidu, better known for her poetry, showed her mastery of prose in her speeches. Another leader of the Gandhian era, C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) was an eloquent speaker. His simple prose versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* also reveal his mastery of English. But the most important leader and thinker of the era was Mahatma Gandhi, after whom this period has been named. In terms of literary merit, Jawaharlal Nehru was the greatest writer of this period, and most critics agree that his autobiography is the best work in the genre.

After Independence, the political struggle no longer engaged the attention of writers; this facilitated the growth of lighter writing. Both before and after Independence, Indians wrote scholarly books in the field of history, economics, religion and philosophy. The most famous writer in the field of Indian philosophy and religion was S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975). He taught philosophy at leading universities in India and abroad, and rose to be President of India. He was a prolific writer, whose works include *Indian Philosophy* (in two volumes, 1923, 1927), *The Hindu View of Life* (1926) and *The Principal Upanishads* (1953). Khushwant Singh, better known as a novelist and journalist, has the credit of writing the standard scholarly work on his community: *A History of the Sikhs*, published in two volumes (1963, 1966). Much significant literary criticism has appeared in the last four decades, covering studies of individual authors and works as well as theoretical studies like Krishna Rayan's *Sahitya: A Theory* (1991). The leading critics in the field of Indian English literature are K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, C. D. Narasimhaiah and M. K. Naik (see Suggested Reading). Meenakshi Mukherjee is another important critic, whose *The Twice Born Fiction* (1971) is devoted to Indian English fiction; in *Realism and Reality* (1985), she studies the growth of the novel in Indian languages.

More than thirty books of non-fiction prose appear every year in the field of Indian English literature. They include biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, historical and culture studies and social criticism. Nirad C. Chaudhuri has written books of all these types. *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) is his most famous work; the autobiographical mode continues in its sequel, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* (1987). His second book, *A Passage to England* (1959) is a travelogue. His books on history, culture, religion and Indian society include *The Continent of Circe* (1966), *The Intellectual in India* (1967), *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (1979) and *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997). Biographies include *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Max Müller* (1974) which won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and *Clive of India* (1975). He revelled in provoking controversy. His first book was dedicated to the memory of the British Empire, "because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped, and quickened by . . . British rule." He denounced India as the "Continent of Circe", a land where the original, energetic Aryans had been turned into slothful pigs by the climate. Most readers are irritated by this human gadfly, full of his own importance. His long, complex sentences, full of learned allusions and difficult words, are not very readable. But much of his criticism of Indian society is based on fact, and his books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian literature or culture.

A writer of the post-independence era who resembles Chaudhuri in dedicating himself to non-fictional writing is Ved Mehta, author of eighteen books, of which just one, *Delinquent Chacha* (1967), is a novel. Born in Lahore in 1934, he became blind at the age of four, and was educated at a special school for the blind at Bombay. When he was fifteen years old he went to America to study at the Arkansas School for the Blind. He went to college in the United States and Britain, obtaining a B.A. degree from Oxford University and an M.A. from Harvard. He has been MacArthur Fellow and a Visiting fellow at Balliol College, Oxford. Undeterred by blindness, he joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1961, and much of his work first appeared in it. His first book, *Face to Face* (1957) is autobiographical. His non-fiction includes a travelogue, *Walking the Indian Streets* (1961), *The Fly and the Fly-Bottle* (1963) based on interviews with British intellectuals, and *The New Theologian* (1966) an attempt to evaluate the ideas of Christian theologians coping with the secular world. *John is Easy to Please* (1971) contains some of his best essays of literary criticism. He is now at work on an autobiographical series to which he has given the name *Continents of Exile*. The first five volumes, *Daddyji* (1972), *Mamaji* (1979), *Vedi*

(1982), *The Ledge between the Streams* (1984), and *Sound-Shadows of the New world* (1986) describe his family and childhood, and his coming to terms with life in Arkansas. *The Stolen Light* (1989) describes his experiences at Pomona College in California, and his attempts to move on equal terms with his sighted college fellows.

Thirty-two years separate *The Stolen Light* from his first autobiographical book, *Face to Face*. But Ved Mehta has grown and matured in terms of style and character in these decades, quite unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who reveals no change in the thirty-six years which separate the two volumes of his autobiography. His first book avoided mentioning his disability; now he states it plainly, "I have been blind from the age of four, as a result of meningitis". An early book, *Walking the Indian Streets* frequently indulged in visual details, such as the colour of a person's clothes. *The Stolen Light* is based on felt experience, and his prose conveys it beautifully, as in his descriptions of the new students' initiation at Pomona College:

The air was fresh with the scent of eucalyptus, which made me think of childhood colds back home in India and the eucalyptus leaves crushed in a handkerchief which my mother would press against my nose. No matter how stuffed up my head was, it seemed, I could always smell the pungent, overpowering fragrance of eucalyptus.

In spite of being an autobiography, Ved Mehta's later work is not one-sided: we get a complete picture of the narrator, his good as well as bad qualities. The streak of selfishness present in Ved Mehta's love affairs and friendships at college is revealed.

Many persons better known in other walks of life have written their memoirs. Such books present fresh glimpses of less known facets of life in India. Sheila Dhar's *Here is Someone I'd Like You to Meet* (1995) contains entertaining anecdotes of musicians, while Moosa Raza's *Of Nawabs and Nightingales* (1995) gives us insights into the life of the I.A.S. officer posted in a small town. R.K. Laxman, India's best cartoonist, has published his autobiography, *The Tunnel of Time* (1998). Many established novelists have published their autobiographies: Nayantara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) which appeared before her novels, was followed by *From Fear Set Free* (1962). R.K. Narayan has written *My Days* (1975), while Ruskin Bond's autobiographical works have the titles *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir* (1997) and *The Lamp is Lit: Leaves from a Journal* (1998). P. Lal, the poet and translator, has written about his near-death experience in *Lessons* (1991). C.D. Narasimhaiah, the literary critic who has done a lot to promote the study of Indian English literature, calls his autobiography *N for Nobody: Autobiography of an English Teacher* (1991). Manohar Malgonkar, the novelist, has written biographies of figures in Indian history, such as *Kanhoji Angrey: Maratha Admiral* (1959) and *Chatrapatis of Kolhapur* (1971).

The last fifty years has seen the publication of a large number of autobiographies and biographies. One biography which won the Sahitya Akademi Award (in 1976) is S. Gopal's *Jawaharlal Nehru*. Sarvepalli Gopal (b. 1923) is a distinguished historian: after working as Director of the Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India (1954-1966), he went back to teaching at universities like Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) and Oxford. His biography of his father, S. Radhakrishnan (who was president of India) is remarkable for its candid portrayal. Professor Gopal makes no attempt to cover up anything, not even regarding the marital life of his distinguished father. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (2 volumes, 1976, 1979) is considered the definitive work in the field. Gopal's work, as befits a scholar, is loaded with facts and references, duly footnoted. But he is involved in his subject, and does not hesitate to use strong language. He admires Nehru, but points out the flaws in his style of functioning. Nehru had implicit faith in his personal assistant, M.O. Mathai; unfortunately, he was "not the faithful retainer as Nehru thought but disloyal, avaricious and opportunistic." Gopal does not have the dry, dispassionate style one associates with a historian; he condemns Mathai in a

complex prose which is full of adjectives. He points out that Nehru alone was not to blame, the pusillanimity of others had a big role in puffing up Mathai:

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Unknown to Nehru, Mathai's irregular activities were generally accepted and his influence either sought or feared. Indira Gandhi encouraged him beyond normal limits, Vijalaya Lakshmi Pandit addressed him as Deputy Prime Minister, Rajagopalachari told Mathai that he looked on him as a son, Padmaja Naidu regularly sent him affectionate birthday greetings and even the Mountbattens, who should have known better, fussed over him. Thus an illiterate upstart had succeeded in making Nehru the victim of his own isolation and had revived in Delhi the atmosphere of a decadent court.

The metaphor of "a decadent court" puts these national leaders on par with the flattering courtiers who used to surround kings in the old days. For centuries, Delhi had been the capital where the Mughals (and before them the Khiljis and Lodhis) had held court in an atmosphere of intrigue, where some upstart favourite would unduly influence the king. The metaphor constitutes very strong condemnation of Mathai.

Rajmohan Gandhi (b.1935) is another important prose writer. His biography of C. Rajagopalachari, his maternal grandfather, first published in two volumes in 1978 and 1982, is considered the definitive work on this statesman. He has now written a condensed version, *Rajaji: A Life* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1997). His biography of Gandhiji, his paternal grandfather, *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Mahatma Gandhi* (1995) is thought provoking. Rajmohan Gandhi was involved in the Moral Re-armament Movement. He was chief editor of *Himmat*, a Bombay weekly, from 1964 to 1981, and later moved to Madras as resident editor of *The Indian Express*. In the last decade, he has started taking an interest in national politics. His study of Hindu-Muslim relations is perhaps his greatest contribution to modern thought. His latest book *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History* (Viking Penguin India, New Delhi, 1999) studies this topic in the context of this whole region. Realizing the general Indian ignorance about Muslims, he wrote biographies of eight Muslim leaders: *Understanding the Muslim Mind* (first published in 1986 under the title *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter*). Rajmohan Gandhi presents historical facts in a clear and readable manner. He attempts to present both sides of a question.

Many leading novelists have written travelogues. R.K. Narayan's *The Emerald Route* (1977) takes us all over Karnataka, while his *Dateless Diary* (1960) is about his visit to U.S.A. Many novelists of the new generation have written travelogues: Salman Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile* (1987) describes his visit to Nicaragua, while I. Allan Sealy's *From Yukon to Yucatan* (1994) describes his journey along the west coast of North America. You will read travelogues by Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh in unit 6 of this block.

The personal essay is a very popular prose form, and Indians have not lagged behind in practising it. These light essays are generally published in newspapers or journals. But there are many collections of lasting literary merit. R.K. Narayan's essays reveal his keen observation of life in India. His gentle irony makes them very entertaining reading. Many collections of his essays have appeared, such as *Next Sunday* (1956) and *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988*. The chief virtues of Narayan's prose, whether he is writing autobiography, essays or translations, are simplicity, precision, clarity and readability. He uses the minimum of words to achieve his purpose, and his vocabulary has a modest range. He is a master of the light essay, and can create memorable characters with just a few words. V.V. John has written in a witty manner of modern India, especially the educational scene, in his collections of essays like *Light Luggage* (1969), and *The Great Classroom Hoax* (1978). Jug Suraiya, the newspaper columnist, has published collections of light essays, like *A Taste for the Jugular* (1994) and *The Great Indian Bores* (1996).

From the beginning, Indians have used English for functional purposes -- trade and commerce or politics and social reform. For almost two centuries, we have used it as a medium for scholarly works in various fields like science and technology, history, economics, religion, philosophy and literary history and criticism. As students of literature, we are more interested in the creative use of non-fiction prose in forms like autobiography, biography, travelogue and the personal essay.

1.3 FORMS AND VARIETIES OF PROSE

The French poet Paul Valéry compared prose to walking and verse to dancing. Verse is the more stylized form, while prose is functional, and used for non-literary purposes also. But this does not mean that prose is a lower form; prose can employ all the rhetoric techniques (like simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, understatement, irony etc) that verse uses. Prose, too, can be rhythmic, though rhythm in prose is different from the music of poetry. Literary genres can use either prose or verse. Traditionally, the epic has always been in verse, but the qualities of an epic can be found in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, written in prose. The novel is usually written in prose, but the great Russian poet Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* is a novel written in verse. Inspired by Pushkin, Vikram Seth has written a novel in the form of sonnets: *The Golden Gate*. Drama can be either in verse or prose. Greek drama, and Elizabethan drama which followed that tradition, was in verse. Shakespeare's tragedies are great poetic dramas, but he has many prose passages in his comedies, which are interspersed with songs. Modern English drama is in prose: T.S.Eliot is the only playwright to successfully attempt poetic drama. Poetry confers a certain heightening, prose is derived from the Latin word meaning "direct, straightforward".

There are different literary forms of prose. The short story and the novel, the fictional forms of prose, do not concern us in this block. We shall devote our attention to the main non-fictional forms: the essay, biography and autobiography, and the travelogue.

"Essay" is derived from the French word meaning "attempt". An essay is a prose composition of moderate length devoted to some particular topic. Essays are of two types: formal essays and personal essays. Formal essays, written by scholars in any field with the sole purpose of conveying ideas, are also referred to as articles. (Journals like *Critical Quarterly* or the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* publish articles of literary criticism.) A formal essay discusses the topic concerned in an objective and impersonal manner. Its primary purpose is to impart knowledge. The personal essay, written in a light style, seeks to entertain the reader. The style of the essay is often conversational; it can be anecdotal, and generally reveals the personality of the author. In English literature, *The Essays of Elia*, written by Charles Lamb, are famous specimens of the personal essay.

A biography is the story of the life of an individual. Unlike history, which concentrates on facts and figures, a biography tries to project the personality of the subject, helping the reader to share that person's hopes and fears. In an autobiography, the author is his own biographer, so it tends to be more subjective. Events are seen through the consciousness of the protagonist; of course, the passage of time may give much objectivity to the recollection. Another big difference between a biography and an autobiography is that an autobiography is more selective in the incidents it describes. A biography can cover the whole life of the subject from birth to death, and even discuss his reputation after his death. An autobiography is necessarily incomplete, but it has the great advantage of presenting events at first hand. The writer can describe what he has experienced personally.

A travelogue is an account of the writer's travels. In this autobiographical account, the focus is on the places and people he has met in his travels, not on events in the author's own life, or his personality. English literature has a strong tradition of travelogues. Addison (1672-1719), the father of the periodical essay, wrote a travelogue, so did the early English novelist Tobias Smollett (1721-1771). Indian English literature too has many travelogues, starting with Dean Mohamet's *The Travels of Dean Mohamet through Several Parts of India* (1794).

We have been talking about the forms of non-fiction prose. Let us now examine the different varieties of prose employed by writers, whether in fiction or non-fiction. There are three main varieties: descriptive, narrative and expository prose. These are not exclusive categories -- a writer may use two or all three types in the same passage. Descriptive prose can be used to describe a person, a thing, or a place. A good description vividly recreates the object or event in such a way that we feel that we ourselves have seen, heard and experienced it. Some descriptions can be impressionistic, that is, they present things from a particular, very personal point of view; an impressionist description reveals not just the object, but the sensibility of the person who is observing it. On the other hand, we can have descriptions, especially of places, which have a kind of photographic realism. When we read the passage, we feel that we are looking at photographs or videotapes of the place.

Narrative prose describes events; a narrative deals with what happens over the course of time. It is the action which absorbs our attention. Narration can be slow or fast. It can be exciting, colourful and heightened, or matter-of-fact and factual. It can be highly imaginative, or purely objective. A narrative can deal with external happenings -- public events or interpersonal relationships. The writer can also narrate internal events, the changing feelings and emotions. Non-fiction prose forms like biographies, autobiographies and travelogues deal with factual narratives, while novels and short stories deal with events born of the writer's imagination. Of course, there can be no rigid rule; good historical novels incorporate a lot of historical facts into the narrative, while autobiographies can be so imaginative that the facts are not important. We also have a kind of fiction based on actual events; such a novel is called a "faction" (fact+fiction) or "non-fiction novel". Truman Capote's novel, *In Cold Blood* (1966), deals with crime and punishment in Kansas, based on interviews with the accused. Norman Mailer used the term "true life novel" for his work *The Executioner's Song* (1979), because it chronicles the life and death of Gary Gilmore, a murderer who demanded his own execution in Utah. Novels and short stories give more scope for the writer to employ different narrative voices, but narrative prose has an important place in non-fiction too.

Expository prose defines or explains a subject. Scholarly writing on science, technology, philosophy, religion, political science, economics etc falls under the category of expository prose. It presents details concretely and clearly in a logical sequence. The aim of the writer is not to describe something or narrate a story, but to present facts and ideas. Good writers use many devices to present their subject effectively: these include the use of examples to illustrate their point, varying their tone from one of public rhetoric to one of personal conversation, narrating interesting anecdotes, presenting analogies in support of their argument, and use of figures of speech like simile, metaphor and personification. Much of non-fiction prose is explicatory in nature, but this does not mean that expository prose has no place in fiction. Many great novels, such as Tolstoy's, present the writer's views on life and society.

Whether it is fictional or non-fictional, prose should be read as closely as verse. In analysing prose, we should examine the diction of the writer -- the words he uses, the range of his vocabulary. The syntax and structure of the sentences deserve attention. Are they short or long? Does he use simple sentences, or does he prefer complex sentences with many clauses and qualifying parenthetical comments? The Victorians had perfected the periodic sentence: long, elaborate sentences with many balanced

clauses. We should also examine rhythm, how the sentences flow. The structure of paragraphs, and the writer's use of punctuation, also reveal his style. But it is not possible to analyse the style in isolation from the meaning. The literary meaning of anything depends on how it is said, a simple paraphrase of what is said does not constitute the full meaning of the text under analysis.

The units which follow are devoted to leading prose writers. Units 2 and 3 contain expository prose. But the writers make good use of description and narration to explicate their subject. The next two units are devoted to the most famous Indian English autobiographies: Nehru's and Chaudhuri's. In the last unit, we shall read two recent travelogues.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

Even though the beginnings of Indian English writing is not fully documented, in this unit we have traced the earliest accounts of non-fictional prose and surveyed the field by referring to various authorities on the subject and the currently writing authors. We have also acquainted you with the form and varieties of prose. Finally, though in terms of form, prose is considered the simplest, we have tried to tell you that it does have the same literary merit as a poem, a drama or a novel.

1.5 SUGGESTED READING

This reading list is in two parts. Part I lists some important books of non-fiction. It is by no means a comprehensive list, and does not include the books which have been prescribed in the syllabus. Part II contains some books of criticism. More will be found in the reading list in each unit of this block.

Part 1: Non-fiction

Gandhi, Rajmohan. *Understanding the Muslim Mind*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1987.

Gopal, S. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Mahomet, Dean. *The Travels of Dean Mahomet*, (1794) in Michael H. Fisher's *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed ((1759-1951) in India, Ireland, and England*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Mehta, Ved. *The Stolen Light* London: Collins, 1989.

Narayan, R.K. *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1988.

Sahgal, Nayantara. *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. (1954) Delhi: HarperCollins India, 1996.

Suraiya, Jug. *The Great Indian Bores*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors, 1996.

Part 2: Criticism

Iyengar, K.R.Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. (1962). Revised edition, New Delhi: Sterling, 1995.

M.K, Naik. *A History of Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982.

----- *Studies in Indian English Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1987.

M.K, Naik. Ed. *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English*. New Delhi: Abhinav, 1982.

C.D, Narasimhaiah. *The Swan and the Eagle*. (1968). Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.

UNIT 2 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, SRI AUROBINDO, AND ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Swami Vivekananda: An Introduction
 - 2.2.1 Introduction to Addresses at the Parliament of Religions 1893
 - 2.2.2 Response to Welcome
 - 2.2.3 Why We Disagree
 - 2.2.4 Paper on Hinduism
 - 2.2.5 Religion not the Crying Need of India
 - 2.2.6 Buddhism, the Fulfillment of Hinduism
 - 2.2.7 Address at the Final Session
- 2.3 Sri Aurobindo: An Introduction
 - 2.3.1 Is India Civilized?
- 2.4 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy: An Introduction
 - 2.4.1 The Dance of Shiva
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 Questions
- 2.8 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is devoted to three great Indian thinkers and masters of English prose. In this Unit we shall attempt to understand the life and work of each of them by looking in detail at the selected short excerpts from their prose writings.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

We need to be aware, at the very outset, that this is perforce a somewhat limited and hazardous task. It is limited in the sense that we will only be able to touch the surface of the vast ocean of their prolific writings, only have a peep or glimpse into their fascinating worlds. Each of these men wrote a huge quantity of prose; each of them, moreover, led exemplary and distinguished lives, which impacted considerably on the entire flow and direction of our cultural formation during a crucial time of our national awakening. That is, all three of these figures were active at approximately the same time, from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Of the three, Swami Vivekananda was not only the eldest, but also the first to die. His brief life of less than forty years, however, left a blazing trail which the two other men, in their own ways, both followed and furthered.

What is more, we'll also need to be aware that all three of these writers, though each is different and unique, shared a common outlook not just on India, but also on life. This outlook may be termed "national idealism," for the sake of convenience. What does "national idealism" mean? It means, simply speaking, two things. First, an attitude of reverence and respect for the nation that is India. This attitude was, by no means, uncommon to that period. As you know, India was emerging from centuries of subjugation in a new self-assertion. On the one hand, the struggle was to free

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M.K. Naik. Ed. *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English*. New Delhi: Abhinav, 1982.

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**Non-Fictional
Prose: A Survey**

UNIT 2 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, SRI AUROBINDO, AND ANANDA COOMARASWAMY

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India from British imperial rule. But, on the other hand, in order to accomplish this, Indians, with their huge diversities and differences, had to be welded into a modern nation. Cultural cohesion, therefore, was very important to the larger enterprise of nation building. But cultural cohesion couldn't simply be "invented" out of nowhere. What the so-called renaissance of India in the 19th century accomplished was a rediscovery of India's ancient past, of its traditions and philosophies. It was this awareness of a shared culture and civilization that stretched back to over five thousand years that became the basis for making of the new Indian nation. This nation was, at once, an attempt to evoke India's past, but at the same time construct a state that was modern, democratic, and equitable. This was a great task to which many people contributed in their own way.

Swami Vivekananda,
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Ananda
Coomaraswamy

All three of the writers that we shall study in this unit contributed to this great task.

So, national idealism means, first of all, the attempt to reawaken the nation, to idealize it, to treat it as sacred and special. But idealism also means a certain attitude to the world. It means that the ideal, the spiritual is considered more important than the material, the mundane. Idealists, like Plato, are people who believe that all that we see around us is made up of mind-stuff, of ideas, or thought, or spirit. All three of these writers were idealists in that they believed that the whole cosmos is pervaded by one Spirit. They saw the harmony and interconnectedness of all life. The whole universe was a unity, though it expressed itself in diverse ways. They derived this basic philosophical outlook largely out of the ancient wisdom traditions of India.

2.2 SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: AN INTRODUCTION



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Swami Vivekananda is one of the great heroes of modern India. There is scarcely an Indian who has not heard of him or doesn't not admire him. What is the source of this fame and admiration? After all, the Swami only had a brief life, from 1863 to 1902. What did he accomplish that make him a household figure in India even a hundred years after his death?

To understand this, we shall have to look briefly at his life. Born and raised in an upper class Kayastha family in Calcutta, Narendranath Dutta, as he was then known, was a brilliant student. He had a modern, "English" education first at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution and then at the famous Presidency

College and the Scottish Church College. In these institutions, he trained to be a modern, Westernized, privileged Bengali gentleman. He read Kant, Schopenhauer, Spenser, Comte, and Mill, then the intellectual giants of Europe. We might say that he was a positivist, that is someone who only believed in positive knowledge—that which could be verified by the senses and tested for its accuracy. He was not prepared to accept things on authority, faith, or superstition.

Young men like Narendranath were then known to be rather critical of Indian traditions, which they considered to be irrational and inferior to modern, Western learning. There was a ferment brewing in Indian society in those days. The missionaries were attacking Hinduism and Islam in order to get converts while the colonial administration wished to undermine India's ancient civilization so as to rule more easily and effectively. The introduction of English education in India was, as we have seen elsewhere, a part of this strategy. The products of this drive for mastery were the young men of Bengal who scorned things Indian and wished to become like their rulers. No wonder, Narendranath had all the makings of such a modern, Westernized Indian.

However, his life changed quite suddenly and dramatically after he met Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886). The latter was an astonishing spiritual phenomenon, one of the most important of India's modern saints. To all appearances, an illiterate village priest, now officiating at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna was actually a storehouse of learning, piety, and dynamism. He learned the best of the spiritual traditions of India from a variety of teachers, but what is equally important, also interacted with many of the modern leaders of his time. Sri Ramakrishna propounded a new spirituality based on the equality and acceptance of all religions and paths. He offered a new interpretation of Kali, the Divine Mother, as the dynamic aspect of Brahman, the Absolute and Ultimate Reality. But, perhaps, Sri Ramakrishna's greatest achievement was that he gathered around him and trained a band of young men who were destined to change the future of India. Of these, Narendranath was the leader.

After his guru's death, Swami Vivekananda founded an order of monks to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and also to reawaken the sleeping conscience of India. To this end, he travelled all over India, and eventually left for the US in 1893. The excerpts from his writings that we shall study are from the speeches that he gave at this Parliament of Religions. After the Parliament, Swamiji lectured extensively in the US and in Britain. By the time he returned to India in 1897, he was already a hero and a celebrity. He had taken Indian spirituality, thought, and culture to the West and thereby restored, to a large extent, the national pride of India. Within a year of his return, he laid the foundations of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Math at Belur, outside Calcutta. Today, the Belur Math is the international headquarters of a world-wide movement.

Swami Vivekananda's years on this earth may have been few, but they were packed and eventful. He inspired millions of Indians with a new sense of self-respect and self-esteem. He helped to lay the foundations of a new India that would not only be an independent nation, but a world leader. He saw India as a vast storehouse and reservoir of spirituality. It was by this force that India would rise and make her contribution to the rest of the world. It was this message of Swamiji's, in his writings and speeches, the power and majesty of his personality, and the work he did in establishing the Ramakrishna Mission that he is seen as a contributor to the building of modern India.

2.2.1 Introduction to Addresses at the Parliament of Religions, 1893

The Parliament of Religions, 1893, was perhaps the largest inter-religious gathering the world had witnessed. As such, it was certainly a sign of an emerging, global

community of religious people. Sri Ramakrishna's message of inter-religious harmony, in that sense, had already anticipated such a movement on a world scale.

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Ananda
Coomaraswamy

During his wanderings in India, Swamiji had heard about this event and had resolved to make his appearance there, not only on behalf of his master's teachings, but, in a larger sense, on India's behalf. But he had no money; he was but a wandering monk. His disciple from Tamil Nadu, Alasinga Perumal, actually begged from door to door to raise some money for the trip. Later, the Maharaja of Khetri gave him a first class ticket and a purse. The Raja of Ramnad and the Maharaja of Mysore also helped. In a vision, Swamiji saw his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, encouraging him to go; Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother (Sri Ramakrishna's wife) also blessed him amply. Swamiji felt convinced that this trip to the West would show him the way to alleviate the miseries of his countrymen and women.

Swamiji set sail on the 31st of May 1893. His ship took him through the far East--Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Kobe, and Yokohama--before reaching Vancouver in British Columbia, Canada. Though it was summer, he found the weather very cold. He reached Chicago by train after three days. He saw the World Fair that was taking place there and was quite bewildered by the affluence and splendor, not to speak of the technological development of the U.S.A. The Parliament was to begin in September; there were many months to go. Swamiji knew no one and was low on funds. Worse, he wasn't even an official delegate. The whole story of how he finally got invited to the Parliament reads like an incredible fable, full of miracles and unexpected connections. We don't have time to tell that story here, but you may read it in Swamiji's biography.

Swamiji gave six speeches during the Parliament. It is said that he was reluctant to speak when his turn came. He kept postponing it until he couldn't but take the floor. The first words that he uttered, "Sisters and Brothers of America," drew a long and thunderous standing ovation. Another miracle, perhaps!

From 11th to 26th September 1893, Swami Vivekananda made six addresses at the Parliament of Religions. We shall read and study all these here. In all these talks, I want you to notice not just common ideas, but similar modes of expression. How does Swamiji address his audience? What kind of language does he use? Is it a simple, everyday language, or is it very complicated and abstruse? Is it a technical language or is it familiar language? Are the sentences long or do they tend to be short? What sort of words does Swamiji use? I ask these questions to you so that you are aware of these talks as examples of rhetoric and communicative skills, that is language in active use, not just as a set of texts to read. Notice also how contemporary Swamiji's address is—doesn't it speak to our own times and our own present problems?

2.2.2 *Response to Welcome*

This is very brief speech, given in response to the words of welcome that Swamiji received as a delegate from India, representing the Hindu religion. It was at the start of this address that, as I already mentioned to you, he received a standing ovation for his opening words.

It is important that Swamiji accepts the welcome not on his own behalf, but on behalf his order of monks, of the Hindu religion, and of the millions of people of India. It is clear that Swamiji stood before the Parliament not in his private capacity but as a representative of the spiritual genius of Indian civilization.

Why does Swamiji call his order of monks the most ancient in the world? We know that it was he himself who founded this order not long after Sri Ramakrishna's death. We mustn't forget, though, that Sri Ramakrishna himself had received sannayasa diksha or had been initiated into monkhood by his guru, Totapuri, who belonged to

one of the ten prominent order of monks in India. These ten orders had been systematised by Sankaracharya in the 9th century, but the tradition of sannyasa or renunciation was much, much older in India. The Buddha instituted the sangha or the sacred community of monks and seekers in the 5th century B.C. It is believed that even before the Buddha there were holy men and women in India who wandered place to place. Clearly, Swamiji sees himself aligned to this ancient tradition of renunciates, which was much older than the Christian monastic traditions.

Similarly, Swamiji calls Hinduism the mother of all religions. This may not be true literally in that there were several religions which originated outside the sphere of influence of Hinduism or India. I suppose what Swamiji means is not conventional Hinduism or even the various religions of India but Sanatana Dharma in its purest conception. Sanatana Dharma is so called because it is eternal, with no origin and end, no beginning and no termination, no inauguration and no closure. The Sanatan tradition, in this sense of the word, includes all the religions of the world, wherever they may have been revealed or wherever they may flourish.

Swamiji also thanks the organizers in the name of those millions of people of India, whose simple and pure faith sustains an ancient civilization. Though these people may be divided into many classes and sects, there is perhaps a unity and commonality in them, which Swamiji will talk of later.

Swamiji next emphasizes the tolerance and inclusiveness of India, which has already been pointed out as its unique characteristic. In this respect, India stands in stark contrast to other nations. In the latter, those who did not accept the dominant religion were often called heretics and killed, exiled, or persecuted. Swamiji clearly shows that India, quite an exception to this world wide trend, actually welcomed not only the Jews and the Parsees, it always stood for freedom of faith and belief.

India's strength, thus, lies in its view that all the different paths lead to the same goal, the Supreme Lord, called by whatever name by His worshippers. Swamiji quotes from the Bhagawat Geeta and from another unnamed source to strengthen his argument.

But, what is perhaps the most important of Swamiji's points is his extremely clear statement against dogmatism, intolerance, and bigotry. He advocates the "death-knell of all fanaticism" so that there is an end to persecutions of both "the sword" and "the pen." Unfortunately, fanaticism is still very much with us, as a threat not only to world peace but to freedom of speech and expression. Swamiji was well-aware of the futility of all such fanaticism as it had spilled the blood of countless innocents down the ages. The 20th century, at the edge of which he stood, was the bloodiest and cruellest in all human history. Swamiji spoke like a prophet warning against the dangers of fanaticism, but unfortunately few people paid heed to him.

All in all, this brief speech strikes the keynote of Swamiji's central ideas, not only at the Parliament of Religions, but in his other works as well.

2.2.3 *Why We Disagree*

In this speech, Swamiji uses the mode of the parable to illustrate his point about the futility of narrow-mindedness. His master, Sri Ramakrishna, we ought to remember, was a master of the parable. His words are full of stories and anecdotes. Why do you think great teachers such as Christ, the Buddha, and Sri Ramakrishna often resorted to stories? That's because a story is each to listen to and understand.

The story narrated here is not too complicated, is it? It deals with the frog in the well syndrome. Each frog believes that his well is the biggest. Swamiji doesn't exclude himself or the Hindu from this syndrome. We are all, according to him, guilty of it. We all think that we are the wisest and that our religion is the best. But like frogs in

the well, we might be deluded. This message is especially relevant to those religions which claim an exclusive and absolute claim to truth and salvation. These religions, or at least some sections of these religions, proclaim that theirs is the only true way and that everyone else will be damned or go to hell or perish or whatever. Swamiji wants to loosen the hold of such beliefs on his listener's minds. Hence the story.

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From Swamiji's remarks it is clear that religious harmony can be created not just by recognizing the unity and underlying similarity in all faiths, but also to understand and accept the difference in them.

2.2.4 *Paper on Hinduism*

This is clearly the longest and most detailed of all of Swamiji's talks. He came to the Parliament as a representative of the Hindu religion and therefore it is expected of him to speak on Hinduism. The main question for us is how does he define Hinduism?

It seems to me that, first of all, he points to its very ancient roots. He calls it a pre-historic religion, that is it goes back to times before recorded history as we know it. However, unlike Judaism and Zoroastrianism, both of which are also ancient religions, only Hinduism flourishes in all its pristine glory in the place of its origin and maturation.

Swamiji next stresses the Vedas and the ancient perennial wisdom embodied in the Vedanta as the key sources of Hinduism. But notice how he at once includes agnostic Buddhism and atheistic Jainism as a part of Hinduism. His definition of Hinduism is thus, once again, inclusive and broad. By Hinduism he therefore means not any restricted creed or set of dogmas, but the wide and inclusive movement of India's spiritual traditions.

Next, he tries to describe the essence of Vedic thought in modern scientific terms. According to Swamiji, it is only Hinduism whose worldview is not upturned or dislodged by the discoveries of modern science because Hinduism was also a science of the spirit not a collection of arbitrary beliefs or rituals.

Hinduism stresses the immortality of the soul, or atman, and declares that 'I am not my body but the everlasting, indestructable spirit'. This is the liberative gospel of Hinduism. From the Hindu point of view, there is no such thing as original sin; we are children of immortality, not of degradation.

Apart from the soul's immortality, Hinduism also stresses the law of Karma, of endless cause and effect. It is by this law that we can uplift ourselves, should we wish. Karma is not to be interpreted as destiny or blind fate, which binds us from life to life, but rather as the inheritance of certain traits or predilections, which we can shape anew in a certain direction in this life.

Swamiji never fails to explain these ideas in a rational manner, always using logic rather than authority to substantiate his points. For instance, he declares, "verification is the perfect proof of a theory," something no modern scientist would disagree with. He wishes to submit the assertions of religion to the same rigorous scrutiny as a scientist does a hypothesis. That is why he doesn't hesitate to ask a fundamental question: if our true nature is indeed perfect, why do we falsely identify ourselves with that which is imperfect? Why does God himself become the world? To this he humbly answers, "I don't know." Yet, the fact remains that the world does seem to exist and we continue to believe that we are our bodies.

According to Vivekananda, Hinduism is not a religion of hopelessness or despair, but a liberative and self-perfecting way that encourages the soul to evolve. He defines God as Almighty, formless one, who is also all-merciful. God is best

worshipped through bhakti, or selfless love. Through Divine grace, when a soul is vouchsafed the knowledge of its true identity, it becomes free and enjoys unrestricted bliss and peace. Thus the Hindu dharma is not about believing in certain dogmas or rituals but in realizing oneself and one's inner perfection. Self-realization, Swamiji explains, does not consist in a loss of individuality, but the gaining of universal individuality.

Hinduism is not a system of polytheism or henotheism (the latter implies a belief in both one God and many gods), neither is it a worship of idols, of stones and stocks. The idol is merely a symbol, because the Hindu believes both in God with form and God without form. In those days, Hinduism was attacked for its idolatry and the Brāhmo Samaj, a reform sect, even went to the extent of banning idol worship. Vivekananda therefore defends Hinduism from this charge. In the Abrahamic tradition, whether in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, idolatry is seen not only as an error, but as a great sin. Idolators are seen as evil, degenerate, and worthy of punishment. Swamiji, therefore, takes pains to clarify that the average idol-worshipping Hindu is neither a sinner nor an evil person. He or she is perfectly harmless and well-intentioned. Swamiji cautions Christians against bigotry, pointing to elements of superstition and idolatry in their faith. What he asks for is mutual tolerance in religious matters and mutual respect, not condemnation and hatred. Swamiji uses the argument that human beings start at a lower stage of evolution but move higher and higher; if this is true, the higher need not condemn the lower. The beauty of Hinduism is that it does not believe that we travel from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from the lower truth to the higher truth. In that sense, the absolute and the relative are not contradictory and opposed, but the absolute can only be realized through the relative.

Hinduism, ultimately, aspires to universal religious harmony. According to Swamiji, it is the only faith which does not say that the Hindu alone will be saved.

Vivekananda ends his speech with an appeal to all the assembled people to move to a new era of inter-religious harmony and tolerance. He believes that it is America's destiny to achieve it. In his enthusiasm for that country, he forgets American history of violence and imperialism, not only against native Americans but against its neighbours such as Mexico, and hails it as the new hope of the world.

Throughout his speech, Swamiji has sought to be sensible and eloquent, trying to portray Hinduism in a modern, rationalistic light. In doing so, he lays the foundations of Hinduism's self-fashioning, offering strategies and techniques that will later be followed by a variety of thinkers including Sri Aurobindo and Gandhiji.

2.2.5 Religion Not the Crying Need of India

In this brief speech, Swami Vivekananda says that bread, not religion is the crying need of India. He exhorts Christian missionaries not to try to convert the poor and wretched people of India but to do famine relief work instead. India under British rule experienced hundreds of famines in which millions of people died. Vivekananda declares in unequivocal terms that "It is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics." He also stresses that according to Indian traditions knowledge is free, that is it cannot be bought and sold.

Here we can see Swamiji's great concern for the state of India—how his heart bleeds for the poor and underprivileged. Swamiji's great social mission is being unveiled where he clearly states his goal of seeking help from the West for India's poor. And yet he confesses how difficult it is for a Hindu to get money out of the Christian in a Christian country, especially if the beneficiary is to be a heathen!

When we read this speech of Swamiji's we must remember that it belongs to a long tradition of such writings, starting with Raja Rammohun Roy. Later, even Gandhiji

would criticise the missionaries for trying to convert the poor and the helpless. These controversies have still not ended, as you know. The argument against the missionaries is based on their double standards—how for instance they constantly criticise others but cannot take any criticism themselves, how they claim to save souls but have an extremely low opinion of other faiths; how they offer material inducements to encourage conversion while all the while claiming that they are interested in the spiritual well-being of those they work with. Swamiji here questions this attitude of superiority. It must be granted, however, that missionaries have also worked to alleviate starvation, though usually with an ulterior motive—hence the term “rice Christians”—that is, those who converted for the sake of rice.

Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Ananda
Coomaraswamy

Issues such as conversion are no doubt controversial, but we need not shy away from controversy always. The aim is to discuss or examine these issues and form our own views on them.

2.2.6 *Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism*

Swamiji here makes certain arguments and claims that most Buddhists may find it hard to agree with. For instance, he says that there are no Buddhists left in India. Even at the time Swamiji gave this lecture, there were a large number of Tibetan Buddhists in Ladakh, Leh, Himachal Pradesh, and the North Eastern parts of India. Buddhism itself had undergone a reinvention in the 8th to the 10th centuries, absorbing a good deal of Hindu thought, ritual, and spirituality.

Yet, Swamiji is undoubtedly right in claiming that the Buddha did not ever claim to start a new religion or faith. Also that Hindus do not regard Buddhism as a rival or antagonist faith, but a part of the Sanatana traditions. That is why most Hindus accept Buddha as an incarnation. Swamiji is also right in pointing out that many of the Buddha's leading disciples were Brahmins and as such there was no antagonism between the two. But Buddhism, as it developed, did deny the notion of God, something that most people in India could not live without. This is what Swamiji says, but there is also the view that true cause of the decline of Buddhism in India is not merely doctrinal; it has to do with the destruction of monasteries, trade routes, and centres of Buddhist learning during the centuries of Muslim rule. Vivekananda does not mention this theory here. At any rate, what is more important in this speech is Swamiji's attempt not just to reconcile Buddhism and Hinduism but to plead for their reunification. The Brahmin mind and the Buddhist heart of compassion is what he calls for here, as he does the Hindu mind and the Muslim body elsewhere. We see Swamiji as staunchly in favour of unity here. His desire is to strengthen and rejuvenate the faith of the masses. He did not anticipate, for instance, that lakhs of untouchables would embrace Buddhism at the call of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. Today, Buddhism is experiencing a revival in India, thanks to the presence of the Dalai Lama. Luckily, the relations between the two are very cordial.

What Swamiji's speech represents, then, is a sort of Hindu view of Buddhism. Hindus do not regard Buddhism as an alien or exclusive creed or even as something apart from the broader tradition of Sanatana Dharma. Buddhism, in other words, belongs as much to India as it does to Burma, Tibet, China, Thailand, Cambodia, or Sri Lanka.

2.2.7 *Address at the Final Session*

What is striking, once again, is Swamiji's fervent plea for religious harmony. Once again, he says that the way ahead is not through the domination of one faith over the others, but of the acceptance of and respect for the various faiths of the world. The Hindu need not become a Christian or vice versa, but both can continue to live in harmony. The great achievement of the Parliament of Religions, according to Vivekananda, is that it proves beyond a doubt that “purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church.” That is why Swamiji pities those who believe

that only their own religion should survive while all others should be destroyed. He pleads for help, assimilation, harmony, and peace, as against fighting, destruction, and dissension among the various religions of the world.

More than a hundred years later, Swamiji's words continue to be relevant. The recent destruction not just of the Babari Masjid but of the Bamiyan Buddhas point to a continued need to stress tolerance and harmony between faiths. A lot of violence and hatred continues to spread in the name of religion. In our own country, there are riots and bloodshed in the name of religion. All this is as true as it is deplorable. Reading Swami Vivekananda helps to put the matter in perspective. We see that this fight against intolerance and fanaticism is a very old one and that great leaders of this land have always stood against them. Vivekananda's construction of Hinduism, as we have seen, is not based against any other religion or group, but wishes to assimilate and learn from other faiths. Modern Hinduism, thus, owes a lot to this cyclonic monk who was not yet thirty when he made these speeches in distant Chicago, more than a hundred years ago.

2.3 SRI AUROBINDO: AN INTRODUCTION



Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)

Sri Aurobindo ranks among the greatest personalities of modern India. A multi-faceted genius, he was a politician, social critic, educationist, philosopher, man of letters, and, above all, a great yogi, a rishi, and guru. As a literary artist, his range is truly staggering. He was a journalist, editor, literary critic, linguist, translator, essayist, short-story writer, dramatist, and, more than all of these, *mahakavi*, or major poet. He had an extraordinarily supple intellect, a breadth of mind so extensive that there is scarcely an important field of human endeavor which escaped his notice. His collected works, numbering thirty volumes, bear ample testimony to his stupendous gifts. He was truly a Renaissance Man, not only in the traditional sense of the term, but also befitting its application to the Indian context—a man who stands with the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

Sri Aurobindo's life may be conveniently divided into four periods based on the major location of residence: namely, England, Baroda, Calcutta, and Pondicherry. He was born on August 15, 1872 into a Westernized upper-middle class Bengali family, the son of Krishnadhan and Swarnalata Ghose. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken to England to be educated there with his brothers. He lived first in Manchester, then in London, where he attended St. Paul's school from 1884-1890, and finally in Cambridge, where he held a senior Classics fellowship at King's College. A brilliant student, he was especially proficient in the Greek and Latin, securing a first division in the Classical Tripos. He also passed with distinction the written entrance exam to the prestigious Indian Civil Service, but did not enter the service because he repeatedly failed to appear for the riding test. Clearly, his heart was not set on serving the British Government in India. Instead, he obtained an appointment with the Maharaja of Baroda and set sail to return to India in January 1893. That marked the end of one phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. When he returned to India he hardly knew any Indian language, though he was proficient in Greek and Latin, acquainted with French, and, of course, expert in English, having already written a volume of poetry in it.

The Baroda period lasts for thirteen years, upto 1906. This is generally considered a phase of preparation and growth for his later work. Sri Aurobindo held various posts in the Baroda Service including Professor of English and Vice-Principal of Baroda College. Here he tried to regain contact with his Indian heritage through a program of rigorous scholarship. He studied Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages including Bengali, his mother tongue, and gained a deep insight into Indian culture and civilization. The publication of some of his early poetry such as *Songs to Myrtilla* (1895) and *Urvasee* (c. 1896) occurred during this phase. Towards the end of this period, Sri Aurobindo began participating in two activities that would be crucial to his later life, namely politics and yoga. A particularly important year was 1901 in which he was married to Mrinalini Bose. During this year he also experienced his first definite spiritual realizations, which are reflected in some of his poems and reminiscences. These experiences culminated in transforming realization in Baroda in 1908 under the guidance of a yogi called Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Later that year he was arrested and detained for his anti-government articles in "New Lamps for Old," a column he wrote for the magazine, *Indu Prakash*.

In 1906 Sri Aurobindo left Baroda to join the newly formed National College in Calcutta, thus inaugurating his Calcutta phase. His political activities which had begun as early as 1902, when he met Lokmanya Tilak at the Ahmedabad session of Congress, continued most vigorously in Calcutta where in *Bande Mataram*, his influential periodical, he attacked British imperialism vehemently. In 1907 he was prosecuted for sedition, but acquitted. The next year, 1908, was in many ways, one of the most important in his life. That year, he was arrested and detained on suspicion of revolutionary activities. During these twelve months, he underwent further spiritual experiences, which prompted him to decide to withdraw from politics, at least temporarily. After a year in detention, he was acquitted following a stormy and celebrated trial, in which he was defended by the famous lawyer and politician Chittaranjan Das free of charge. In 1910 he retired to French Chandranagore, and on hearing that a third prosecution was to be launched against him, set sail for Pondicherry in South India.

Though, initially, he had not entirely given up political activity, he was never again to return to British India or to politics; he continued living in Pondicherry, until his death in 1950. During this period, he began the publication of *Arya*, a periodical in which the original versions of most of his famous works such as *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, etc., appeared. He also wrote poetry, criticism, drama, and translated extensively from Sanskrit and other Indian languages during these early years in Pondicherry.

For all these first ten years or so, Sri Aurobindo lived in a small rented house with only a few disciples. But in 1920, Mirra Richard, who had met him earlier, settled down in Pondicherry. She came to be known as the Mother afterwards, and took charge of Sri Aurobindo's household, gradually building the extensive and superbly organized Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which is internationally renowned today. For the next thirty years, Sri Aurobindo continued his literary and spiritual activities, living mostly in seclusion, but guiding his rapidly growing number of disciples through yearly darshans (public appearances), and an extensive correspondence. Sri Aurobindo died on December 5, 1950, three years after India achieved its independence in 1947--on August 15, his birthday.

2.3.1 *Is India Civilized?*

This essay by Sri Aurobindo was originally serialized in the quarterly *Arya* from December 1918 to February 1919. It was published in book form, along with other essays of related interest, under the title *Foundations of Indian Culture* in 1953 by the Sri Aurobindo Library, New York

The series of articles of which this is one was inspired by an attack on Indian civilization by a British critic, William Archer. William Archer and his attack are forgotten today, but Sri Aurobindo's response has become a classic. In fact, there had already been a response to Archer by the Indophile and Tantric scholar, Sir John Woodroffe. The title of the latter's book, *Is India Civilized?*, was meant to be a provocative, if rhetorical question. Sri Aurobindo uses the same title in the first series to underscore the importance of Woodroffe's argument, whose gist he recapitulates, here in the first section.

Sri Aurobindo begins by stating unequivocally how a culture or civilization may be evaluated: "A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements" (2) First of all, Sri Aurobindo clearly avows that happiness is indeed the goal of human life. Such an admission is important because it shows how life-affirming Sri Aurobindo is. He does not regard human life as intrinsically full of *dukkha* or suffering.

Next, it is important to realize that behind such a definition of what constitutes true happiness is a certain notion of what a human being is. In Sri Aurobindo's scheme of things, a human being possesses at least three levels of being--the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. And, what is more important, without a natural harmony between these three levels, we can never be really happy.

When Sri Aurobindo wrote this there were no internationally recognized yardsticks for evaluating the quality of human life as there are these days. Now we have recognized indices to measure such things, yet these never take into account the fact that we are spiritual beings too. The result is that in the most prosperous countries of the world, countries which score the highest on the quality of human life indices, there is still a high level of discontent. I am not only speaking of the discontent which comes from class and racial conflict or from poverty and unemployment, though such things are also found in these "advanced" societies. The fact is that the most privileged and affluent sections of these countries are also unhappy and discontented. How else can we account for the perennial fascination not only for drugs and alcohol in these countries, but for yoga, zen, and Eastern gurus?

As a corollary to Sri Aurobindo's statement, it follows that any country or society which caters only to the body or to the body and the mind, but leaves out the spirit cannot achieve true happiness. A culture, a society, a country should also make provisions to nourish the spirit of a human being otherwise neither the society nor the

individual can ever attain perfection. Such a society may attain very high levels of material prosperity, but it cannot attain or be conducive to true happiness. Our very nature is such that we cannot be truly happy until we have the opportunity to strive for perfection. So, we see that behind Sri Aurobindo's whole outlook is a basic premise about the nature of the human being itself. If you deny that a human being is essentially a spiritual creature, then you can also deny the rest of Sri Aurobindo's argument.

Next, Sri Aurobindo tries to sum up the distinctive features of the Indian civilization. He says: "India's central conception is that of the Eternal, the Spirit here incased in matter, involved and immanent in it and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till in mental man it enters the world of ideas and the realm of conscious morality, dharma" (2). These lines sum up not only Sri Aurobindo's notion of India, but his whole philosophy itself. He holds that matter is but the Spirit in its involved form. Striving to recover its true self, the Spirit struggles through matter and through life, until it reaches the mental plane in the human being. After this, evolution is not automatic, not merely subject to the natural process, but can be conscious. Dharma is nothing but a system that leads us on the path of spiritual progress. To Sri Aurobindo, the notion of progress in India is primarily spiritual. It is this that makes India special and distinct.

Now if we pause for a minute and ask how come people in India decided that the realization of the Spirit or of the Self was the most important thing to do, that that is the purpose of our birth? What made the Indians think this way? It seems to me that long ago, the best minds in India discovered that it was not very difficult to sustain life in this subcontinent. It was not very difficult to take care of all of one's bodily needs and necessities. They lived on fruits and roots; they bathed in the flowing streams; they lived in harmony with nature. Similarly, it was not very difficult to make a hut, a cottage, a hermitage. Nature provided enough. So they retired into the forest, devoted themselves to contemplating the eternal truths. Most of the time and energy could be devoted to self-realization, to *sadhana*. This does not mean that our ancient rishis and munis were isolated from society. Instead, they interacted with the kings and commoners, guiding both, helping to uphold Dharma. They held the remote control of our civilization in their hands, letting the kings and courtiers to handle the mundane, material aspects of life. While other cultures thought that it was more important to build cities, to subdue enemies, to increase one's comfort and power, Indians recognized that all these activities were not as important as self-realization. Without the latter, all human achievements were partial and transitory.

I believe that these ideals are still present in our culture. Everyone laments that we are becoming more and more materialistic, yet as a civilization we have yet to admit that that is the supreme goal of human life. You must have read in the papers how a couple of years ago, one of the richest diamond merchants in India, a young man, took *sannyas*. He distributed diamonds and pearls from atop a richly caparisoned elephant, which was taken out in procession through the streets of Ahmedabad. Now you may or may not approve of such ostentation, but the idea was that the life he was about to embrace was superior to all the wealth and riches that he had accumulated. Renunciation was superior to accumulation. This diamond merchant was a Jain, but all the religious traditions of this country, I think, share his outlook to the world, more or less. How else can you explain why Prince Siddharth left all the comforts of the palace to look for the ultimate Truth? All this means that in India we do not consider the satisfaction of bodily or mental needs to be the sole purpose or even the highest aim of life.

Now, Sri Aurobindo says that there are countries and cultures which are led by a different, even opposite conception of human life: "Since some centuries Europe has become material, predatory, aggressive, and has lost the harmony of the inner and outer man which is the true meaning of civilization and the efficient condition of a true progress" (4). Both Woodroffe and Sri Aurobindo admit that Europe was not

always thus, that in her medieval ages, she too was dominated by the religious ideal. Yet, as Sri Aurobindo clarifies, this idea was narrow and intolerant; it cramped the spirit of man. Moreover, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, Christianity itself was of Asiatic origin. Whatever be the origins of modern Europe, it now subscribes to a totally different civilizational ideal.

Those of us who are mesmerised by the West would do well to reflect on Sri Aurobindo's statement. That Europe has become material, predatory, and aggressive should be obvious to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of history. Since the 15th century, Europeans have overrun our earth, destroying entire civilizations, killing off populations, colonizing continents, subduing people, taking slaves, fighting wars, conquering territories, and so on. The entire history of humankind has never witnessed the scale and degree of violence that modern Europe unleashed on the rest of the world. What they did to Africa, to South America, to the native communities of North America, to India, South East Asia, to China, and so on, is well recorded. All along, Europe considered itself to be the most civilized part of the world, the leader, the carrier of enlightenment. How ironic! Does the essence of civilization lie in killing others, destroying their culture, enslaving them, grabbing their wealth, and ruling over the world?

However, the second part of Sri Aurobindo's statement is still perhaps difficult to accept for most of us. He says that the West has lost the harmony between the inner and the outer lives and thus what they have achieved cannot be considered to be true progress. Most of us are still dazzled and blinded by the achievements of the West. Naturally, we regard the West as our model; we must emulate them and try to have a similar society in India. We still regard progress as merely material progress: from such a standpoint the West is the most advanced society in the world. Yet, according to Sri Aurobindo, that is not true progress.

Sri Aurobindo believes that "Each nation is a Shakti or power of the evolving spirit in humanity and lives by the principle which it embodies" (3). If so, a clash and conflict between nations is inevitable. In fact, Sri Aurobindo defines the three stages of the interaction between nations. These are conflict and competition, concert, and sacrifice (5). At present, nations are in the first stage, that of competition and conflict. The second stage, that of cooperation, has hardly begun. People may talk of enlightened self-interest as the governing principle behind international diplomacy, but the word enlightened ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. What obtains more often is a brutal self-interest disguised behind high-sounding principles. As to the third stage, that will only happen after a nation has realized its Self. At present, only individuals have attained that high degree of realization which allows them to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the perfected *sannyasin*, the liberated man," may consider self-defence to be needless, but ordinarily, "To allow oneself to be killed, like the lamb attacked by the wolf, brings no growth, furthers no development, assures no spiritual unity" (5). Concert, unity, may come at a future time, but for the present, we must go through conflict and competition.

For Sri Aurobindo, there has been a perennial conflict for supremacy between Europe and Asia. In this conflict, either Asia will become Europeanized or Europe Asiaticised. William Archer's attack on India is a part of Europe's hegemonizing drive to subdue the rest of the world. Ever since England conquered India, it has endeavoured to subdue our civilization. First, was the attack on Hinduism by the missionaries. That was successfully fended off, not only by a Hindu revival, but by West to East movements like Theosophy. Now, the second wave of the attack is not religious, but rationalistic and materialistic. (There is actually a third wave which Sri Aurobindo doesn't mention. This is the attack on India by modern science and technology.) Asia is rising, but this empowerment is not fully self-conscious. It is a Europeanised Asia that is rising, an Asia which has turned its back on the Asiatic ideal.

Sri Aurobindo admits that "Spirituality is not monopoly of India," but elsewhere it lies submerged beneath veils of intellectualism. What makes India special is "spirituality made the leading motive and the determining power of both the inner and the outer life" which is quite different from "spirituality suppressed, allowed only under disguises or brought in as a minor power, its reign denied or put off in favour of the intellect or of a dominant materialistic vitalism" (10). In other words, many other nations of Asia, from Turkey to Japan, have "grown rationalistic and materialistic"; "India alone is still obstinately recalcitrant" (11). So, in this conflict between India and Europe, "Will the spiritual motive which India represents prevail on Europe and create there new forms congenial to the West, or will European rationalism put an end for ever to the Indian type of culture?" (11)--this for Sri Aurobindo is the crucial question, the question at the heart of the essay.

There are several people who have told me how uncomfortable they feel with this framework of confrontation. There are three chief ways in which their discomfort is articulated. On the one hand, they claim that both Sri Aurobindo in particular and Indian spiritual view in general are universal. There is no distinction between countries and cultures. So, why am I harping on this conflict between India and the West?

The second kind of objection comes from those who are quite comfortable with the level of synthesis that they seem to have achieved between their Indian heritage and the modern world. They have made the required adjustments and believe that we can have the best of both worlds. What is the need to confront the West or to confront ourselves? Why not go on living in this convenient synthesis?

The third kind of objection comes from those who consider Sri Aurobindo to be both outdated and essentialistic. They believe that such generalizations about cultures and civilizations are arrogant and unjustified. Each individual is different and that it is pointless to attribute any special characteristics to nations, peoples, or communities.

I shall respond only briefly to these interjections. Let me put my case rhetorically: why does it matter if Indian civilization is destroyed? So many civilizations have been destroyed in the past. Why not let this one be destroyed too? Actually, that is what these objections really imply, but they don't say so clearly. If that is what we believe, then that is what will happen. It will happen by default, if not by deliberation. So many of us are already devoting our energies to destroying our culture, our civilization, so what's new about it? There is a Latin American proverb which comes to mind: when the axe came to cut the trees, the some trees said that the handle is one of us. Similarly, there are several of us who are actively assisting in the destruction of Indian civilization. Contrarily, there are several Westerners who have devoted their lives to its preservation.

The question is not that of us versus them, but about two competing and conflicting value systems. To those of us who love India and what she stands for, the question of protecting Indian civilization or of fending off the West does not even arise. There is no choice here; we must live or die according to our beliefs. If we believe that the highest goal of human life is self-realization, then it is natural for us to strive for it. We don't need any special inducements or incentives to work for this ideal. To me, every Indian has the potential to be spiritual seeker, a *sadhak* or *sadhika*, whether we realize it or not. It is believed that this is a *punya bhoomi*, a holy land, where every inch of soil has been irradiated by the tapas of our seers and mahatmas. It is in our very blood to walk this path; it is natural for us. For Sri Aurobindo, ultimately, it does not matter if we are defeated or if we triumph. What is important is to uphold the life that we believe in.

Sri Aurobindo urges us not to indulge in a vigorous self-defence as Woodroffe had advocated: "But defence by itself in the modern struggle can only end in defeat, and if battle there must be, the only sound strategy is a vigorous and aggression based on a strong, living and mobile defence" (8). Here Sri Aurobindo, like Mahatma Gandhi, does not advocate a weak-kneed, apologetic response to the West. He is saying that if our ideal is worth preserving, we must be bold and take the battle into the enemy's camp. This is precisely what Swami Vivekananda did. Similarly, Gandhiji believed in an aggressive *ahimsa*, not in cowardly non-violence. Indian spirituality, thus, needs to be aggressive, not cowardly.

But what does aggression mean? It means that we should actually teach the West: look here, you have solved several material problems with your high levels of prosperity. But you have not solved human problems. Who are we? Where do we come from? What is the purpose of life? And so on. For that a different approach is needed. Moreover, your prosperity is based on the exploitation of non-renewable resources, resources which rightfully belong to the whole of humankind. Such hedonism, luxury, and waste may lead not only to your own destruction, but to the destruction of the earth. So, before it's too late, you must alter your civilizational goals.

But what right do we have to teach others when we ourselves don't live by these ideals, when, instead, we are copying and outdoing the West in our conspicuous consumption? So we must bring about change in ourselves without waiting for our neighbours or friends to change. When there is a power failure, do we wait for our neighbours to light their candles, hoping thereby to get some borrowed light into our benighted houses? Or do we light a candle ourselves to dispell the darkness that surrounds us? Sri Aurobindo does not intend us to become second-rate imitations of the West. He wants us to become world-leaders. But we can do so only if we spiritualize our lives now, without postponing it to some future date. No doubt, this is a slow process, but we must make a beginning. That is what is implied in Sri Aurobindo's words.

In the concluding paragraph of this section, Sri Aurobindo explains what he means by aggressive spirituality: "India must defend herself by reshaping her cultural forms to express more powerfully, intimately and perfectly her ancient ideal. Her aggression must lead the waves of light thus liberated in triumphant self-expanding rounds all over the world which it once possessed or at least enlightened in far-off ages" (12).

This belief in India's unique destiny as a world-Guru was not confined to Sri Aurobindo alone. Several people believe that if the world is to be saved, the light has to come from India. Fuji Guruji, the well-known Japanese saint and friend of Mahatma Gandhi also believed that India had this special responsibility: The Rev. Samdong Rimpoche, Director of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, also told me that Buddhists believe that India, which is the Arya Bhoomi, will point the way to the world. So, this belief is not typical to Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo also ends on a note of hope and optimism for those who dislike conflicts. He says, "An appearance of conflict must be admitted for a time, for as long as the attack of an opposite culture continues." But later, this very conflict, because it will help to bring out the best in us and in our adversaries, will "culminate in the beginning of a concert on a higher plane" (12). These are words not of an ordinary man, but of a yogi and visionary. We must therefore learn to take them seriously, however sceptical we may tend to be. It is only when a culture is under attack that it is impelled to bring out the best in itself. While we are under attack, we can use this opportunity to renew and revitalize the best in our traditions. Thus, even our follies and failures, conflicts and quarrels may serve to assist the mysterious workings of Divine Providence.

2.4 ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY: AN INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Ananda
Coomaraswamy



Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947)

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) was an extraordinary geologist, art scholar, collector, curator, and philosopher. Born of an English mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby and Sri Lankan Tamil father, Sir Mutthu Coomaraswamy, was born in Colombo. His father was a leading member of the native society in Sri Lanka, the first Asian to qualify for the bar, a linguist, and great scholar himself. Within a year of Ananda's birth, his mother set sail for England, probably finding life in Sri Lanka too difficult. Sir Muthu died on his voyage to join his family, with the result that Ananda was raised by his mother in England. He went to Wycliffe School, possibly the only English public school that encouraged vegetarian diet. (Incidentally, many years later, Coomaraswamy sent his only son, Rama, to the same public school.)

Coomaraswamy did well in school and went to get a BSc from University College, London. Before he was twenty, he had already made his mark as a geologist of note. He visited Sri Lanka, his fatherland. It was quite a discovery. He soon became busy cataloguing and studying the mineralogy and geology of the country. Sri Lanka was then a British colony. The colonial administration saw the utility of Coomaraswamy's services and appointed him as the Director of the newly established Department of Mineralogy of Ceylon. After all, identifying and cataloguing the mineral wealth of the colony would be highly useful and profitable for the colonial administration.

Coomaraswamy spent only a little over three years in Sri Lanka, but made major contributions. The University of London conferred a Doctorate on him for his findings and contributions. He not only discovered a new mineral, "Thorionite," which he refused to name after himself as was the fashion, but made extensive studies in the art, history, crafts, philosophy, and philology of the island, and thereby of India.

Coomaraswamy was only twenty-six when he "discovered" Sinhalese art, but it changed his life forever. He gave up what was lucrative career as a geologist and turned instead to his true vocation, to articulate the spirit of Eastern arts to the world. In the process, he became not just a reformist but a nationalist, fighting on behalf of his father's country, Ceylon, against his mother's, imperialist Britain. Coomaraswamy not only wrote extensively on art, but also delved deep into

philosophy and religion. His father had translated from Sanskrit and Pali; now Coomaraswamy too studied original texts in Pali and Tamil.

Travelling through the length and breadth of the island, he discovered the hidden unity of South Asian art. Ceylon was merely a sprigboard to the greater riches of the sub-continent. In India, Coomaraswamy met some of the leading nationalist thinker, politicians, and reformers. Whether in Ceylon or in India, he found the remnants of a great civilization now gasping for breath under the imperial yoke. He found a fascinating continuity between the rich handicrafts and between classical art. He found weavers, metal workers, and skilled craftsmen all over the sub-continent, carrying on age-old traditions. What they produced was much greater both aesthetically and practically than modern, machine made goods.

Coomaraswamy felt that the regeneration of India would be possible through a revitalization of its arts and crafts. He began to see that such art and craft as ancient and medieval India produced was possible largely because of *varnashrama dharma*, the social arrangement in which castes and stages of life ordered human activity. He began to see this system as the Asian equivalent of guild socialism of medieval Europe. Instead of attacking this age-old social stratification of India as many social reformers did, he somewhat romanticised it. Coomaraswamy became a sort of neo-traditionist, decrying the destructive effects of modernity and praising the traditional way of life.

He wrote and published extensively, often in the best journals in the world. His writings had a great and instant impact all over the world. He wrote with great authority and learning, each paper well-researched and documented. He even started his own publishing house, taking over the Old Bourne Press in Essex, that William Morris had founded. From here he published his high-quality monographs with breathtaking reproductions of Indian arts and crafts.

Of his many publications at that time, *Essays in National Idealism* (1911) is of great importance. It contains fifteen essays on themes as diverse as "Indian Nationality," "Gramophones and Why Not?" "The Influence of Modern Europe on Indian Art," "Memory and Education," and "The Christian Missions in India." In the Preface to this book, Coomaraswamy boldly declared that "nations are made by artists and poets, not by traders and politicians." He believed that the Indian nation could be great by reviving and adhering to great ideas, not by making great strides in material growth. The fate of India depended on the great ideals of this civilization not on its gross national product. Ultimately, he believed that India's freedom was also in Europe's interest; that was the only way of ensuring world peace in the long run. Otherwise, a Westernized and militarized India (and China) would overrun Europe just as Europe had once overrun Asia. The death of imperialism would also mean the end of the subordination of many countries by one; it would mean a recognition of rights of several free nations.

I had used the term "national idealism" earlier. As you can see, this was Coomaraswamy's term. By this Coomaraswamy meant an alternative conception of a nation that what prevailed in Europe. A nation was built not merely on the basis of racial, religious, or linguistic unity as was the case in most of Europe. If this were the case, India could never be a nation. A nation could be built on a geographical and cultural India such as India had throughout the ages. Coomaraswamy believed that a strong nation could be built not by developments in science and technology or by other modern devices. This is what several Indians, including Jawaharlal Nehru thought. For Coomaraswamy, the ideal was the basis of the material, and not vice versa. He wanted the great ideas of India to be revived and reestablished. That would be the basis of the Indian nation.

Naturally, Coomaraswamy became a strong advocate of Swadeshi. India was being ruined by its craze to imitate the West. We become second or third rate Westerners

instead of becoming first rate Indians. And could the fabrics or artefacts of the modern West match the grace and elegance of traditional Indian handicrafts? Never, according to Coomaraswamy. Anglicised India destroyed the beauty and romance that traditional Indian design, which he called "an inexhaustible treasure-house" possessed. That is why, when we turned our backs to tradition, we lost the grace, elegance, simplicity, and dignity of that lifestyle, exchanging it for something ugly and ignominious. We live in ugly modern houses and in ugly modern cities and wear ugly clothes and have become an ugly people. We have thought that a political and economic revival would be sufficient to rebuild the nation. We have thus ignored our arts and crafts, except for relegating them to museums and special showrooms.

Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Ananda
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During this period, Coomaraswamy also embarked upon a vigorous defence and interpretation of Indian art and culture. It was commonly believed that Indian art was grotesque and monstrous—figures with several arms and with contorted faces. European writers and critics believed that the Classical ideal, being absent in India, showed the inferiority of the Indian imagination. They also believed that it was the Greek influence in Gandhara that had given rise to Indian sculpture. Coomaraswamy disproved these claims. In the process, he countered critics like the William G. Archer, whom we have already encountered through Sri Aurobindo's writings earlier. Coomaraswamy conclusively proved that the Buddha image was not only indigenous, predated the Greek influence in Gandhara, but that the latter was really an inferior and bastardised style, inferior to the more serious and elevating native styles.

Coomaraswamy's Indian interlude, which lasted from 1907 to 1916, was perhaps the most productive and inspiring of this life. Then why did he leave India? The answer was complex, but the precipitating cause was that he could not get the freedom to set up a museum in India. Instead, the Boston museum of fine arts lured him away. A rich philanthropist and patron of arts, Denman Ross, not only bought Coomaraswamy's collection but had him appointed as the Keeper of Indian and Muhammedan Art at the Boston Museum. What is more, this was a lifetime appointment. This post had been previously held by Count Okakura, the well-known Japanese Indologist.

Coomaraswamy, thus spent the last thirty years of his life in Boston. He worked hard everyday, producing book after book, paper after paper. He kept in touch with India throughout these years and died only after India had attained independence. It was India's loss that it could not keep this great savant and scholar, but lost him to the "new world."

2.4.1 *The Dance of Shiva*

This essay became the title piece of a collection of fourteen published under that title in 1918. You will notice at once that it is a learned essay, full of learned quotations, footnotes, and citations. What is its main purpose? It is explicatory, that is, to explain the significance of the image of Nataraja, or the dancing Shiva. But in doing so, Coomaraswamy also helps us understand a whole philosophy and way of life, taking us into the very depths of an ancient tradition. One single image, if examined minutely, will reveal the whole tradition. This is how the microcosm reflects the macrocosm in Indic traditions. You will also notice how Coomaraswamy's method is often comparative, citing or quoting instances from other cultures to augment his point. This should alert us against mistaking him to be a sectarian or narrow fanatic. Indeed at the end of the essay, he quotes extensively from a Russian poet, Skryabin, to show that ideas and world-views have a universal dimension to them, even if they originate in one culture or the other.

Coomaraswamy starts by explaining one of the names and aspects of Shiva—Nataraja, or the master of the dance or the king of actors. Of course, Shiva is himself both the dancer and the audience. This aspect of Shiva is akin to that of Eros Protogonos of Lucian. Lucian (AD 117-c.180) was a Greek satirist. The idea of Eros

Protagonos is that of a primary, creative, and life-affirming force, that Sigmund Freud later used to identify one of the primary drives of human nature. In other words, the primitive, frenzied dance of our ancestors was to imitate a cosmic act of creation, like the spurt of life-giving energy at the beginning of the cosmos.

Coomaraswamy mentions three dances of Shiva—the evening dance at Kailasa, the Tandava, and, finally, the Nadanta dance at Chidambaram. It is on the last that he focuses, because it is this dance that is depicted in the famous Nataraja bronzes.

You must have seen one of these bronzes, or at least its imitation. It is available in any curio shop. The image is as familiar as it is inscrutable to most of us. We are incapable of understanding what it represents. If you get an opportunity, though, you must get to see a good Nataraja bronze. There are several at the National Museum in New Delhi and I am sure you'll find them in good museums in other cities too. The whole composition is circular, with Shiva, perfectly proportioned, poised on his right leg. It's a magnificent conception, both dynamic and controlled at the same time. Certainly, this image is one of the great masterpieces of Indian art. Coomaraswamy helps us understand it better.

The legend behind this dance is that of the submission of the Rishis in the Taragam forest. These Rishis did not accept the divinity of Shiva. They were, presumably, the followers of the Vedas—Coomaraswamy mentions Mimamsa, of the three pairs of classical Hindu philosophical traditions. Though Coomaraswamy doesn't interpret the legend, it suggests the harmonizing of the diverse elements in Indian traditions, what might be called the Aryan and the Dravidian, the Classical and the folk. Clearly, Shiva belongs to the latter and the dominant tradition must bow before him, because he is the supreme Lord. The Rishis try to overcome and destroy Shiva, but are worsted in the fight. Like his victory over Daksha, Shiva's defeat of the Rishis represents the triumph of the higher over the lower. Shiva has already mastered the animal energies, that is why he is called Pashupati, the Lord of the beasts. That is why he can so easily disarm the fierce tiger and the poisonous serpent. The malignant dwarf underfoot may be taken to represent the ego—it is so small, but imagines itself to be so big. Thus Shiva, the beautiful and the auspicious, as his name implies, shows his true grace and power as the Lord of the Universe, in this dance.

Shiva, with four arms, braided hair, Ganga in his locks on which rests the crescent moon, adorned with both men's and women's ornaments, fluttering scarf and sacred thread, left foot upraised, and the right hand in the *abhaya* or reassuring gesture, thus represents a whole philosophy. In this image, you'll be able to identify several names of Shiva. For example, Bhalachandra, he whose forehead holds the moon or Chandrashekhar, he whom the moon adorns, or Gangadhar, he who holds the Ganga, or Vyomkesh, he whose locks are space itself, and so on. The dual nature of Shiva, how he is both male and female, the skull of Brahma, the Ganga in his locks, the drum—all these details have stories and myths behind them. So when we see the image it's like a short hand to a whole cultural tradition.

But, as Coomaraswamy explains, the image shows the five activities of Shiva—creation, preservation, destruction, veiling, and release. These five, taken together, explain a philosophical totality. Separately, they are the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara, and Sadashiva. Note that the trinity of popular Hinduism is a different version of what Shaivite philosophy considers a five-fold process. Whatever we do or see may be thought of as belonging to one of these five categories. To see this image, therefore, to understand its deeper significance, is to be released or emancipated. It is nothing short of understanding the nature of the Ultimate Reality itself.

Books like *The Tao of Physics* have argued that Shiva's dance represents the whirl of subatomic particles that make up the texture of the cosmos. It is a vibration of matter and energy that contemporary physics are trying to understand. Shiva's drum is the

striking of the primeval cord that sets this huge cosmic force into motion. The balance of Shiva and Shakti, of Uma and Maheshwara, is like the balance of matter and energy, each turning into the other, but each remaining indestructable. When Shiva danced thus, the sages were liberated. They saw the entire cosmos as sacred, the play of Absolute in its various guises. The dance of Shiva is in Chidambaram, which is not only a real place in Tamil Nadu, but symbolizes the sky of consciousness. Where is this sky of consciousness? Ultimately, it is within the heartspace of each of us. There Shiva dances his magnificent dance. Meditating on his auspicious form within ourselves, we can attain divinity, bliss, and freedom from process—that is the meaning behind the iconography of the dancing Shiva.

Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Ananda
Coomaraswamy

Towards the end of his essay, Coomaraswamy elaborates his reading by references to the Shakta traditions of Bengal. Here, Kali, not Shiva is the dancer. Kali is the embodiment of the dynamic aspect of Shiva, of his energy. The two forms are related, even complimenting one another. In the end, the author talks of a contemporary poem, explaining with comments in brackets after selected lines, how it conforms to Hindu ideas.

All these references are meant to suggest the solution to the deepest questions of human existence. Why are we here? Who are we? Why was the world created. Looking at the dancing form of Shiva, the answers to these questions might be as follows. We are here as a part of the cosmic play of the Lord. The Lord's own body has become the universe. He sets the whole process of creation into being and can also withdraw it into himself at his will. Activity and inactivity are two simultaneous attributes of the Lord because he is both at peace and in activity at the same time. The Lord is both matter and energy, both male and female. He is pure consciousness, the eternal Spirit, and he is matter, the stuff of which the whole universe is created. His form is beautiful and full of joy, as is his creation. We are a part of his own consciousness, which is why we are aware of this dance of his. By remembering the auspicious form of the Lord in our own inner heartspace, we can understand the mystery of this universe. The whole world is a unity, both the here and now and the hereafter; both the material and the spiritual; both the profane and the sacred; both the imminent and the transcendental; both illusion and truth. By understanding this totality and interrelatedness, we may be free for ever and anon.

Towards the end of the essay, Coomaraswamy, quoting texts, identifies the image with the *panchkashara mantra*, the five-syllabled chant, *namashivya*. By adding "Om," which represents the Shakti, we have a complete mantra, what is traditionally known as the *mahamrityunjaya* or the great victory over death mantra.

As we have seen, Coomaraswamy "translates" the plastic, the iconic, to the verbal here, but in the process, he achieves much more. He restores us to an aspect of our heritage which we did not have the ability or the knowledge to understand. This is a great service to this culture because it helps to find meaning in our own traditions. Instead of being a grotesque image which superstitious and backward people worship, on proper understanding, the image of Shiva becomes a compressed embodiment of a most complex philosophical conception of the universe. Coomaraswamy helps to restore the self-respect and dignity of the faith of an ancient people.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

I wish to mention here that all three figures that we've discussed in this unit have also been criticised for being revivalists, nationalists, and traditionalists. Some critics have accused them of being Hindu communalists in disguise. You have to read them yourself to decide if there is anything in their writings which warrants such a charge.

Are they preaching against other religions or denegrating those who are not Hindus? Are they sectarian, narrow-minded, irrational, or bigoted in any way?

Yes, if you disagree with their goals, with their methods, with their beliefs, it is another thing. Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, each in his own way, wished to create a proper understanding of things Indian, not only among Indians, but also among the rest of the people in the world. Their focus was on what might more narrowly be called "Hindu India," but again, this is strictly not the case. Coomaraswamy, for instance, was not only an expert on Mughal miniatures, but was also the Keeper of Muhammeden Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

The three have also been faulted on being male writers who are not very sensitive to concerns of women. Coomaraswamy, for instance, even wrote in favour of the ancient ideal of Sati. Swamiji Vivekananda, on the other hand, bewailed the condition of women in India, attributing the fall of the nation to its ill-treatment of women. At any rate, we need to understand that all three writers had a certain understanding of Indian traditions and believed that these traditions had much to offer to us in our present crisis. Each pointed a different path to a better future for India, but all these paths were related in their attempt to restore the self-respect and dignity of Indians. All three writers were staunch anti-imperialists and worked in their own ways for the freedom of India from the servitude to the British. Finally, they were all masters of the English language and extremely eloquent users of it.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Renaissance:	the period in Europe in the 14 th , 15 th and 16 th centuries AD especially in Italy during which there was a great revival of interest in art, literature and learning
Kant:	(1724-1804) German philosopher. Professor of logic and metaphysics who developed his own theory of knowledge
Schopenhaur:	(1788-1860) German philosopher, Chief exponent of pessimism and of the irrational impulses of life arising from the will
Spenser:	(1573-1599) English poet, showed a lot of Platonic influence in his works
Comte:	(1798-1857) French philosopher founder of Positivism conceived by him as a scientific system of thought and knowledge applicable in all spheres of life.
Mill:	(1773-1836) Scottish philosopher, historian and economist. Appointed official in East India Company. Devoted 11 years to his highly critical <i>History of India</i> , known for his utilitarian theories
Monks:	religious renunciates
Sanyasa Diksha:	training for monkhood

Budha:	title given to Gautam Sidhartha, who was a religious teacher and the founder of Buddhism	Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Ananda Coomaraswamy
Sanatam Dharma:	a title that designates Hinduism as an eternal and ever-existing religion. The word occurs in <i>Brahmanda Purana</i>	
Bhagwat Gita:	religious scripture of the Hindus	
Dogmatism:	belief in positive unsupported assertions based on a priori principle, not on induction	
Bigotry:	having or expressing very strong, often unreasonable attitudes and opinions for showing disapproval	
Fanaticism:	extreme and unreasonable behaviour	
Judaism:	religion of the Jews, with belief in one God	
Zoroastrianism:	principles of dualistic religious system propagated by Zoraster (the religion of the Magi and ancient Persia still followed by Parsees)	
Vedas:	ancient Indian scriptures	
Vedanta:	monastic Hindu philosophy founded on the Upanishads	
Agonistic:	one who believes that nothing is known or likely to be known of the existence of God.	
Buddhism:	the religion that teaches that the way to end suffering is by overcoming your desires.	
Atheistic:	that which relates to the belief that there is no God	
Jainism:	religious movement established by vardhamana Mahavira, in 6 century BCE, flourished with Buddhism on the same lines	
Law of Karma:	action has a chain sequence i.e. cause & effect	
Hypothesis:	a proposition, supposition etc. tentatively accepted to explain certain facts	
Idolatry:	practice of worshipping idols.	
Heathen:	one who has no religion or has a religion that is not Christianity.	
Yoga:	type of exercise in various positions which helps to remain fit, improve breathing and relax mind	

Daksha:	son of Brahma, able, competent, intelligent. He enraged Siva by not inviting him for sacrificial offerings. Uma, Shiva's wife urged Siva to display his power and assert his rights. After having destroyed him, Siva restored dead Daksha to life but as his head could not be found, it was replaced by that of a goat or ram.
Dalai Lama:	religious head of the Tibetans
Freud:	(1856-1939) Austrian neurologist and founder of Psychoanalysis
Rishi:	exemplar and preceptor of renunciation and righteousness
Kailash:	abode of Shiv in Himalayas
Ganga:	sacred Hindu river
Shavit philosophy:	refers to five activities of Shiva – creation, preservation destruction, veiling and release. Our life revolves round these activities.
Shakta tradition:	as per this tradition Kali is the dancer. Kali is the embodiment of dynamic aspect of Shiva, of his energy.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the relevance of Swamiji's addresses to the Parliament of Religions to our own times and our own present problems.
2. How would you interpret *Sanatan Dharma* in its purest conception?
3. According to Swamiji, the world view of Hinduism is not upturned or dislodged by the discoveries of modern science. Develop in your own words Vivekananda's logic of this assertion.
4. Sri Aurobindo thought that the Indian Culture has sufficient dynamic qualities to save the world. Do you agree to this viewpoint?
5. What makes India special for Aurobindo is "spirituality made the leading motive and the determining power of both the inner and the outer life" Do you agree?
6. What does the bronze image of the dancing Shiva symbolise?
7. Discuss the legend behind the dance of Shiva.

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

Swami Vivekananda,
Sri Aurobindo, and
Ananda
Coomaraswamy

Romain Rolland. *The life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1965.

Tapan Raychaudhuri. *Europe Reconsidered Perception of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi, OUP, 1988.

H.R. Justa. *Aesthetic Vision of Sri Aurobindo*, Delhi, R.K. Books, 1987.

Sisir Kumar Chose. *The Poetry of Sri Aurobindo A Short Survey*, Calcutta, Chatuskone, 1969.

V.K. Gokak. *Sri Aurobindo. Seer and Poet*, Delhi, Abhinav Publications, 1973.

UNIT 3 GANDHI

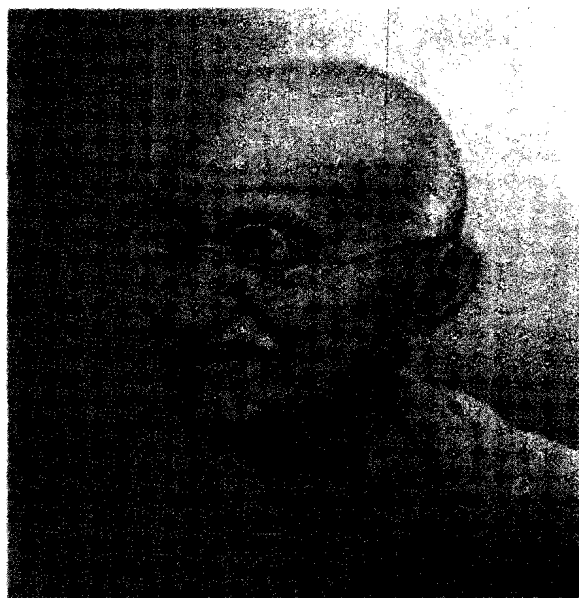
Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 The Life of Mahatma Gandhi
- 3.2 What is *Hind Swaraj*?
- 3.3 The Form of *Hind Swaraj*
- 3.4 A Chapter-Wise Summary of *Hind Swaraj*
- 3.5 Detailed Study of Selected Chapters
 - 3.5.1 Chapter IV What is Swaraj?
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 - 3.5.3 Chapter VII Why was India Lost?
 - 3.5.4 Chapter XIII What is True Civilization?
 - 3.5.5 Chapter XVII Passive Resistance
 - 3.5.6 Chapter XVIII Education
- 3.6 The Importance of *Hind Swaraj*
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Glossary
- 3.9 Questions
- 3.10 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we shall study *Hind Swaraj* by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. This is a small but highly provocative and influential book, originally written in Gujarati, but translated into English by Gandhiji himself. Though the whole book has been written in the simplest of style, it is really quite a complex and difficult text to understand. Thus, we shall approach it first from the life of its author, Gandhiji. Then we will look at its salient features, its form, its chapter-wise content, and then discuss its importance. In the Summing Up at the end, I intend to raise the question of just how practical this book and its ideas are.

3.1 THE LIFE OF MAHATMA GANDHI



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

2.8 SUGGESTED READING

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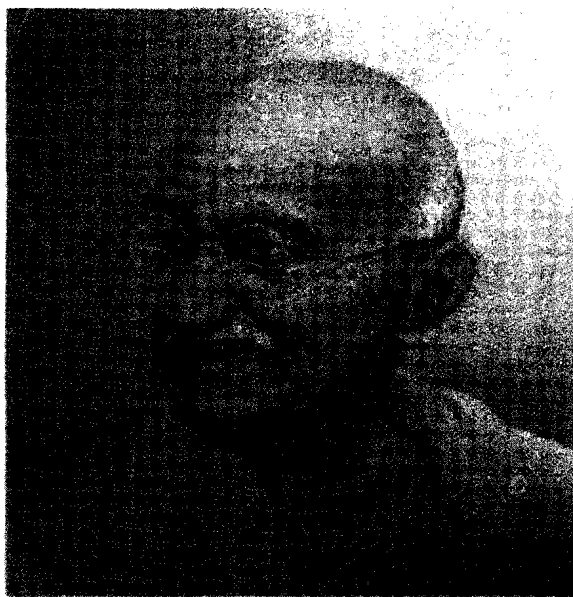
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3.1 THE LIFE OF MAHATMA GANDHI



Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar on 2 October 1869 and died in Delhi on 30 January 1948. He is commonly regarded as one of the greatest men of the 20th century. An apostle of non-violence, he nevertheless led India's struggle against the greatest and most powerful empire in human history. That is why he has been called the father of the nation and given the appellation, "Mahatma," or great soul. The outline of his life is known to every Indian, but some important details need to be remembered. However, before we recount these, let me suggest that no retelling of his life can be as effective as reading it in his own words in his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

The very title of that book points to what is perhaps the most important thing about Gandhi's life. The whole life was lived as an experiment. Now what is an experiment? It is a coherent, consciously conducted set of actions to test a hypothesis. The word has achieved its currency in modern times as a part of the scientific vocabulary. The conduct of modern science is based on a clear method. It is based on making precise observations and recording results. If a hypothesis, or initial assumption, is verified under test conditions, it can be repeated. The scientific method thus offers predictability; it gives the experimenter a certain degree of definite knowledge and control.

No doubt, the word "experiment" in Gandhi's autobiography need not be seen as embodying such scientific precision, but its drift is similar. In other words, Gandhi's life was lived according to certain assumptions and in order to demonstrate certain results. It is up to us to find out how strictly conducted this experiment was and how successful its results. That Gandhi was himself aware of this dimension of his life is clear from one of his most quoted and well-known statements, "My life is my message."

What I have been suggesting all along is that the experiences in Gandhi's life, unlike most others, were not merely a series of random events, but a carefully crafted and shaped story in which he was both author and actor. The actual occurrences in Gandhi's life, hence, however great, unique, or interesting are not of paramount value in themselves—at least this is what Gandhi would have liked us to believe. Instead, they are important in so far as they illustrate the validity of certain eternal principals or "laws." These are spiritual and ethical laws, but, according to Gandhi, they are as "true" as laws of nature which science seeks to uncover and delineate.

It follows, therefore, that the other key word in the title of Gandhi's autobiography, in addition to "experiment" is "Truth." It is Truth, then, to which Gandhi's experiments are directed at and it is Truth which the events in story of his life illumine. But this still begs the question, "what is Truth." To Gandhi, Truth, is *sat*, the first component of the trinity *Satchitananda*, which is the Vedic definition of the Ultimate Reality. Truth is simply that which is; Truth is what exists, what is real. It is the ground of being, it is the substance of which the cosmos is made. Truth, therefore is objective, valid, and eternal, irrespective of one's subjective perceptions of it. Of course, how one perceives it conditions one's attitude to it.

Finally, Gandhi's life is a story; it is not a cut and dried or lifeless record of data. In other words, it is full of richly subjective detailing and narration. Gandhi is not superhuman per se, but superbly human. He rises higher and higher through endless striving and discipline. He is not born superior to us. In fact, he has the same failings and weakness as that of the rest of us, but it is his struggle against these that makes him shine as beacon of hope and the leader of millions. What I have been stressing throughout is that Gandhi's life is exemplary; all the extraordinary events in it are meant to uplift and inspire us. As such, Gandhi is a great modern hero, just as Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and many others after them, were great heroes.

We do not have the space here for an adequate biographical overview, but I wish to stress a couple of points which have special bearing on *Hind Swaraj*. Most of us know a good deal about Gandhi's life in India, especially about his leadership of the freedom struggle. Actually, Gandhi came back to India rather later, in 1915, when he was over forty-five years of age and already a great hero. Gandhi was formed in South Africa; he was already a Mahatma when he returned to India.

But let us back track a bit. After his early schooling in Rajkot and marriage to Kasturba in 1883, Gandhi left for England in 1888 to study law. After qualifying for the Bar in 1891, he came back to India but found no satisfactory work. He therefore set sail to South Africa in 1893 to take up his practice as a lawyer. South Africa, then, though a part of the British Empire, suffered from severe racial discrimination. Gandhi, soon, became involved in a struggle for justice for the entire Indian population. Perhaps, the turning point was his being thrown out of the first class compartment of a train at Pietermaritzburg in 1893, even though he possessed a valid ticket. That opened his eyes to the extent of the injustice prevalent in South Africa.

In any event, Gandhi soon organized the Indians against some of the unjust laws of the land. His struggle culminated in the Great March of 1913 from Charlestown to Volksrust. This forced the South African government to accede to his demands in the Gandhi-Smuts pact of 1914. It was after this crowning achievement of Gandhi's non-violent campaign that he decided to return to India.

During the South African years, Gandhi experimented with all the major ingredients of his praxis: community living in the Tolstoy and Phoenix settlements, experiments with diet and natural cure, the invention of satyagraha, the adoption of Truth and nonviolence, the vow of brahmacharya or chastity, and finally, the giving up of personal property. The South African years were thus, literally, the years of the making of the Mahatma, years of self-formation. It was during this period that Gandhi discovered his personal and political philosophy and hardly deviated from it for the rest of his life. And it was during this period that *Hind Swaraj* came to be written.

3.2 WHAT IS *HIND SWARAJ*?

Hind Swaraj is one of the most important books that Gandhi wrote. It was originally written in Gujarati and published in *Indian Opinion*, a journal that Gandhi used to edit in South Africa. The ms. was written in 1909 (not in 1908 as the Navjivan edition erroneously states) on deck of S. S. Kildare, the ship which was bringing Gandhi back to South Africa from London. It was written in long hand on the ship's stationery in a burst of sustained inspiration in ten days. When Gandhi's right hand tired, he commenced writing with his left. The ms. was later translated into English for the benefit of Gandhi's English friends. It was published as a booklet in Gujarati, but immediately banned by the government of the Bombay Presidency. Its English translation was published in book form in 1910.

What is the message of *Hind Swaraj*? As Gandhi himself says, "It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force." What was its immediate context? What provoked Gandhi to write this book with so much passion? While in London, Gandhi met, in his own words, "every known anarchist." It is recorded that among these was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the leading ideologue of the extremist group and later of the Hindu Mahasabha. Savarkar was a brave and patriotic man, who wished to overthrow British rule through violent revolution. His study of world history had convinced Sarvarkar that no country had won its freedom without an armed insurrection. Sarvarkar was therefore working to train a band of Indian terrorists in London. With

the help of Shyamji Krishna Varma, Sarvkar had instituted a scholarship for Indian students in Britain, but his object was to indoctrinate and prepare leaders for violent revolt.

Gandhi

It was in one such meeting in London that Gandhi met Savarkar and actually shared a common platform with him. Gandhi and Sarvkar had detailed discussion over the means and ends of the struggle for India's freedom, but could not come to an agreement. Gandhi, unlike Savarkar, was convinced that it was India's unique genius and destiny not to imitate the other nations of the world, and that India, indeed, would win its freedom through moral and spiritual force which was superior to material force or the force of arms. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* to explain his point of view.

3.3 THE FORM OF *HIND SWARAJ*

Hind Swaraj is written as a dialogue between an Editor and a Reader. The Editor is none other than Gandhi himself, while the Reader is a prototype of the kind of angry, young man that Gandhi met in London and wished to change. Gandhi adopts the dialogic mode because he wanted to write a book which "can be put into the hands of a child." Indeed, this studied simplicity went on to be the hallmark of Gandhi's style, not just in his writing but in all that he did in life. Gandhi was the master of the direct and plain style; in many ways, he was a minimalist, shunning excess, unnecessary ornamentation, and needless complexity. Gandhi simplified things; he dealt with very difficult topics and ideas in the language of common men and women. In that sense, he was a great communicator.

Gandhi, though a ceaseless innovator, was also a traditionalist. The dialogue form reminds us, at once, of both the Upanishadic and Socratic traditions. Gandhi, thus, uses a tried and tested form to convey his thoughts. *Hind Swaraj* is made up of twenty little chapters. The book itself is very small in volume, but packs in a very big punch, so to speak.

3.4 A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS IN EACH CHAPTER

Chapter I: The Congress and Its Officials

The Editor counsels the Reader to respect Congressmen like Hume, Wedderburn, Naoroji, and Gokhale for laying the foundation for Indian Home Rule (or *Swaraj*). He argues against hating every Englishman just because they rule India: "We who seek justice will have to do justice to others."

Chapter II: The Partition of Bengal

The Editor says that the real awakening of India took place with the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon: "The demand for the abrogation of the Partition is tantamount to a demand for Home Rule." The Partition taught Indians that "petitions must be backed up by force, and that they must be capable of suffering." The partition also divided the Congress into two factions: the moderates and the extremists.

Chapter III: Discontent and Unrest

This chapter analyses how reforms take place. According to Gandhi, "Every reform must be preceded by discontent."

Chapter IV: What is Swaraj?

Gandhi tries to define his idea of Swaraj in this chapter. He makes it clear that Swaraj is not merely independence, but a different form of government altogether: "Swaraj is not just the withdrawal of the British, it is not 'English rule without the Englishman.'"

Chapter V: The Condition of England

Gandhi argues that the condition of Europe is not worth copying: "the Mother of Parliaments is like a sterile woman and a prostitute. ... If India copies England...she will be ruined." The pitiable condition of England is due to "modern civilization," under which "the nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day."

Chapter VI: Civilization

Just material well-being is not a mark of civilization, Gandhi clarifies. Modern civilization is not just purely material, it is also immoral and irreligious. Modern civilization enslaves people with "the luxuries that money can buy."

Chapter VII: Why Was India Lost?

"The English have not taken India; we have given it to them." We must not blame others but scrutinize and correct our own weaknesses. The English "wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods."

Chapter VIII: The Condition of India

"India is ground down, not under the English heel, but under that of modern civilization. ... We are turning away from God." India's suffering is due to our turning away from a religious life and accepting modern civilization.

Chapter IX: The Condition of India (Continued): Railways

"Railways, lawyers, and doctors have impoverished the country." Railways help spread all sorts of evil because while "good requires a long time" to travel, "evil has wings." It was the British who perpetuated the myth of divided India; before their advent India was one culturally.

Chapter X: The Condition of India (Continued): The Hindus and the Mahomedans
India is one nation because it has the "faculty for assimilation." Religion and nationality are not synonymous. Hindus and Muslims are blood brothers and must learn to coexist.

Chapter XI: The Condition of India (Continued): Lawyers

Lawyers are often immoral because their profession thrives on quarrels and disputes. The British also use law courts to strengthen their illegitimate rule.

Chapter XII: The Condition of India (Continued): Doctors

Likewise, the medical profession has aided imperialism. Most diseases are caused by lack of discipline and by indulgence, which is encouraged through medication. Modern medicine is cruel because it vivisects animals. Doctors use their profession not to help people but to make money.

Chapter XIII: What is True Civilization?

Gandhi

"Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty." In this sense, India has nothing to learn from anyone else. "The tendency of the Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality."

Chapter XIV: How Can India Become Free?

"It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves." Only by freeing ourselves first can we dream of freeing others. India's strength is unique: instead of Europeanising ourselves, we can Indianise the British.

Chapter XV: Italy and India

Unlike Italy, India cannot easily rise up in armed rebellion. "Moreover, to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanize it." If assassination, terrorism, and violence is used to free India, we will make this holy land unholy. Though the English are influenced by "gunpowder ... what is granted under fear can be retained only so long as the fear lasts."

Chapter XVI: Brute Force

The Reader argues in favour of brute force, of obtaining the right end through whatever means. The Editor replies that there is "the same" inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. ... We reap exactly as we sow. ... The force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms." A petition which is not backed by force is, admittedly, useless, but instead of being backed by brute force, it should be backed by "love-force, soul-force, or, more popularly but less accurately, passive resistance."

Chapter XVII: Passive Resistance

The Reader asks what historical evidence there is to prove that passive resistance works. The Editor replies by defining history not as a record of wars and of the reins of Kings, but as the story of humanity. The fact that the world lives on in spite of wars proves that the force of love is greater than the force of hatred and violence. "Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering."

Passive resistance is not the weapon of the weak, but actually it requires more courage than the use of brute force. Is it harder to kill others or smilingly to die for one's beliefs? Passive resistance is for everyone: men and women, those weak in the body and those who are strong, singly or jointly. Passive resistance "blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used." Passive resistance is an Indian speciality because the common people of India have always used it down the ages. "We cease to co-operate with our rulers when they displease us."

This does not mean that we neglect our bodies; it is our duty to make our bodies strong too. Passive resistance can be perfected only through the practice of chastity, poverty, truth, and fearlessness.

Chapter XVIII: Education

Education is not merely the acquisition of letters, but the building of character. English education has enslaved the nation. Though valuable English books may be translated into our languages, religious or ethical education should take first place. Hindus should learn Sanskrit; Muslims, Persian or Arabic; and vice versa too; Northerners and Westerners should learn Tamil; the national language should be Hindi, whether in Persian or Nagari script. Religious education should not be left in

the hands of the hypocritical clergy alone, but should be an instrument of driving out Western civilization.

Chapter XIX: Machinery

Machinery, or rather the use by Indians of machine-made goods, has enslaved us. Capitalism is aligned to imperialism; both oppress the common man. Though machine-made products cannot be given up all at once, we must make a beginning without waiting for the world to change. "Machinery is bad"--we must keep this in mind even when we use it against itself.

Chapter XX: Conclusion

Moderates and Extremists must join hands to work for Swaraj. The English must be asked to stop exploiting India; they cannot rule us against our will. Indians, in order to be free, must reform and discipline themselves. We must eschew the English language; lawyers and doctors must use their knowledge for the benefit of others; European civilization must be resisted at every step even through personal sacrifice and suffering; all must take to the hand loom. "Real home-rule is self-rule or self-control. The way to it is passive resistance: that is soul-force or love-force. In order to exert this force, Swadeshi in every sense is necessary. ... I bear no enmity towards the English but I do towards their civilization."

3.5 DETAILED STUDY OF SELECTED CHAPTERS

In this section, let us take a closer look at the chapters prescribed for detailed study.

3.5.1 Chapter IV: *What is Swaraj?*

In this brief, but important Chapter, Gandhi tries to define his concept of Swaraj. Gandhi clearly indicates that driving the British out is not the same as attaining Swaraj. Though it is clear that British rule impoverished and ruined India, Gandhi still does not make the mistake of arguing that Swaraj can be achieved simply by substituting the British imperialists with the native bourgeoisie. The latter is, in fact, what the Reader wishes. "English rule without the English," Gandhi calls this position succinctly: this means the same sort of government, with armed forces and the whole bureaucratic machinery of the modern nation-state. But it is precisely this kind of system of governance that Gandhi opposes. He believes that it is exploitative and extremely harmful to the general interests of the population. While the Reader wants a whole scale incorporation of English, that is modern institutions, Gandhi has a totally different view of Swaraj. This view takes time to emerge; it is not fully defined in this particular Chapter. For this we shall have to look elsewhere in Gandhi's speeches and writings. Gandhi believed that Swaraj or self-rule should begin with at the bottom of society, with the poorest of the poor. What he had in mind was not a pyramidal society in which a few dominated and lived off the rest, but a society of ever expanding oceanic circles whose individual is the individual.

3.5.2 Chapter VI: *Civilization*

One of the most interesting things about *Hind Swaraj* is its cross-cultural comparison between modern Western civilization and the traditional Indian civilization. Gandhi realized that most educated Indians were totally awed and overwhelmed by the glamour and power of the former. How to wean them away from it and reorient them to their own cultural moorings was a question that exercised him. In this chapter, he mounts a frontal attack on modern civilization by calling it Satanic and ungodly.

Gandhi argues that modern civilization caters only to the body and totally ignores moral development. As such, it is degenerate. He says that Europe in the olden days was not all that different from India of today. Most people laboured with their hands to till the soil, plant the crops, and harvest the grain. It was an agrarian and religious civilization. Precisely what some Europeans called the Dark Ages, Gandhi thinks of as a worthy way of living. All that the modern developments have done is to enable a few to amass a great deal of wealth while the condition of the rest is "worse than that of beasts." While Gandhi is aware of the positive side to modernity, he acknowledges it only grudgingly and partially. This is because he is more concerned with the negative fallout; what worries him the most is the official, value-neutral line such as scientists and engineers adopt even to this day. Gandhi is concerned with the dehumanisation that industrialism produced, but he does not concede the manner in which it freed both women and men from traditional, rather limited lifestyles and livelihoods. Gandhi does not envisage the possibilities of moving beyond the drudgery of industrialism through advancing technology. Instead he focuses on self-destructiveness of modernity, on its immorality and greed. In other words, far from regarding it as a panacea, he looks at modern civilization as a disease, but a curable disease.

In his indictment of modern civilization, perhaps Gandhi goes too far. After all the very English Parliament which he called a "sterile woman and a prostitute," both of which images are sexist, became the model for Indian democracy too. In this chapter, he says that "Parliaments are emblems of slavery," a view which those who don't have them will certainly not endorse. In other words, what I am suggesting is that Gandhi's remarks need to be viewed in the context of his times. Then it was very necessary to expose the hideous underbelly of modern civilization, especially to those Indians who were enamoured of it. That is what Gandhi succeeds in doing in this chapter. Of course, we should remember that Gandhi's remarks are not merely tactical; he genuinely believed that a simple way of life based on manual labour was the most conducive to moral and spiritual advancement.

3.5.3 Chapter VII: *Why Was India Lost?*

The key statement in this chapter is both simple and astonishing: "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them." The idea contained in this statement undermines all the conventional wisdom on imperial conquest. Here Gandhi focuses on the innate, inner strength of the oppressed. He wants us to know that no one can rule us without our consent. That is why he once called Swaraj nothing but a process of self-purification: we have permitted foreign rule to sully us; by purifying ourselves of it, we are merely returning to our natural, pristine state. Such a theory of self-cleansing assumes that our original natures are not corrupt or fallen, but perfect and divine. What Gandhi does is to build a theory of decolonization which stresses self-realization and self-scrutiny, instead of attacking the oppressors as African and other anti-colonial struggles all over the world did.

If we examine Gandhi's arguments carefully, we see that he is changing the very equation between the oppressed and the oppressor. The former considers himself powerless, helpless, abject, disarmed, and therefore unable to change his destiny. Gandhi blames not the victor, but the victim: "If I am in the habit of drinking *bhāng* and a seller thereof sells it to me, am I to blame him or myself? By blaming the seller, shall I be able to avoid the habit?" Even if Gandhi held the seller of *bhāng*, or the imperialist, responsible, he still wishes to drive home to the victim the latter's own complicity in his exploitation. To give the oppressed a sense of agency, to suggest to them that they are in charge of their own lives, that in fact, they could change their lives and end their oppression was a great gift that Gandhi gave to the people of India.

Gandhi doesn't stop there but offers the reasons why the British can retain their hold over India. He makes a very important point that British imperialism is, above all, an

economic system. The military is there only to support this system, but that it is not primarily militaristic. He wants Indians to recognize that to the British, "money is their God." The British, says Gandhi, "wish to convert the whole world into a vast market for their goods." So, you can see how Gandhi anticipates what we call globalisation today. In other words, power according to Gandhi is not maintained with armies but with economic control. While we quarrel amongst ourselves, the British strengthen their hold on our economy. That is why, for Gandhi, swadeshi or economic self-reliance and internal unity are the two necessary ingredients of Swaraj.

3.5.4 Chapter XIII: *What is True Civilization?*

This chapter should be read in conjunction to the earlier one, Chapter VI "Civilization." Here Gandhi defines his idea of civilization after having already demolished the prevalent notions of it. For Gandhi civilization is simply *sudharo*, the Gujarati word, which means "good conduct." It consists of "performance of duty and observance of morality." In this respect, Gandhi feels that India has "nothing to learn from anybody else" because since times immemorial the mighty river of Dharma has flown through this land. For Gandhi, India was a land of Rishis and Fakirs, of the exemplars and preceptors of renunciation and righteousness. The common people lived in villages, away from the corruption of large cities. It is "this cursed modern civilization" that has spoiled India. Where it has not reached, the traditional ways of life continue as before, says Gandhi. He pursues the contrast farther by saying that while "the tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the Western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God." This is a rather severe condemnation, but is based on Gandhi's belief that modernity fundamentally changes the human being's equation with the cosmos by alienating us from the natural order and placing us on top. While he is not blind to the numerous faults of the traditional way of life, he considers these to be "defects," which are not integral to it. But, what would Gandhi have said if someone made the same arguments about modern civilization? If we said that the latter's defects, such as he identifies, need not be considered integral to it? I suppose Gandhi would have argued that colonialism, slavery, wage labour, moral decay and degeneration and many other problems are not merely the defects of modernity, but somehow central to it. Without them, there would be no modernity as we know it. I think each of you will have to make up your own minds on this vital issue, but do examine the complexities of the debate carefully.

3.5.5 Chapter XVII: *Passive Resistance*

This chapter brings us to the heart of Gandhi's praxis or method of action and activism. As such, it is probably the most important chapter in *Hind Swaraj*. It is also, I think, the longest chapter. After you finish reading it you realize that "passive resistance" is anything but passive. In fact, it is a very proactive way of intervening in the world. That is why Gandhi preferred to call it "Satyagraha" or soul-force. It rather calls for extraordinary courage and self-discipline, not to speak of several other qualities. Passive resistance, thus, isn't easier, but much, much harder than violent reaction.

Gandhi argues that soul-force or truth force is a scientific principle without which the world would not have survived. Unfortunately, our history books merely chronicle the endless wars and mindless violence of ruthless kings and conquerors. Soul-force, on the other hand, is present in every family; indeed, it has ensured the survival of the human species itself. History, on the other hand, "is really a record of every *interruption* [emphasis added] of the even working of the force of love upon the soul." Gandhi defines passive resistance as "a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms."

Next, the discussion moves to law, especially to unjust laws. Like Henry David Thoreau before him, Gandhi argues for the moral basis of civil disobedience when it

is directed against unjust laws. He says, "A man who has realized his manhood, who fears only God, will fear no one else. Man-made laws are not necessarily binding on him." Gandhi believes that just because the majority supports something or just because it has been made into a law it does not automatically become right.

Next Gandhi refutes the idea that soul-force is the weapon of the weak; on the contrary, he says, it requires greater courage to practise it than to practice violence. After all, it is easier to injure, even kill someone else instead of being injured or being killed oneself. Moreover, passive resistance, unlike violence, benefits both the subject and the object of it, that is both she who uses it and he against whom it is used. According to Gandhi, the Indian people have always used it against kings and governments, disregarding laws that they found unjust or obnoxious.

But, what are the qualities necessary for a passive resistor? If one looks at their list they include chastity, poverty, truth, fearlessness, and so on, all of which are very difficult to attain. The passive resistor, the *satyagrahi*, therefore, is like a saint; he is no ordinary person.

You may argue that no one wants to be a saint; instead all of us wish to lead "normal" lives. In Gandhi's scheme of things "normal" life requires the qualities listed above; without them, human beings will become akin to beasts. What is "normal" for Gandhi may be extraordinary for us, but we must ask ourselves if we should strive towards it or remain as we are.

3.5.6 Chapter XVIII: Education

This chapter on Education is directly connected with our own realities today. We have inherited a colonial system of education, which is hardly relevant to our real needs. The result is so many ignorant and job-less graduates, all of whom are too qualified to do any hard work. Many of us want cushy and secure government jobs by virtue of which we can live happily. We seldom realize that many of us are actually burdens on society. Gandhi anticipated this problem. He believed that true education was not merely literacy or the knowledge of Mathematics, but the development of high moral character. In fact, he believed that not everyone needs what we call education today. Most of those, for instance, who live in villages and practice farming, may make do with some rudimentary knowledge of letters; they don't need to go to school or college to earn degrees or diplomas.

The worst feature in the racket that is education is what was known as "English education." This was a system devised by Lord Macaulay and his successors to produce a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." Gandhi knew that English education would alienate the classes from their native culture. This is precisely what has happened. Those of us steeped in this type of education, therefore, need to work extra-hard to reconnect with our roots, to offer our advantages to the service of those on whose behalf we enjoy all our privileges.

Gandhi is not exactly anti-English, but wishes English to be given its rightful place, which is as an international link language. English should not dominate us as it has come to do today. Moreover, Gandhi wants every Indian to learn one classical language, like Sanskrit or Persian, and one more language other than mother tongue. This is the only way of avoiding linguistic chauvinism or fanaticism and encouraging a multilingual, multiethnic sensibility.

Gandhi also touches briefly on religious education. He believes that we need to return to India's pristine civilization by throwing out Western civilization, but also by cleansing our own traditions of the dirt and filth that has accumulated in them. If they could be cleansed, religious education would naturally substitute the kind of

secular education that we have. Gandhi's dream, however, was not to be realized. Education still remains woefully inadequate and ineffective.

3.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF *HIND SWARAJ*

We have already seen how, strictly speaking, *Hind Swaraj* cannot be considered a part of Indian writing in English. It was written originally in Gujarati, but what is equally important, translated by Gandhi himself into English. This is the only book of his which he himself translated. That is why, we need to remember that we have to discard narrow yardsticks of what constitutes Indian English literature. All of Indian English literature, more properly speaking, is a translated literature. Therefore, considering *Hind Swaraj* as a valid text, we have done well to include it in the syllabus. Its literary value, as I suggested earlier, is its direct and simple style. The sentences are short and avoid excessive coordination or subordination. This is a plain style with little or no ornamentation. It is prose of thought which does not strive after needless elegance. It is the same style that we find in Gandhi's later works, whether translated or written originally in English.

Yet, the importance of *Hind Swaraj* extends far beyond its literary value. It is, in my opinion, a seminal text for all those who wish to understand Gandhi. What is more, it is nothing less than a non-violent revolutionary's handbook. It should be compulsory reading for all Indians. Why do I make such a sweeping statement? That's because this book has the power to make us wake up from our stupor. We, who are intoxicated by modernity and westernization, who are continuing to be brainwashed daily via the mass-media to get entangled further into self-destructive lifestyles of consumerism, require the kind of jolt that *Hind Swaraj* offers.

The text extends much beyond its immediate political message, which, as we have already observed, concerns the achievement of *Swaraj* and the best means thereof. We have also seen how Gandhi clearly says that *Swaraj* obtained by violence will be no *Swaraj* at all, but will demean us to the level of our former colonizers. But, Gandhi's concerns are not merely political. Indeed, we need to recognize clearly that Gandhi's approach is not fragmentary, but holistic. In Gandhian thought what helps us attain political independence should also help us develop spiritually.

Gandhi's thought springs from a deep perspective which is not just intra-civilization, but trans-civilizational. He identifies India as a spiritual and religious civilization, whose culture is superior to that of modern western civilization. Here Gandhi makes a crucial point that western civilization today is merely modern civilization: at one time, before the onset of modernity, Europe was not much different from India. Why is modern civilization condemned by Gandhi? It is condemned not only because it is materialistic, but because it is essentially immoral. It encourages vice and makes us forget the purpose of life which is the cultivation of virtue. Modern life regards the human being as essentially a physical entity the aim of whose life is to accumulate comforts. In order to give us the comforts that we seek modern civilization adopts a predatory and destructive approach to nature. All the progress and development, we will realize, is at the cost of enormous damage to our environment. Some of this damage is irreversible. The other way in which much of what we call modern development happens is through the exploitation of human beings. Slavery, colonialism, indentured labour, and other forced or ill-paid systems have been evolved so that the majority of the poor toil for the comforts of the rich few. Gandhi shows us that modernity is driven by the baser instincts of greed, lust for power, urge to dominate over others, and so on. If all of us succumb to the craze for modernity, the whole species would be dehumanized. Gandhi recognizes this and therefore criticizes the West, which is the custodian of modernity.

He wants Indians to regain their lost pride in themselves and their culture, which he believes is superior to that of the modern West. That is because traditional Indian culture, at its best, was designed to ensure the moral and spiritual evolution of each of its members. Gandhi wants modern Indians to get rid of the colonial mentality which makes us worship everything that comes from the West. Instead, Gandhi deglamourizes the opponent, so that we can evaluate it afresh. The so-called backwardness of traditional India, according to Gandhi, was no backwardness at all, but a proof of its higher culture.

Gandhi considers the craze for machinery to be inappropriate to India. Here we have a surplus of labour, so labour saving machinery will actually render millions jobless. It will dehumanize and enslave those who are bound to machines in lifeless routines. It will concentrate the wealth in the hands of those few who own machines. Instead of so much centralization of power and wealth, Gandhi advocates decentralization. Each one must attempt to attain self-sufficiency; we should become both producers and consumers, or to use postmodern jargon, we should all become "prosumers."

Self-sufficiency, self-respect, self-realization are thus the planks of Gandhi's idea of Swaraj. Swaraj itself is a concept more deep and wide than independence. Swaraj is a Vedic word which means more than just self-rule. It suggests not just individual autonomy but a very high level of moral and spiritual development. Such Swaraj is a life-long project and includes every aspect of our lives. It is interactive and evolutionary, not just static or inert. By Gandhi's yardstick, we are still far from attaining Swaraj. Indeed, in the ultimate analysis, Swaraj is not just a self-centered or negative concept. It embraces all of humankind, both the oppressed and the oppressor. Political independence is merely the beginning. Swaraj will be impossible before the whole world learns to co-exist in peace and prosperity; it will be a world without the rampant inequalities, dehumanizing poverty, crippling disease, internecine warfare of today.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

After giving you an overview of *Hind Swaraj* I would like to take up the question of just how practical or impractical a text like *Hind Swaraj* is. To put it bluntly, of course it is impractical. But was Christ practical? Was the Buddha practical? Is any revolutionary ideal practical? Is the dream of transforming the world practical? No, most of these things are not practical and that is one reason why they are so special. Clearly, then, *Hind Swaraj*, is the work of an extremist. It is unique precisely because it is so unreasonable and provocative. No one, not even Gandhi, could practice in toto what it preaches. Gandhi himself used not just the railways but all sort of machinery in his lifetime. *Hind Swaraj* aims at transforming our attitudes. It cannot be followed literally. If we do so, we shall not be able to live for one minute.

Ninety years have passed since it was written. During these nine decades we have moved closer to modernity and farther away from Gandhi. But, at the same time, we are in a much better position to ascertain the value of what *Hind Swaraj* preaches. The whole world today speaks of protecting the environment. That is because the earth as an eco-system has reached a crisis of survival. Gandhi was a visionary who could foresee this crisis very clearly. He warns all of us against it. He calls on us to change our attitudes and our lifestyles. It is up to us how much we can understand him and follow his example.

Hind Swaraj, then, is an impractical text when seen from a limited perspective; when seen from a broader perspective, what it advocates seems to be the only possible way to survive.

3.8 GLOSSARY

Beacon:	a person or thing that warns, offers encouragement or guidance etc, to light up
Bhang:	an intoxicating drink
Hypothesis:	a proposition, supposition etc tentatively accepted to explain certain facts.
Delineate:	to mark out, sketch, or to trace the outline
Exemplary:	serving as a model or an example worth imitating
Praxis:	established practice or custom
Insurrection:	a rising up against established authority, rebellion
Indoctrinate:	to instruct in, or imbue with doctrines as of a sect
Seminal:	containing seeds of reproduction or development
Stupor:	a state in which the mind and senses are dulled, as from the use of a narcotic or from a shock
Intoxicated:	being in a state of no control through the use of alcohol, or a drug, to excite to a point beyond self control.
Demean:	to lower in status or character, degrade
Holistic:	an integrated whole or a complete view
Interactive:	acting on each other, reciprocal action or effect
Internecine:	deadly or harmful to both sides, destroying effect

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on Mahatma Gandhi's life and theories relating to Truth and humanity in general. To what extent do you consider him as a true Indian or as the Father of our Nation"?
2. Gandhiji himself says "My life is my message" What do you think was the message, and as an Indian or as a human being how has that message affected you?

3. How far do you know about the formative years of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa and the events and experiences that shaped his thinking and character?
4. When and why did Gandhi write the *Hind Swaraj*, and why was it banned?
5. Write a note on the form of *Hind Swaraj*? Do you think that writing in such a form would make things clear to the readers?
6. Write an essay on your understanding of the *Hind Swaraj*. What according to you is Gandhi trying to convey to the readers?
7. Explain Gandhi's view of the following concepts: Swaraj, Civilization, , Passive Resistance and English education. What role did the partition of Bengal have on the political as well as social development of India?
8. Do you agree with the Gandhian view that "Every reform must be preceded by discontent"? Substantiate your answer with proper examples.
9. What do you think of Gandhi's idea of Swaraj, with respect to your own views of it?
10. As a child of the 21st century, what do you feel about our culture and civilization? What measures can be taken to preserve and save this civilization?
11. With reference to what Gandhi is saying in chapters XV, XVI and XVII on the idea of peace, brute force, passive resistance and the use of armed rebellion in order to free India, analyse his views with respect to the present Kargil Border conflicts and war threats between two nuclear nations.
12. Socially, politically and religiously, what do you think about the unity and diversity in India. In what ways, do you think can we improve our present situation.
13. What does Gandhi say on various professions like that of the lawyers and the Doctors?
14. What do you think about the role Education plays in our lives? What are the views expounded by Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* on Education: scientific as well as literary and religious?
15. In today's materialistic, modernist, mechanical world, where do you think does Gandhiji's idea of Swadeshi stand?
16. How can Gandhi's views of Swaraj and Swadeshi be effectively used for the benefit of India?
17. According to you, what is the relevance and importance of *Hind Swaraj*?

3.10 SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 4 JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Structure

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- 4.1 Introduction
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 - 4.2.1 Life
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to introduce you to the prose writing of Jawaharlal Nehru as exemplified in his *Autobiography*; (ii) through a study of a sampling from his *Autobiography* to familiarise you with the distinctive features of his prose style, and (iii) to enable you to place Nehru's writings in the context of the non-fictional prose written by other Indian writers of the twentieth century and those who are writing now.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Nehru is among the most distinguished Indians of the 20th century. As one of the makers of modern India, his life merges with the life of the nation. Inevitably, a study of his writings becomes not only a study of the man but also of the history of modern India.

Nehru's writings reflect his dynamism, his catholic taste and his broad sympathies, his freedom for cant and hypocrisy, and his sensitive use of words.

We would like you to first read the extracts from Nehru's *Autobiography*, 6 chapters in all which are prescribed for you and then form your own judgement about his writing. Do read other chapters also if you have time. In any case compare them with the writings of others. This will help you to discover the similarities and differences among them and also to identify their special features.

4.2 NEHRU-LIFE AND WRITINGS

4.2.1 Life

Nehru (1889-1964): The bare facts about Nehru's life can be told quickly. Born to rich Kashmiri parents, he had an exclusive education, first at home at the hands of governesses and then at Harrow and Cambridge and the Inner Temple. Soon after his return from England he plunged into the nationalistic struggle, went to jail a number of times, became President of the Indian National Congress, took a leading part in the negotiations that culminated in the freedom of the country and headed the Interim Government. He was Prime Minister of free India from August 1947 till his death on 27 May 1964.



Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964)

In case you are interested in more details, you could consult a biography of Nehru's.

4.2.2 Writings

Three main books of Nehru's which we owe to his prison days are:

An Autobiography (1936)

Glimpses of World History (1939)

The Discovery of India (1946)

Glimpses of World History first published in 1934-35 in two volumes contains, as the title page says, "Further letters to his daughter, written in prison, and containing a rambling account of history for young people."

Tom Wintringham in his tribute to Nehru included in collection called *Abinandan Granth* called the book "better history" and "better English". He said: "If in the future some Indian children are to learn English they will do well to insist that they are taught from these *Glimpses* rather than from Macaulay or from Gibbon."

The Discovery of India (1946)

Written in Ahmednagar jail in five months, the book contains Nehru's reflections on life in general and on India in particular. The discovery of the title obviously took place during the 1936 whirlwind election tour of India. Chalapathi Rao in his *Jawaharlal Nehru* (1973) says: "There has been no better book about the cultural unity of India or the continuity of Indian civilization and it is monumental in conception, a book that deserves to be richly illustrated." Chalapathi Rao was right. The book was made into a beautiful film in Hindi, *Bharat Ek Khoj* by Shyam Benegal.

4.3.1 Preliminary Remarks

Nehru did most of his serious writing during his prison terms. His *Autobiography* was written entirely in jail in a period of less than 9 months from June 1934 to February 1935 or 14th February 1935 to be precise. As he explains in chapter LXIV, the task was begun in Dehra Gaol and completed in the District Gaol, Almora. The result was a massive manuscript of 976 pages and Nehru must have worked furiously at it.

Prison is central to Nehru's experience and the original title suggested by the author was *In and Out of Prison* with a sub-title *An Autobiographical Narrative with musings on recent events in India*. It was finally published under the bare title *An Autobiography* by John Lane The Bodley Head of London in April 1936. This included a postscript dated 25 October 1935 that he wrote at Badenweiler in Switzerland where he had gone for the treatment of his wife. Nehru obviously prepared the manuscript for publication in Badenweiler, for the preface to the first edition is dated 2 January 1936.

The book is dedicated to his wife Kamala who had died a few weeks before its publication.

4.3.2 Genesis of the *Autobiography*

How did the narrative come to be written?

Nehru explains the genesis of the book at two places - once in chapter LXIV dealing with 'Dehra Gaol Again' and in the preface to the first edition of the book. His primary purpose he says, was two-fold. It was to give himself a definite task that would fill in the long solitude of jail life and would divert his mind from worry and depression. It was also an attempt at understanding - understanding the past events with which he has been connected and understanding his own responses to them and thereby trace his own mental development. In, Dehra Gaol Again, he explains the mood of self-questioning in which the narrative began. "Distressed with the present, I began thinking of the past, of what had happened politically in India since I began to take part in public affairs. How far had we been right in what we had done? How far wrong? It struck me that my thinking would be more orderly and helpful if I put it down on paper" (559). At the end of chapter xxviii we find Nehru asking again: "Why am I writing all this here in prison?... I write down my past feelings and experiences in the hope this may bring me some peace and psychic satisfaction." (208)

His account is clearly and self-confessedly "egotistical" and selective. "I must warn him [the reader], therefore that this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably, egotistical; many important happenings have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events, have hardly been mentioned.... a personal account can claim this indulgence. "(xv-xvi)

4.3.3 *The Autobiography as a narrative*

Jonathan Culler has suggested several elements that need to be taken into account for analysing a narrative. These are:

Who is the narrator?

Who constitutes the audience?

When was the narrative written?

What is the time gap between the events described and the recalling of the events?

The narrator of course is Nehru himself and he writes of past events in which he has played a part and of persons with whom he has been connected.

Every narrative has an audience and this is true for personal diaries as well as for less personal narratives. Given the self-clarificatory nature of his narrative, it comes as no surprise that Nehru should disclaim any intention of having any deliberate audience in view. But he hastens to add that his audience consisted of his own countrymen and countrywomen. This partly accounts for the generally intimate tone of the narrative. He knows that he enjoys the confidence of his people and is confident that what he writes about the country's turbulent years will interest them.

Nehru's autobiographical narrative takes the story of his years upto February 1935 when he was 45.

Like many narratives, this one tries to describe his moods and thoughts at the time of each event, "to represent as far as I could my feelings on the occasion." But he concedes that "It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings" And that "later ideas must inevitably have coloured my account of earlier days". (596)

This preliminary discussion should help you to approach the *Autobiography* with great understanding and formulate your own views about the book.

4.4 CHAPTERWISE ANALYSIS

4.4.1 Chapter 1: *Descent from Kashmir*, (p 1-5)

In the first chapter Nehru describes his lonely childhood in a large prosperous family and also narrates the story of his Kashmiri origins from that an ancestor named Raj Kaul, who probably migrated to Delhi at Emperor Farukhsiar's instance.

Nehru opens and closes his autobiographical narrative with apt quotations. The opening quotation from Abraham Cowley refers to the dilemma of an autobiographer. His task, as Cowley says, is both hard and nice, nice perhaps because it grates his own heart to say anything of disparagement, and hard because it, grates the reader's ears to hear anything of praise for him. The closing epigraph from Talmud talks of the essential incompleteness of human labour.

Comments

The whole account of his early childhood and of his descent from Kashmir is given in a matter of fact manner that does not invite attention to itself. But the first sentence of the narrative could be called epigrammatic - "An only son of prosperous parents is apt to be spoilt, specially in India" (p1) and recalls the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* and though he does not say so here or elsewhere, the whole book could be seen as a refutation of the traditional wisdom.

Most of his narrative is taken up with an account of his ancestry, which expectedly narrows down to his father Motilal Nehru who succeeded eminently at the law and made lots of money and loved all the good things of life and took to western ways.

In spite of his obvious admiration for his father there is no attempt to idealize him. One can also detect a certain obvious pride in his Kashmiri Brahminical heritage, which becomes clearer in the *Epilogue*.

Nehru's account is generally marked by a fine restraint. Here he presents facts about his father and the possible influences on him but he refrains from drawing any conclusions.

Jawaharlal Nehru

4.4.2 Chapter IV: *Harrow and Cambridge* (p 17-26)

In this chapter Nehru talks about his education in England at the expensive public school at Harrow, Trinity College, Cambridge and the Inner Temple. He also talks of the Indian students and Indian leaders he met there; of his being influenced by the aestheticism of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater and of the brief period when he cultivated expensive tastes and tried to live like "a man about town"

He also writes of his agitation at the big events in Indian politics and of his vague dreams of playing a gallant part in the fight for freedom. The chapter inevitably talks of his father's "moderate brand of politics and his frank dislike of religious nationalism", a view that Nehru himself shared.

Comments

Writing about himself as he was thirty years before, Nehru is disarmingly honest and objective. Additionally his self-deprecating tone and his quiet sense of humour are likely to appeal to the cultivated reader. Here is an early hint of Nehru's self-deprecating manner: "Always I had a feeling that I was not one of them [his classmates at Harrow], and the others must have felt the same way about me. I was left a little to myself. But on the whole I took my full share in the games, *without in any way shining at them*, and it was, I believe recognised that I was no shirker." (Italics added, p 17) Later while describing himself as a new entrant to the university he comes with a gem that combines amused self-deprecation with balanced phrasing: "With a self-conscious air I wandered about the big courts and narrow streets of Cambridge, delighted to meet a person I knew" (p 19) Still later when he tries living extravagantly like a 'man about town', his self-criticism becomes stronger: "I was merely trying to ape to some extent the prosperous but somewhat empty-headed Englishman who is called 'man about town'. This soft and pointless existence, needless to say, did not improve me in any way. My early enthusiasm began to tone down and *the one thing that seemed to go up was my conceit*" (italics added, p 25).

The self-criticism continues till the end of his chapter when he comes back to Bombay after a stay of over 7 years in England as "a bit of a prig with little to commend me."

Nehru's "writing is enlivened by a quiet sense of humour. Notice his dig at A.M. Khwaja as he got up at a public meeting in Cambridge to ask the visiting Indian leader G.K. Gokhale a question: "Khwaja got up from the body of the hall and put an interminable question, which went on and on, till most of us had forgotten how it began and what it was about.," (p.22)

Nehru's usual weapon of criticism of those contemporaries whose conduct he did not approve of is irony. This is how he speaks of those who at Cambridge talked extremist language but ended up holding respectable jobs in British India: "Later I was to find that these persons were to become members of the Indian Civil Services, High Court Judges, very staid and sober lawyers, and the like. Few of these parlour firebrands took any effective part in Indian political movements subsequently." (22)

Besides, Nehru always has an eye for a vivid detail. Here is a very small example: "Eighteen years later I was again in Paris when Lindberg came *like a shining arrow from across the Atlantic*." (Italics added, p. 25)

4.4.3 Chapter VII: *The Coming of Gandhiji: Satyagraha and Amritsar* (p 40-47)

This chapter begins with a description of the post -World War I scene in India, of the air of expectancy of great constitutional changes among the middle classes and of unrest among the masses particularly among the peasantry.

In spite of universal opposition, the Government passed the Rowlatt Bill that provided for arrest and trial -- the checks and formalities the law is supposed to provide. The resulting agitation saw the emergence of Gandhiji as an all India leader. The Jallianwalla Bagh massacre followed which sent shock waves throughout the country and gave a new shape and a new orientation to the national movement.

The chapter narrowing its focus gives us a fascinating glimpse of Gandhi's power of leadership and how he obtains the assent of Khilafat leaders who doubted the efficacy of his policy of non-violence.

The chapter also gives a glimpse of the turmoil in the family caused by the prospect of the arrest of a dearly beloved son on offering satyagraha against the Rowlatt Acts.

Comments

The following points could be made:

1. The irony that the draconian Rowlatt Acts were not used even once during the three years of their existence is not lost upon Nehru. He observes: "One might almost think that the object of the measure [The Rowlatt Acts] was to bring trouble." (41) Further, the laws enacted later were far more harsh so much so that Nehru ironically says that the Rowlatt Bills might almost be considered a charter of liberty".(41)
2. Honesty marks this chapter as it does the others as Nehru tries to probe the motives of his father's initial reaction to Gandhiji's plan of offering individual satyagraha.

What good would the gaol - going of a number of individuals do, what pressure could it bring on the Government? Apart from these general considerations, what really moved him was the personal issue. It seemed to him preposterous that "I should go to prison. The trek to prison had not then begun and the idea was most repulsive [to the father]. (41-42)

He admires his father greatly but that does not prevent him now, as it did not prevent him earlier, from being critical of him.

3. Nehru is not bitter against Englishmen, not even against Gen Dyer of the Jallian Walah Bagh notoriety. He of course describes the terrible event as a 'massacre' and gives a graphic account of the murderous fire mowing down "people trapped within the four walls of the Bagh". But all that he does is first to refute Edward Thompson, a friend of Nehru's, who had suggested in an extenuation of Dyer's action that he (Gen. Dyer) was under the impression that there were other exits from the Bagh. Then he records that he overheard the hero of Jallianwala Bagh, as he ironically calls him, boasting in "an aggressive and triumphant tone' about what he had done: "He pointed out how he had the entire town at his mercy and he had felt like reducing the rebellious city to a heap of ashes, but he took pity on it and refrained." (43) Nehru abjures all condemnation and by way of comment simply says: "I was greatly shocked to hear his conversation and to observe his callous manner." (44) Deeds speak louder than any comment on them.

4. Nehru's report on the meeting in Allahabad in which the Muslim leaders came to accept Gandhiji's creed of non-violence is interesting on two counts. First his account is mildly humorous and is a testimony of what a great leader can achieve on the strength of his earnest convictions. Second it contains a brief but sharply etched estimate of Gandhiji that one is unlikely to forget easily. Here is a longish extract from the chapter.

Gandhiji addressed them and after hearing him looked even more frightened than before. He spoke well in his best dictatorial vein. He was humble but also clear-cut and hard as a diamond, pleasant and soft-spoken but inflexible and terribly earnest. His eyes were mild and deep, but yet out of them blazed out a fierce energy and determination. (46)

Nehru reports Gandhiji's exhortation as follows:

This is going to be a great struggle, he said, with a very powerful adversary. If you want to take it up, you must be prepared to lose everything, and you must subject yourself to the strictest non-violence and discipline. When war is declared martial law prevails, and in our non-violent struggle there will also have to be dictatorship and martial law on our side, if we are to win..... But as long as you choose to keep me as your leader you must accept my conditions, you must accept dictatorship and the discipline of martial law. But that dictatorship will always be subject to your goodwill. (46)

The crowning irony is - and the irony is not lost on Nehru - that it is the apostle of non-violence who is using what Nehru calls "military analogies:" "Something to this effect he said and these military analogies and the unyielding earnestness of the man made the flesh of most of his hearers creep. But Shaukat Ali was there to keep the waverers up to the mark, and when the time for voting came the great majority of them quietly and shamefacedly voted for the proposition, that is for war!"(46-47)

Nehru is sharply critical of Gandhiji in his *Autobiography* but the view of his personality given above is unforgettable.

4.4.4 Chapter XXX In Naini Prison (217-25)

This is one of the twelve chapters in the *Autobiography* that deal with Nehru's experiences in prison. These experiences begin from the time of his first imprisonment during the course of which he first stayed in Alipore jail and then Dharadun jail and finally Almora district jail.

In *Naini Prison* is largely reflective and shows Nehru's compassion for less fortunate prisoners. Nehru begins realistically with a brief description of the part of the jail called Kuttaaghar where he was confined, the nocturnal jail noises he heard and of the inhuman practice of employing human labour-power to work a huge water pump in front of his enclosure.

He then goes on to talk the plight of the lifers - convicts sentenced to life and how inhuman treatment turned them into automatons responsive only to fear. Nehru stresses the need to distinguish between hardened criminals and the non-criminal types. He then goes on to point out the discrimination made between the facilities available to European prisoners and to Indian prisoners and stresses the need for a more humane treatment of them. He also feels a sense of guilt at having an easier time in the jail.

Towards the end of the chapter Nehru likens the efficient but heartless administration of an Indian prison with the working of the British government of India.

The chapter closes on a personal note with Narmada Prasad Singh joining him a month later and then ten and a half months later his own father and Dr. Syed Mahmud.

Comments

We shouldn't forget that prison is central to the *Autobiography*. Nehru had thought of calling it *In and Out of Prison*. Prison life meant a great deal of deprivation for Nehru. "One misses", he says in Chapter XIV 'Out Again', "many things in prison, but perhaps most of all one misses the sound of women's voices and children's" laughter." In Lucknow District Gaol he suddenly realised that he had not heard "a dog bark for seven or eight months". (98) But these experiences also result in an expansion of his sympathies. He becomes aware of what it means to spend long years in prison and of many a promising life lost in it. And of course prison life promotes introspection which results in the writing of the book.

This chapter "In Naini Prison" needs to be read along with some at least of the 11 other chapters on the subject.

Nehru conveys a sense of being cooped up in prison with the help of an anonymous quotation.

Referring to his circular enclosure, he wonders if a circular wall and the absence of corners and angles add to a sense of captivity. During the daytime he looked

Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by.

At night he imagined "I was at the bottom of a well. Or else that part of the star-lit sky that I saw ceased to be real and seemed part of an artificial planetarium" (218).

Nehru is compassionate towards the non-criminal prisoners herded together with hardened criminals and he is guilt-ridden at receiving better treatment than most political prisoners. But he overdoes neither. His is an informed sympathy and he quotes Lewis E. Lawes the Warden of Sing Sing Prison in New York who, according to Nehru, says that "only 12-1/2 percent of his prison population is aggressively anti-social and are really bad." His simple idealism is reflected in the suggestion that "a more sensible economic policy, more employment, more education would soon empty out our prisons." (220)

Nehru's experience of Indian prisons leads him to compare them with the British rule in India. Both are efficient and heartless. He works out the analogy in some detail:

Outside, in the government of our country, we see much of this duplicated on a longer, though less obvious, scale. But there the C.W.'s [convict wardens] or C.O.'s [Convict overseers] are known differently. They have impressive titles, and their liveries of office are more gorgeous. And behind them, as in prison, stands the armed guards with weapons ever ready to enforce conformity. (225)

Nehru does not stop there. He expands his meditations further and says that "in prison one begins to appreciate the Marxian theory, that the state is really the coercive apparatus meant to enforce the will of a group that controls the government." (225)

In chapter LII, Nehru uses another analogy to depict India's plight. He compares India to an "enormous country-house...that they [the British] owned," and expands it to some extent.

4.4.5 Chapter L IV: *The Record of British Rule* (433-49)

Nehru's views on Englishmen and on English rule are widespread throughout the *Autobiography*. While he resented the presence and behaviour of English rulers, he says he had no feelings whatever against individual Englishmen. "In my heart I rather admired the English." (6) Later he reported a story that accounted for his father's "anti-British politics of his being refused membership of a English Club, adding: "As individuals we had usually met with courtesy from the Englishman and we got as well with him, though, like all Indians, we were no doubt racially conscious of subjection and resented it bitterly.'" (101) In the chapter on *What is Religion?* he censures the Church of England which has served the purpose of British imperialism and has sought to justify its predatory policy in Asia and Africa. (376) His censure of British rule goes to the extent of calling the Government of India metaphorically as one big efficiently run but heartless prison.

In this chapter Nehru subjects the record of British rule in India to a searching and systematic analysis. He states the different claims made for the British rule in India and then examines each one of them giving credit and blame where each is due. Most of all while he is grateful to the British for the one splendid gift of science and its rich offspring i.e. industry, he ensures them for encouraging disruptive, obscurantist, reactionary and sectarian elements in the country. But more than the deficiencies of the British he is critical of the failings of Indians themselves.

Comments

The *Autobiography* offers several kinds of writing, narrative, descriptive, reflective and argumentative and often a combination of two or more kinds. This chapter entitled *The Record of British rule* shows Nehru at his argumentative best. But though he presents his case like a skillful lawyer, he is more interested in discovering the truth rather than in winning it

Nehru begins by stating the British point of view and he does so in the words of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform (1934) which could be expected to put the British case in strong terms.

The Report credits the Government with establishing political unity, the rule of law and a just and efficient administration and indeed with fostering the first beginnings of nationalism.

Nehru concedes that the British first opened India's "window to the West and bought her one aspect of Western industrialism and science. But having done it, Nehru says, they throttled the future industrial growth of the country. Thereby they delayed political growth and in fact preserved outdated feudal relics in the country.

Further, it has been claimed that the educational and material progress in the country has been greater during the British period than at any other period of her long history. But progress in these fields in almost every country has been tremendous during the past century. We need to be grateful to the British for the benefits of railways, telegraphs, telephone and the wireless but these things came to us primarily to strengthen the British rule.

The fault lay with the British concept of ruling India which was the police concept. The Government job was only to protect the state. The economic need of the citizens were sacrificed to British interests.

Nehru then examines the merit of the British claim of having fostered political unity. "Unity is a good thing." Nehru agrees but, "unity in subjection is hardly to be proud of" Political unity came about as a side-product of the British empire's progress but when that unity challenged the alien rule the rulers promoted disunity and sectarianism. Likewise, peace is necessary for progress, but peace imposed by an alien conqueror has hardly the restful quality of the real peace. On the contrary quoting William James, he applauds war or rather the moral equivalent of war because it fosters virtues like fidelity, cohesiveness, tenacity, heroism and several other virtues.

Nehru then proceeds to examine the British claim of progress in India. There have been big changes in India--railway, irrigation, factories, schools, colleges and huge government offices but India, according to Nehru, is still a servile state. He then proposes a vital test of progress--the wellbeing of the people as a whole and from this point of view "India makes a terribly poor show today." (437)

At this point he raises his voice and asks a series of rhetorical questions.

We read of great schemes of unemployment relief and the alleviation of distress in other countries; what of our scores of millions of unemployed and the distress that is widespread and permanent? We read also of housing schemes elsewhere; where are the houses of hundreds of millions of our people, who live in mud huts or have no shelter at all? May we not envy the lot of other countries where education, sanitation, medical relief, cultural facilities and production advance is rapidly ahead, while we remain where we were, or plod wearily along at the pace of a snail?" (437-38)

Then he focuses on Russia, Backward Turkey and Fascist Italy all of which made giant strides towards widespread literacy ending with the words of the Italian Education Minister Gentile who called for "a frontal attack on illiteracy". That gangrenous plague, which is rotting our body politic, must be extirpated with a hot iron." (438) Nehru's own comment is sharp and ironical.

Hard words, unseemly for a drawing room,... We are polite, here and use more rounded phrases. We move warily and exhaust our energies in commissions and committees." (438) Prophetic words these for they seem to script the course that governments have taken in modern India.

Nehru refers to the India of his day as "a poor and dismal sight", particularly to the grinding poverty of the Indian peasant and quotes 10 lines from the American poet E. Markham, that highlight his woes. But he does not absolve Indians of all responsibility for their plight which he says, are the inevitable consequences of their own weaknesses.

Nehru is very caustic about the virtues imputed to the civil services.

Hierophants of the sacred mysteries of government, they will guard the temple and prevent the vulgar from entering its holy precincts. Gradually, as we make ourselves worthy of the privilege, they will remove the veils, one after another till, in some future age, even the holy of holies stands uncovered to wondering and reverent eyes." (440)

He then questions the views of Major D. Graham Pole, formerly a Labour member of British Parliament, who talks of the indisputable ability and efficiency of the Indian Civil Service. The ICS consists of men, Nehru says, who are on the whole mediocre and who are out of tune with the spirit of changing times. He quotes the example of the crisis of the civil disobedience movement saying that they came out poorly of the crisis.

India's poverty, according to the ICS, Nehru says, is blamed on her social customs, their *banias* and moneylenders and above all her population. But he says, we ignore "the greatest *bania* of all-the British government". About over- population, he says, that the much advertised increase of population in India has been at a much lower rate than in the West and that as in the West limiting factors are likely to check population increase in India also.

At this stage in the argument Nehru with the prescience of a statesman looks forward to the time when India will be free and will need the services of many ICS men both Indian and foreign but he is categorical in saying that no new order can be built so long as the spirit of ICS pervades our administration.

Towards the end Nehru devotes some attention to the Defence Services and shows up the follies of generals and admirals quoting from Lloyd Genge's *War Memoirs*.

At the end Nehru repeats the question he asked in the first sentence: "What has been the record of British rule in India?"

Since the whole chapter is written in a heightened tone, he resorts to rhetoric: "Who are we to complain of its deficiencies when they were but the consequences of our own failings?" And two sentences later: "Are we to complain of the cyclone that uproots us and hurts us about, or the cold wind that makes us shiver?" (449)

He ends the chapter with a appeal to forget the past and move forward to the future:

Let us have done with the past and its bickering and face the future. To the British we must be grateful for one splendid gift of which they were the bearess, the gift of science and its rich offspring. It is difficult, however, to forget or view with equanimity the efforts of the British Government in India to encourage the disruptive, obscurantist, reactionary, sectarian, and opportunist elements in the country. Perhaps that too is a needed test and challenge for us, and *before India is reborn it will have to go through again and again the fire that cleanses and tempers and burns up the weak, the impure and the corrupt.*" (449)

Nehru is not over fond of using metaphors and images but the image of fire that burns and cleanses and tempers is singularly apt in the context in which he was writing. The image reminds us Indians of Sita's fire ordeal that tested her chastity but it could remind Westerners of the fire of purgatory. It is characteristic of Nehru to have used an image having implications across cultures.

4.4.6 Chapter LXVIII: *Epilogue* (595-97)

Nehru ends as he had begun with an epigraph. The initial epigraph from Abraham Cowley spoke of the difficulties of an autobiographer. The present epigraph from Talmud draws attention to the essential incompleteness of human endeavor.

Nehru records that the immediate labour i.e. the autobiographical narrative has been completed but he is over 45 and so many more years of life have to be lived.

His mood is reminiscent. He tries to sum up how he has been a part of a great mass movement: "Sometimes we were fortunate enough to that fullness of life which comes from attempting to fit ideals with action." (595) Life, he says, has been an "adventure of absorbing interest" where there is so much to learn. But he would not have it any different.

In Chapter LXIV *Dehra Gaol Again* he tells how he came to write the narrative. (559). Here he speaks about the difficulties of writing:

It is difficult to recapture a past mood, and it is not easy to forget subsequent happenings. Later ideas thus must inevitably have coloured my account of earlier days..." (596)

The tentativeness suggested here is welcome as it leaves the final evaluation to the reader.

The reference to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar is somewhat intrusive in a summing up. Nehru dismisses him as a full-blooded apologist of British rule in India. But he says, he agrees with C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar that "he [Nehru] does not represent mass feeling."

Nehru takes this opportunity to say that he is a queer mixture of the East and West. "out of place everywhere, at home nowhere." (596) His thoughts and his approach are, he says, more Western but India clings to him in numerable ways. Nehru is also proud of racial memories of generations of Brahmans. "I cannot get rid of either that past inheritance or my recent acquisition." (596) As a result he feels a stranger and alien in the West but he also has "an exile's feeling in his own country". This is candour at its disarming best.

After expressing his ambivalent feelings, Nehru uses the metaphor of climbing mountains recalling Pope's words in *An Essay on Criticism*. He then says "the higher one goes the more laborious becomes the journey and the summit recedes into the clouds. *Yet the climbing is worth the effort and has its own joy and satisfaction.*" (597)

So pleas'd at first he tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount over the vales, and see to head the sky,
Th'eternal snows appear already past,
And the first clouds and mountains seem the last;
But, those attained, we tremble to survey.
The growing labour of the lengthen'd way,
The increasing proof act tries our mandring eyes
Hills peep over hills, ad Alps on Alps arrive!

Here is a proof, if a proof, is needed, of India clinging to Nehru for the italicized sentence echoes the teaching of Gita.

4.5 HOW THE *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* HAS BEEN RECEIVED

The book was generally well-received in England and even those who disagreed with the point of view of the author recognised its importance and quality. Friends like Ellen Wilkinson, Edward Thompson and H.N Brailsford "hailed it as a basic utterance of one of the few great men of the time." According to *The Economist* any understanding of the last fifteen years in India was incomplete without reading it. Sir Standley Reed considered it to be an exceptional book. According to Nehru's biographer S. Gopal, the book "despite being a long and serious book, became a bestseller and within weeks ran into many editions."

Nearer home Tagore praised it highly: "I have just finished reading your great book and I feel immensely impressed and proud of your achievement. Through all its details there runs a deep current of humanity which overpasses the tangles of facts and leads us to the person who is greater than his deed, and truer than his surroundings." Perhaps the best praise has come from John Gunther who wrote in his best selling book *Inside Asia* (1974): "Nehru's *Autobiography* is subtle, complex,

discriminating, infinitely cultivated, steeped in doubt, suffused with intellectual passion. It is a kind of Indian *Education of Herry Adams* written in superlative prose-hardly a dozen men alive write English as well as Nehru-and it is not only an autobiography of the most searching kind, but the story of a whole society, the story of the life and development of a nation."

Jawaharlal Nehru

4.6 LET US SUM UP

The sampling of six chapters from Nehru's *Autobiography* has I suppose, given you a fair idea of the prose style of the writer.

Nehru's style reflects a cultivated consciousness, it is the style of a man who has read enormously and has absorbed a great deal of what he had read. Evidence of this is widespread in the book in the form of quotations used as epigraphs to chapters and other references. And he writes as one to whom writing came easy. Walter Cocer an Australian diplomat and Nehru's contemporary compliments him on his English saying that Nehru at his best wrote better English than "most of us born to the language." And he was not alone in doing so.

Nehru is disarmingly candid about himself and he tries to be fair to his opponents and hardly ever loses his temper. The writing is urbane and controlled but he is unalterable opposed to the continuance of British imperialism in India. This passion to see India free colours the entire book.

The writing is not without humour, though the issue of India's freedom does not afford much scope for it and it is sometimes enlivened by an apt metaphor or a comparison.

4.7 GLOSSARY

Nehru, Motilal (1861-1931):	Lawyer, Congress nationalist leader.
Harrow:	A public school at Harrow-on-the-hill, Middlesex and traditional rival of Eton college. The founding of the school goes back to the days of Queen Elizabeth I.
Tripas:	The honours examination for the B.A degree at Cambridge University.
Gandhi, Mahatma (1869-1948):	Father of the Nation.
Shaukat Ali, Maulana (1873-1938):	Khilafat leader; along with his more famous brother M.Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) plunged into the non-cooperation movement; later drifted away for the Congress and Gandhiji.
Inner Temple:	One of the two Inns of court on the site of the Temple in London.
Raza Ali, Sir Syed (1882-1949):	Was a khilafat leader; later joined the Muslim League, presiding over its Bombay session, December 1924.

Sing Sing prison:	a New York state prison built in 1825-26, formerly notorious for its severe discipline.
George d. Lloyd (1863-1945):	British Liberal statesman; Prime Minister of England 1916-26.
Talmud:	the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. "Jawaharlal Nehru wrote with self-scrutiny and self-criticism but no self-pity." Do you agree? Discuss with reference to the excerpts from Nehru's *Autobiography* prescribed for you.
2. Write your personal reaction to Nehru's *Autobiography*.
3. Make an assessment of Nehru's prose style in his *Autobiography*.

4.9 SUGGESTED READING

Primary text

Jawaharlal Nehru. *An Autobiography* New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial fund OUP, 1936; 1980; rpt. 1982.

All references to the *Autobiography* are to this edition and are indicated in the text of the study material by page numbers.

Secondary Material

C.D. Narasimhaiah. "Autobiographies: Jawaharlal Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri," in *Essays in Commonwealth Literature: Heirloom of Multiple Heritage* Delhi: Pencraft, 1995 (p.46-70)

CROCKER, WALTER *NEHRU, a Contemporary's Estimate*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1966.

Walter Crocker was the High Commissioner for Australia in India for six and a half years between 1952 and 1962, when it was his job to watch Nehru 'day by day.' See chapter 3 entitled 'Nehru's Personal Background' p.58-68.

Dikshit, Sheila. et al. *Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary Volume*. Delhi: OUP, 1989. [Please see 'A Man of Letters' by K. Natwar-singh, p 430-35 and Rabindarnath Tagore's letter dated 31st May 1936 to Nehru on the *Autobiography*.]

Gopal, Sarvepalli. *Jawaharlal Nehru: a Biography* Volume One 1889-1947 Bombay: OUP, 1975.

Rao and Raghavan. *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study of His Writings and Speeches*. Mysore, 1960.

UNIT 5 NIRAD C. CHAUDHURI

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*
- 5.3 *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*
- 5.4 Critical Opinion
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Glossary
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will read selections from Nirad C. Chaudhuri's autobiography. We shall critically examine one long chapter from *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, the book which catapulted Chaudhuri to fame, and then two selections from its sequel, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, to acquaint ourselves with Chaudhuri's distinctive prose style and his beliefs. His opinions are controversial, and critical opinion about his achievement is divided. You should aim at evaluating this leading writer of non-fiction prose yourself.

5.1 INTRODUCTION



Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1998)

Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1998) was born on November 23 into a middle class family in Kishorganj, a small town in Mymensingh District of East Bengal. He was educated in Bengal, and took his B.A. (Hons.) degree from the University of Calcutta in 1918. He studied for an M.A. degree in history, but was unsuccessful in the examination. Even as a school child, he was fascinated by books and the intellectual life. The atmosphere at home was conducive to an appreciation of Western literature and music. He was very well read, and had learnt European languages like French, German and Latin. Lack of a master's degree ruled out the chances of teaching in a college, and he found it difficult to get suitable employment. For some time he tried free lance journalism. From 1937 to 1941 he worked as a secretary to Saratchandra Bose (Subhas Chandra's brother). Fed up with Bengali insularity, he left Calcutta to settle down in Delhi, and took up a government job there. He worked for All India Radio from 1941 to 1952. But he found that Delhi, too, was full of Philistines.

He was extremely fortunate in marriage. As Amita Malik puts it (Nirad C. Chaudhuri: *The First Hundred Years, A Celebration* p.58): "Nirad Chaudhuri would not have been what he is without the patience and unfailing support of his wife". Following tradition, he did not want to see the girl chosen by his father; as he tells us in the second volume of his autobiography, he himself was not a very impressive physical specimen, being short, thin and dark-skinned. They had three sons, and his wife Amiya supported his eccentric ways in their six decades of married life. He was always extravagant in his love for art objects, and acquired them even if they were beyond his means. He recounts how his wife had to settle the account by selling off the gold coins she had received as a marriage present when he bought some expensive Cashmere shawls on credit. Their financial situation did not improve even after moving to Delhi, because of Chaudhuri's penchant for buying rare wines and books from money which could be better spent on routine household expenses.

His first book, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (discussed in Section 5.2, henceforth referred to as *Unknown Indian*) made him famous. He was denounced as an Anglophile, but his mastery of English was admired. *Unknown Indian* is actually not his first significant publication. "Defence of India or Nationalization of Indian Army", a seventy-three page essay, was published in 1935 by the All India Congress Committee, Allahabad. Naik has observed that "Two interesting features of this early essay are the total absence from it of both his notorious anglophilia and his Hindu-baiting. There is also not the slightest trace here of those preconceived theories and prejudices about Hindu character and culture which gradually hardened into obstinate dogmas as Chaudhuri grew older" (Naik, 1984, p.106).

In 1955 he went abroad for the first time in his life. The British Council arranged for him to visit England, where he spent five weeks at the invitation of the B.B.C. to prepare some talks for its Overseas Service. The newspaper articles he wrote about his visit grew into his second book, *A Passage to England*, a very readable travelogue. *A Passage to England* received good reviews in the English press. According to Khushwant Singh, "Three editions were rapidly sold out and it had the distinction of becoming the first book by an Indian author to have become a bestseller in England" (Dasgupta 31). He has preconceived concepts of England drawn from his reading of English literature, and he is acutely conscious of the fact that England is very different from India. His happiness at seeing "a great many things that I had longed to see since my boyhood" makes this the most enjoyable of his books.

In 1970 he moved to England, and started work on a biography of Max Müller. Just as he had never gone back to Kishorganj after 1927, he never came back to India, and settled down at the university town of Oxford. He was badly disappointed when he found that contemporary English society was very different from the picture he had built up from his reading of literature. He could never accept a society which produced hippies and glorified the Beatles, and this disenchantment is expressed in his last book, *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*. (The three "horsemen" are individualism, nationalism and democracy, which he holds responsible for the

decadence which has overtaken civilization). The University of Oxford honoured him with a D.Litt. in 1990. The Queen conferred the CBE on him. He was a Fellow of the Royal Literary Society. He died in July 1998.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

Chaudhuri's third book, *The Continent of Circe : An Essay on the Peoples of India* (1966) provoked fierce controversy. He proposed the thesis that Hindus are actually a race alien to India and are arrivals from Europe. Modern Hindus are descended from the fair-haired, blue-eyed Aryans who inhabited the region between the Volga and the Danube. Circe was a sorceress in Greek mythology. Anyone who drank from her cup was turned into a pig, and this was the fate of the companions of Odysseus (Ulysses) in *The Odyssey*. India is a sorceress; due to the climatic conditions, people who make it their home, in the course of time, become dehumanized and turn into swine. *The Continent of Circe* reveals Chaudhuri's detestation of India at its pathological extreme; the influence of this "Circe" has made "insanity" and "inertia" the principal attributes of present day Hindus. He reveals a perfectly "Orientalist" attitude to India (in the sense in which Said uses the term). He glorifies ancient Vedic India, but finds nothing good in the present. His attempt to trace a European lineage for himself (and all Hindus) has been called "an instance of acute anglophilia" (Kaul, p.54). His later books of intellectual exposition, like *the Intellectual in India* (1967) and *To Live or Not to Live* (1970) are slightly more objective in their comments on India and Indians, though he consistently criticises the anglicized Indian. His essays have appeared in journals like *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *London Magazine*. A collection, *East is East and West is West*, edited by his son, was published in 1996.

His biography of Clive, *Robert Clive of India*, is overwhelmingly favourable to this Nabob, who enriched himself through loot. Chaudhuri attempts to justify Clive's rapacity on the grounds that "The acceptance of gifts was not contrary to the regulations then in force" (Clive, pp.260-61). *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller* (1974) is generally considered Chaudhuri's best book, and won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1975.

5.2 THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN UNKNOWN INDIAN

In *Thy Hand, Great Anarch*, Chaudhuri says about his first book that, "In spite of its title, the book was not truly an autobiography. It was a picture of the society in which I was born and grew up." Chaudhuri is quite clear about his purpose in writing *Unknown Indian*:

The story I want to tell is the story of the struggle of a civilization with a hostile environment, in which the destiny of the British Empire in India became necessarily involved. My main intention is thus historical, and since I have written the account with the utmost honesty and accuracy of which I am capable, the intention in my mind has become mingled with the hope that the book may be regarded as a contribution to contemporary history. (p.ix)

He states his target audience: "I have written this book with the conscious object of reaching the English-speaking world" (p.ix). Perhaps this intended readership is responsible for Chaudhuri always using similes from European art, literature and history. Both the preface and the prefatory note to the first section are in the style typical of the book: there are long, involved sentences, and a liberal sprinkling of words from European languages. There are many situations where only the French or Latin quotation would do. But Chaudhuri seems to use foreign phrases even if English equivalents exist. The common reader may not be fully conversant with these phrases, and pausing to find out the meaning provides a needless break in the reading experience. Here are two sentences from the second paragraph of *Unknown Indian*:

"These recollections of mine are in no sense *des memoires d'outre-tombe*. If anyone so chooses he may call them *memoires d'outre-Manche* in a figurative sense, in the sense that, retreating before the *panzers* of the enemy who has seized my past life, I have decided to put between him and me, between apparent defeat and acceptance of defeat, a narrow but uncrossable strip of salt water. (ix)

Chaudhuri declares that his autobiography is not to be treated as "*des memoires d'outre-tombe*" (an account from beyond the grave). He says that readers may call them "*memoires d'outre-Manche*", that is, an account from the other side of the sea (the English Channel, the arm of the sea separating England and France, is called La Manche in French). Chaudhuri's metaphors are always from the West; he refers to the German panzers, (literally "armour", the elite armoured corps of the German army, a truly fearsome fighting force in the Second World War). He assumes that his reader should be as erudite as he is, and never provides a translation. There is a tendency in Chaudhuri's prose for the main point to get lost in a haze of verbiage.

The dedication has been widely denounced, and Chaudhuri has been condemned as unpatriotic. We should pay more attention to the aptness and the style of the dedication, and consider how it expresses Chaudhuri's sensibility, before discussing Chaudhuri's political stance. The dedication is natural, even inevitable, considering Chaudhuri's warm feelings towards the British Empire. It also reveals Chaudhuri's egoism -- he assumes that everyone has the same admiration for the Empire, for he declares "Everyone of us threw out the challenge". It never strikes him that many Indians did not want to be British, they preferred independence to citizenship. The vast majority would not say, "Civic Britannicus Sum" (I am a British citizen). But a careful reading shows that the first part of the dedication does not shower praise on the British without reservations, Chaudhuri hints at British discrimination, when he mentions subjecthood without citizenship, implying that Indians were subjects to be ruled (and perhaps exploited), but did not have the privileges and rights of a citizen.

Unknown Indian is in four books. Book I, "Early Environment" (pp. 1-130) is devoted to the background, describing Kishorganj, his ancestral village, and his mother's village, and Bengali society at the end of the nineteenth century. Book II, "First Twelve Years", describes his birth and early life, while Book III, "Education", covers the years he spent at high school and college in Calcutta. He did well in his B.A. examinations, with a first class, and was placed first in order of merit. But his reading for his M.A. examination was encyclopaedic and over ambitious. As he candidly admits, he "disliked and even despised examinations when they were not an immediate reality" (p.367). As a result, he dropped out after sitting for three papers, and the third book of *Unknown Indian* ends with his failure in the academic field. But he became a self-taught scholar. All the people who knew him vouch for his encyclopaedic knowledge, and his biography of Max Müller brings out his best qualities as a scholar. Though he did not get his M.A. from Calcutta University, Oxford University honoured him with a D.Litt. degree.

Book IV, "Into the World" is an essay on life in Bengal in the nineteen-twenties, rather than an account of Chaudhuri's life after he left college. Like some of his later books like *the Continent of Circe*, it reveals more about Chaudhuri's mindset than about the topic discussed, because Chaudhuri chooses only the facts which support his argument, neglecting large chunks of history. The concluding chapter, "An Essay on the Course of Indian History" is full of easy generalizations; he believes that "Civilizations in the successive historical cycles in India are foreign importations" (p.489). Each of the four books has a prefatory note, in which Chaudhuri airs his views about matters contained in the book.

Chaudhuri is always very conscious of the fact that his knowledge of English and England is secondhand, yet he persists in describing things only in English metaphors. Chapter I begins:

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

Kishorganj, my birthplace, I have called a country town, but this description, I am afraid, will call up wholly wrong associations. The place had nothing of the English country town about it, if I am to judge by the illustrations I have seen and the descriptions I have read, these being my only source of knowledge about England, since I have never been there, nor in fact anywhere outside my own country. (p.1)

This acceptance of England and things English as the norm for judging India is, no doubt, the effect of colonization. That all writers of Chaudhuri's generation need not accept England as the standard is shown by the opening chapter of the novel *Kanthapura* (published in 1938, long before Chaudhuri's book) by Raja Rao (b.1908). Rao begins his wonderfully evocative description of the village without any reference to English villages:

Our village -- I don't think you have ever heard about it -- Kanthapura is its name, and it is in the province of Kara.
High on the ghats is it, high up in the steep mountains that face the cool Arabian seas, up the Malabar coast is it, up Mangalore and Puttur and many a centre of cardamom and coffee, rice and sugarcane. . . (*Kanthapura*).

The passage from *Unknown Indian* continues:

Kishorganj was only a normal specimen of its class -- one among a score of collections of tin-and-mat huts or sheds, comprising courts, offices, schools, shops and residential dwellings, which British administration had raised up in the green and brown spaces of East Bengal (p.1).

One notices immediately that Chaudhuri's tone is quite detached -- there is no sense of closeness to his native village. The tone throughout tends to denigrate the village, it is one "among a score", and he is dismissive of all the buildings, whether "residential dwellings" or offices, schools or courts. From a height of five hundred feet, the buildings would have looked like "a patch of white and brown mushrooms." The comparison with "mushrooms" has pejorative implications, with the suggestions of unplanned, untidy, short-lived growth. There is no attempt to individualise the buildings; surely, the court would not have been a hut or a shed, it would have had a permanent brick building.

Chaudhuri's diction seems to be based on bureaucratic jargon, with endless reservations and qualifications. There is no poetic licence whatsoever. Instead of saying that the small town would have looked like a patch of mushrooms when seen from a height, or when seen from an aeroplane, he writes, "Had there been aeroplanes in our boyhood", as if he were giving evidence in a court of law. Metaphors are always from the West; to express the importance of the river in their life, Chaudhuri writes, "it was our Nile" (p.2). In referring to the boats which plied on the river, he does not care to describe them in detail, instead he institutes comparisons which are meaningless to the common reader, especially in India: the "country boats" have "the outlines and general shape of the model boats found in the tombs of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt" (p.4). The largest boats, used for passengers, "were our triremes" (p.5).

He is at his best when he gives us concrete particulars, as in his description of the rainy season (pp.5-8). Chaudhuri evokes this watery world through minute details -- their compound was so flooded that they "could not walk from the hut which was our bed-and-living-room to the hut which was our kitchen except on a line of bricks laid at intervals of about two feet or on a gangway made of bamboos" (p.6). The reader

can visualise the child in the inner courtyard, fascinated by the "myriads of tiny watery marionettes" which were created by a heavy downpour (p.7). The destructive aspect of the heavy monsoon rain is revealed by the "pair of pied mynas, dead and stiff"(p.7). Chaudhuri is capable of using short, simple, balanced sentences:

Everything was wet to the marrow of the bone. Neither we nor our clothes were ever properly dry. When we were not slushy we were damp. The bark of the trees became so sodden that it seemed we could tear it up in handfuls like moss. (p.6)

Chaudhuri's style is usually prolix -- he does not believe in using the minimum number of words. He uses many connecting phrases to link different paragraphs. An example is the beginning of the second paragraph: "I shall presently have something to say of the moral quality of our urban existence. But, to begin with, let me give some idea of its physical aspect" (p.1) The tone is somewhat formal, as in a document where a table of contents precedes the matter. C.D.Narasimhaiah labels his writing "inane", and declares: "Now like an Accountant's English, now like a District Surveyor's report or a village chronicler's, now like that of an ossified academic, seldom what one has associated with an imaginative writer" (Narasimhaiah, 1990,p.92). He gives many examples from the book:

I summarize below the results . . (p.36)

It is this house which I am going to describe now" (p.20)

There was a story behind its building and it is this." (p.22)

The description of Durga Puja at Banagram, (the next excerpt in your Reader), is one of the better passages in *Unknown Indian*. It is rich in adjectives. The gory scene of the buffalo sacrificed before the goddess becomes more vivid in its horror because of the details he gives us : "My relatives fell on it, rubbing its neck with melted butter so as to make the skin soft" (p.67). The changing moods are well captured. This bloody sacrifice is followed by chanting prayers to the Goddess.

One interesting feature Chaudhuri mentions about Durga Puja is that it is the occasion for married daughters to visit their parental home. He is aware of the bond between mother and daughter, and the loneliness of the mother after the girl is given away in marriage. To indicate the mother's emotions, he cite a parallel from French literature: "She kept thinking of her girl with an infatuation rivalling, if not surpassing, that of Madame de Sevigne for her cold and shrewish daughter" (p.70). The allusion reveals Chaudhuri's wide reading, but does very little to describe this tender bond in a culture where it was not permissible for the mother to visit or stay with her married daughter in her new home. After the festivities end, the married daughters have to go back to their husbands' homes. Chaudhuri has little sympathy for the ritual crying that goes on. This is how he describes it:

Not only the mother and the daughter, not only the other women and girls of the family, but also all the visiting neighbours joined in a chorus of snuffling. The tradition was so well established that the newly-married girl, whose only thought was to get back to her husband-lover, and the matron, who felt ever so worried to have been away from her well-ordered household, kept up the wiping of the eyes until they were at least five miles beyond the parental village.(p.70)

There is a welcome touch of humour in Chaudhuri's account of the women pretending to weep; the young girl who wants to go back to her husband has to pretend to weep, because it prejudiced her reputation "if she remained dry-eyed on these occasions." The use of the word "snuffling" indicates that Chaudhuri has no sympathy for these hypocritical women.

"The English Scene" (the next excerpt in your reader) is a chapter from the second book of *Unknown Indian*, "First Twelve Years". He describes how he came to love the English language and English literature so much, and has some perceptive comments on teaching. He tells us that he read his elder brother's books, because they were taught English poetry and good stories, while students in his batch were forced to repeat "The fox sat on the mat" on the theory that textbooks should be Indianized (p. 116). He is quite successful in conveying the enthusiasm that people in Bengal felt for western civilization. The concluding part of the chapter is typical of Chaudhuri's subsequent works. He criticizes Indians for suffering from a colour complex, giving anecdotal evidence from his immediate family. His style is clear and unambiguous when he is castigating Indians:

When not thinking of the foreign conquerors and taking up a self-pitying attitude in consequence, a Hindu is unsurpassed in his exaltation of colour and proneness to make a fetish of it. This comes out most blatantly in connection with marriages. (p. 126)

The fourth book, "Into the World" is in the same vein; it is a comment on Bengali society. We have to turn to the second volume of his autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* to learn about Chaudhuri's life after 1920.

5.3 *THY HAND, GREAT ANARCH*

"This book continues the story of my life and thoughts from the point of time at which it was left in *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*," writes Nirad C. Chaudhuri in the opening sentence of *Thy Hand*. The earlier book gave an account of his childhood and student days till 1921. This one takes the account till 1952. Many autobiographies bring the account up to date, but this, written in 1987, falls short by 35 years. There were major changes in Chaudhuri's life after that. After retirement from government service, he made a living by his writing. He visited England, and wrote a bestseller about his experiences, *A Passage to England*. In his seventies, he left India and settled down at Oxford. Chaudhuri started writing *Thy Hand Great Anarch* in 1979, when he was eighty-one years old, and took six years to complete it. He has not provided us with a sequel to it, so there is no autobiographical account of the last forty-seven years of his life, of which 27 were spent in England.

He says that he has made a conscious effort to "write the book on the same lines and in the same spirit as its predecessor." He is quite successful in this -- there is absolutely no difference in style or tone between the two volumes. The same self-satisfied stance of wisdom, the complete lack of modesty, can be found in the second book. In *Unknown Indian* he boasts about his "capacity for experiencing the emotion of scholarship":

My appetite for information and explanation became as varied as my mental dexterity became versatile. I could pass from physics to Sanskrit literature or from novels to astronomy with an agility which seemed like volatility to those who did not know me well. (*Unknown Indian*, p. 343)

In *Thy Hand*, he talks about his wife, and how fortunate she is in having married such an eminent person:

Even for my wife, I would say, it has been worthwhile, although I could, without unfairness, be accused of showing no consideration for the inevitable trials I was going to inflict on a young girl who had been brought up in affluence. But she is now the wife of Nirad Chaudhuri, instead of being the

nameless wife of a nameless official or professional, rotting in the low prosperity of a suburban house near Calcutta. (*Thy Hand*, p.343)

Unknown Indian was very much concerned with the British empire and its civilizing mission in India. This book, which records the decline and end of British rule in India, takes its title from lines by Alexander Pope which describe the reign of chaos and disorder. The title page of the book bears the complete quotation from Alexander Pope's poem *The Dunciad*, Book 3:

Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos! is restor'd;
Light dies before thy uncreated word;
Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;
And universal Darkness buries All!

The epigraph is in keeping with the tone of the book. When Britain withdrew from India, Chaudhuri felt an almost personal sense of loss. *Thy Hand! Great Anarch* is almost a thousand pages long, and covers the years from 1921 to 1952. It has ten chapters, with a long epilogue:

Introduction "Apologia pro Biographia sua"

Books I Livelihood and Politics 1921-1922.

Book II Towards a Vocation 1922-1925.

Book III The Scholar Gypsy 1926-1928

Part IV The Gandhian Rebellion 1927-1932

Part V Into Married Life 1932-1937.

Part VI Experience of Politics 1937-1939.

Part VII Indian Enjoys the War 1939-1941

Part VIII Migration to Delhi 1942-1945

Book IX Victor-Victim 1945-1947

Book X Crossing the Bar 1947-1952.

Epilogue Credo ut Intelligam

Chaudhuri intersperses the narration of his personal life with a highly subjective version of the historical events of the period. He takes free swipes at many figures of the freedom struggle, none of whom are alive to rebut him. According to him, Gandhiji exuded benignity, but "his demands for money were made in the unabashed manner of all Hindu holy men". Chaudhuri holds Nehru responsible for the failure of the Cripps mission, feels that Subhas Chandra Bose (whom all Bengalis venerate as *Netaji*, "the leader") was unmethodical, inefficient and suspicious, and considers Sarojini Naidu "a victim of monumental egoism". The style, as usual, is almost Victorian, with long involuted sentences. His wide reading and scholarship (some might call it pedantry) are quite evident, and his use of quotations in French, Latin etc. seems to have increased. The first volume has a dedication in English with one Latin phrase; *Thy Hand* has three epigraphs, of which only the one pertaining to the title is in English. As in the earlier volume, there are occasional flashes of wit. He says that his father-in-law overlooked the fact that he was not rich, and said that "he was considering only the young man, and not his money. That attitude has

unfortunately disappeared, and nowadays all fathers boast about marrying their daughters to salaries, and not to men" (p.346).

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

"The Gandhian Congress" (the first excerpt in your Reader) is from Chapter 2 of Book VI, "1937-1939", while "My Credo" forms the concluding lines of *Thy Hand*. Both are representative examples of Chaudhuri's prose style, with long sentences. To illustrate his arguments, Chaudhuri uses erudite comparisons or anecdotes. Consider his account of the difficulties they encountered in getting vegetables of his choice for Mahatma Gandhi. Chaudhuri compares his host Sarat Chandra Bose's nephew with an obscure figure from French history:

He wanted to rise to the occasion, and if he had failed to procure all the vegetables regularly, I am sure he would have killed himself like Vatel, the major domo of the Great Condé, who threw himself on his sword because, when M le Prince was receiving Louis XIV at Chantilly, he found that only two carts of sea fish had arrived instead of the forty he had ordered. (p.435)

This comparison may not work well because most readers would not know this incident in the life of the French king. Similes from common life are much more effective. Describing the men who surrounded Gandhiji, he compares these people who "acquire secondary, derivative power" to a vine. Chaudhuri gives us the common, as well as the scientific Latinized name, of the plant:

They climb upwards by twining themselves round the tree of power as I have seen the Russian Vine (*polygonum baldschuanum* or Mile-a-Minute) doing on the trees they can get to. (p.439)

But in many cases the abstruseness of the comparison completely invalidates it. Consider the image that springs to Chaudhuri's mind when he wants to convey "the extraordinary innocence and benignity" and the "beatific unworldly look" of Mahatma Gandhi. He writes, "On the animal plane . . . Gandhi suggested the primitive primate tarsier to me" (p.439). How many readers would have heard of a tarsier, leave alone being familiar with its appearance?

Thy Hand, Great Anarch combines autobiography with history, politics and social commentary. The Epilogue, "Credo ut Intelligam" (I believe in order to understand) is full of quotations from European authorities. In its long and difficult words, it is typical of Chaudhuri's philosophical essays. (His last book, *The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, is in the same style, and develops further the pessimistic view he takes of the world). The "Credo" is liberally sprinkled with French and Latin quotations. Chaudhuri admires Pascal, the French writer and theologian. The passage beginning "Quelle chimère est-ce . . ." expresses the same ideas as Shakespeare's "What a piece of work is man!" Pascal exclaims, "What an ephemeral thing is this creature called man". He is a study in contradictions; he is a judge of all things, yet has the vision of an earth worm, he is a repository of truth cloaked in error, the glory and the garbage of the universe.

Chaudhuri is not happy with the way Christian morality rejected the natural urges in man. After quoting from the *New Testament*, he adds the comments of Pascal, who is overcome by this vision of a world dominated by lust, "Unfortunate the accursed earth that is burnt rather than watered by these three rivers of fire." In the same paragraph, he discusses Latin, Greek and French versions of these three "rivers of fire": "the concupiscence of the body, the concupiscence of the eye, the concupiscence of the world". Chaudhuri's reading of English literature is also obvious; he refers to Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and quotes the lines "The world's great age begins anew . . ." from Shelley's poem *Hellas*.

Chaudhuri has always been inimical to the technological society, and it is not surprisingly that he condemns Americans for their technological advancement. Filled with overbearing pride, they forget that the laws of nature are supreme. Chaudhuri

expresses this in a witty manner: "they are so powerless against nature that even though they can send a rocket past Neptune by obeying it, they cannot prevent it from wrecking their homes through hurricanes." He says that Americans are the best *Homo faber* "manufacturing man" and the worst *Homo sapiens* "thinking man". He ends with lines from a French poem recognizing the duality of man's existence. People must have faith. The last line, "Peuples de la terre, chantez" means, "Peoples of the earth, sing!" Chaudhuri claims that he is doing just that, having faith in a higher dispensation and continuing with his creative work.

5.4 CRITICAL OPINION

Nirad C. Chaudhuri has provoked an emotional reaction, whether it is to the books or the person. Controversy has surrounded him, and there is no unanimity about the valuation of his work. Swapan Dasgupta's *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The First Hundred Years: A Celebration* (see **Reading List** below) presents fascinating pictures of Chaudhuri's personality, as seen by eminent writers and critics like Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Khushwant Singh and Keki N. Daruwalla. They comment on his English and Bengali writings, in addition to describing the man.

Among all the critics, it is C.D. Narasimhaiah who has the poorest opinion of Chaudhuri's autobiography. He finds absolutely nothing praiseworthy in it. He has compared Nehru's autobiography with Chaudhuri's, and believes that they demonstrate "two kinds of Indian writing: one pulsating with human warmth, the other abstract, ponderous and dully academic; one meant for Indians, another for an English-speaking world abroad" (Narasimhaiah, 1995, p.64). According to him, "Chaudhuri's writing betrays an immaturity that one would not normally associate with a person of his age" (p.65). Illustrating with quotations from *Unknown Indian*, he condemns the "attitudinizing" and "looseness of thinking" of the book, and says that Chaudhuri "misses no chance to magnify things that have any relation to him whether it is the house he lived in, his mode of living, the fairs he visited, the festivals he celebrated, the books and paintings he owned and admired and the tastes he cultivated. Snobbery is writ large on every page" (p.67). Narasimhaiah challenges Chaudhuri's admirers "to produce from the autobiography any well-remembered chapter, section, or even a few pages of continuous writing which can be called distinguished prose" p.68). He points out that none of the people described are memorable, "They are not individualized, or they have nothing of interest to other human beings" (69). However, C.D. Narasimhaiah praises Chaudhuri's later work, "Mr Chaudhuri has made ample amends for his poor and irresponsible writing by contributing an excellent work of scholarship in his recent book on Max Müller. *Scholar Extraordinary*" (p.70).

Scholar Extraordinary seems to be the one book which has won the approval of almost all the critics. Nissim Ezekiel gave it a very favourable review, saying:

His book is certainly a full and detailed portrait of the subject along with its social and cultural background. I cannot imagine any criticism, however valid, of specific insights or even of the treatment in general undermining the worth of this biography as a whole. Chaudhuri's admiration for Müller, which he declares without reservations, leads him to defend Müller against all detractors. But he defends persuasively, and always with a fair statement of their position. This means that at times one may disagree with Chaudhuri and still not feel that he is unduly partisan. (*Selected Prose*, p.154)

The most common charge against Chaudhuri is that he is partisan; he has already made up his mind which side he is on, and does not present alternative view points. But this is not true in the case of his biography of Max Müller. Perhaps because he

found the topic so appealing, or maybe the congenial environment of Oxford university where he wrote it, make this the most scholarly and least polemical of his works.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

However, *Scholar Extraordinary* contains a few wild generalizations, and a "number of statements about Victorian love and sex which are very unsatisfactory, besides contradicting one another" (Ezekiel, pp.156-57). Ezekiel quote three of these statements, and comments:

I suspect that it is not Chaudhuri the scholar who wrote these reckless sentences but the other Chaudhuri, the man of tall prejudices, whose self-pitying moralism taints so much of his intellectual output. I must add that this other Chaudhuri is not conspicuous in the biography of Müller. (p.157)

Sudesh Mishra has written in detail about this interesting aspect of Chaudhuri's writing, that there are two Chaudhuris, "Historical Witness and Pseudo-Historian". "The former Chaudhuri operates largely as a chronicler recording incidents and events to which he has borne personal witness" (p.8). The second Chaudhuri "evaluates history biologically, psycho-culturally, racially, philosophically and idiosyncratically by postulating his personal dilemmas as representative of the Indian people's collective predicament, and in particular of the Hindus" (pp.7-8). His neutral approach is evident in his descriptions of Kishorganj (*Unknown Indian* pp.27-28), or the account of his mother's village (pp.93-95), while the pseudo-historian's approach is evident in his comments about the debilitating effects of the Indian terrain and climate (p.57, p.514). This thesis is developed fully in *The Continent of Circe*, which shows his weakness as a historian. He tries to bend facts to suit his theory, and has no qualms about leaving out any facts that do not fit his theory -- the Indus Valley civilization and the Dravidian culture of South India are completely ignored.

C. Paul Verghese expresses the views of a majority of critics when he writes, "The main weakness of *The Continent of Circe* stems from the fact that the pseudo-sociologist in Chaudhuri conceived a theory about the Hindus and the aboriginals of India and the historian in him started looking for facts and when he did not find them, he depended on pseudo-history" (Verghese, 1973, p.115). Verghese finds something likeable in Chaudhuri's quality of holding convictions whole-heartedly, and feels that in later works like *To Live or Not to Live* Chaudhuri "is sharing with us his mature wisdom and knowledge of life." He concludes that self-contradiction is Chaudhuri's chief characteristic: "for Chaudhuri is an Indian who is anti-Indian, an Anglicized Hindu who is critical of other Anglicized Hindus, an Indian writer in English who sees no virtue in Indian novels in English, a historian who believes in objectivity, but leans heavily on subjective dogmas, a radical non-conformist who supports the caste system, and cow worship, . . ." (116).

5.5 LET US SUM UP

Chaudhuri was intellectually active till the very end, and very proud of this fact. As he writes in the preface to *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, his last book:

The very first thing I have to tell those who will be reading this book is that it is being written by a man in his ninety-ninth year. I have never read or heard of any author, however great or productive in his heyday, doing that.

He goes on to declare:

I have never allowed my likes or dislikes, my predilections and prepossessions to influence my presentation of subjects. I have, so to speak, tried to keep the lens of my mind free from chromatic aberrations.

He thinks of himself as a "medium or amanuensis for the self-revelation of the subjects I deal with. . . . Yet whatever my own view of my vocation, readers in India have always attributed dogmatism, eccentricity and even arrogance to me." It is true that Indian critics have always accused him of being dogmatic, and a confirmed lover of the Empire. But his actual experience of Britain disappointed him. Krishna Bose, daughter of Chaudhuri's brother, knew him quite well. (She refers to him as "Mejo Kaka" with love and respect.) She presents a fair evaluation of her uncle's reaction to Britain:

Mejokaka had admired an imaginary Great Britain from afar and was bitterly disappointed on actually experiencing life in Britain since the 1870's. He then began to suffer from the illusion that the Britain of his dream must have existed at some time in the past. He lives mentally in Jane Austen's age. Hence his eccentricities, such as dressing up in period costume, which embarrasses his relatives and is considered bizarre by the contemporary British. He would doubtless have been happier to celebrate his hundredth birthday in the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign than on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. (*The First Hundred Years*, p.12)

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is one of the few Indian English writers who have used the language for non-fictional purposes alone -- earlier writers like Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru have been orators, who made speeches because they were social reformers and statesmen; later writers like Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh have written fiction and poetry. Almost all of his ten books have received critical attention and sometimes substantial praise. His biography of Max Müller won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and has become the standard work. *The Continent of Circe* won the Duff Cooper literary award. His life of Robert Clive is quite provocative. We may not agree with his basic philosophy of preferring a dead empire to the lively chaos of modern India, but his books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian culture and literature.

5.6 GLOSSARY

Anglophilia:

a craze or indiscriminate admiration for everything English.

Insularity:

Literally, the quality of belonging to an island. Narrow- mindedness, prejudice, wishing to cut oneself off from the wider world.

Orientalism:

According to Said, the Western image of the Orient has been constructed by generations of writers and scholars who have based it on texts, not first hand experience. They ignore the changing reality, and present an essentialist image of the orient which makes it a fit subject for imperial domination. The exotic aspect is stressed, and the orient is projected as the "Other". Scholarship becomes a means for legitimizing colonial control.

Panzer:	Literally "armour". The Panzers were the armoured corps of the German army, a great fighting force in the Second World War.	Nirad C. Chaudhuri
Philistines:	A person with a materialistic outlook who does not care for culture.	
Ponderous:	Heavy, unwieldy, solemnly laboured and slow moving.	
Said:	Edward Said (b.1935), author of <i>Orientalism</i> (1978) is considered the founder of post-colonial literary theory. A Christian Palestinian brought up in Egypt and U.S.A., Said studied history and English at Princeton and Harvard, and completed a doctorate on Conrad. His work reveals the influence of the Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and the French post-structuralist Michel Foucault (1926-1984).	
Trireme:	An ancient galley with three rows of rowers. A galley was a small ship, having both sails and oars. They would usually have a large number of criminals or slaves to man the oars.	

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the view that Nirad C. Chaudhuri is the greatest writer of non-fictional prose in modern India?
2. How far are Chaudhuri's autobiographical works a contribution to contemporary history?
3. Do you agree with the view that there are two Chaudhuris, a historical witness and a pseudo-historian? Give reasons.
4. "*The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* is one of the most remarkable examples of its genre in Indian English literature" (M.K.Naik). Discuss.
5. Write a note on Nirad C. Chaudhuri's credo. Does it reveal him as an anglophile?
6. "Chaudhuri's books cannot be ignored by any serious student of Indian culture and literature." Comment.
7. Compare and contrast the autobiographies of Nehru and Chaudhuri.

5.7 SUGGESTED READING

There are two parts to this reading list; the first part lists works by Chaudhuri. You must make a close study of the works marked with a double asterisk (**), so it is a good idea to have a personal copy of *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, it is

available in paperback. Read some of his other works also, especially those marked by an asterisk (*). The second part contains secondary material, i.e. books and articles about Chaudhuri and his works.

Part 1: Books by Nirad C. Chaudhuri

**A Passage to England.* London: Macmillan, 1959.

Clive of India. London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1975.

Hinduism: A Religion to Live By. London: Chatto & Windus, 1979.

**Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller.* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974.

***The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian.* (1951). Bombay: Jaico, 1969.

The Continent of Circe. London: Chatto & Windus, 1966.

The East is East and West is West ed. Druva N. Chaudhuri. Calcutta: Mitra and Ghosh Publishers, 1996.

The Intellectual in India. New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1967.

Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

***Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India: 1921-1952.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1987.

To Live or Not to Live. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1970.

Part 2: Books and Articles on Chaudhuri

Books:

Dasgupta, Swapan. Ed. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The First Hundred Years: A Celebration.* New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1997.

Karnani, Chetan. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.

Kaul, R.K. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The Renaissance Man.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998.

Naik, M.K. Ed. *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English.* New Delhi: Abhinav, 1982.

Naikar, Basavaraj S. *Critical Articles on Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* Dharwad: Shivaranjani Publications, 1985.

Philip, David Scott. *Perceiving India through the Works of Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* R.K. Narayan and Ved Mehta. New Delhi: Sterling, 1986.

Sinha, Tara. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri: a Sociological and Stylistic Study of His Writings During the Period 1951-1972.* Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1981.

Verghese, C. Paul. *Nirad C. Chaudhuri.* New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann India, 1973.

Articles:

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

Ezekiel, Nissim. "Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller". *Selected Prose* ed. Adil Jussawalla. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp.154-58.

Mishra, Sudesh. "The Two Chaudhuris: Historical Witness and Pseudo-Historian" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XXIII:1 (1988) pp.7-15.

Naik, M.K. "Nirad C. Chaudhuri's First Publication" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XIX:1 (1984) pp.98-107.

Narasimhaiah, C.D. "Autobiographies: Jawaharlal Nehru and Nirad Chaudhuri", *Essays in Commonwealth Literature*. Delhi: Pencraft, 1995. pp.46-70.

----- "Nirad C. Chaudhuri: *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*", *Indian Critical Scene: Controversial Essays*. Delhi: B.R.Publishing Corporation, 1990. pp.85-95.

Stilz, Gerhard. "Experiments in Squaring the Ellipse: A Critical Reading of the Autobiographies of Gandhi, Nehru, Chaudhuri and Anand", *New Perspectives in Indian Literature in English* ed. C.R.Yaravintelimath et al. New Delhi: Sterling, 1995. pp.162-176.

Tripathy, Shrinibas. "Chaudhuri's Portrait of Mahatma Gandhi". *Ravenshaw Journal of English Studies* 6:1 (1996) pp.24-30.

Venugopal, C.V. "Growing to Manhood: The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian", *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English* ed. M.K.Naik. New Delhi: Abhinav, 1982. pp.213-31.

UNIT 6 VIKRAM SETH AND AMITAV GHOSH

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Vikram Seth: Introduction
- 6.2 *From Heaven Lake*
- 6.3 Amitav Ghosh: Introduction
- 6.4 *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma*
- 6.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.6 Glossary
- 6.7 Questions
- 6.8 Suggested Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall acquaint ourselves with the non-fictional prose written by two members of the post-Independence generation of Indian writers, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh, who are better known for their fiction. We shall critically examine their travelogues: Seth's *From Heaven Lake* and Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma*, by critically analysing excerpts from both these texts.

6.1 VIKRAM SETH : INTRODUCTION



Vikram Seth (1952-)

Vikram Seth (b.1952) was born in Calcutta, and educated in Dehra Dun. He got admission in St Stephen's College, Delhi, in Mathematics (Honours) course, but did not join. He won a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford University, and graduated in 1975 with honours in philosophy, politics and economics. He went to Stanford University, U.S.A. in 1977. He obtained his Master's degree in economics, and started work on a doctoral dissertation, "Seven Chinese Villages: An Economic and demographic Portrait." He spent two years in China doing research at Nanjing University. *From Heaven Lake* is based on his experience when he travelled to India overland, through Sinkiang, Tibet and Nepal.

His first book, *Mappings*, published by Writers Workshop, Calcutta, in 1982, contained poems written in English along with a few translations of Indian poets. His second book, *From Heaven Lake* (1983), which won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award, attracted a wider readership. His second book of poetry, *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985) won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia in

Articles:

Nirad C. Chaudhuri

- Ezekiel, Nissim. "Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Müller". *Selected Prose* ed. Adil Jussawalla. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp.154-58.
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1985, and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award for Poetry. *The Golden Gate* (1986) won him international fame: this novel written in sonnets is a *tour de force*, even the acknowledgements and dedication are in the form of sonnets. It won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the American "Book of the Month Club" New Voices Award. *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), his third collection of poems, won critical acclaim. *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1991) contains simple narrative poems with regular metre and rhyme. Seth retells animal fables from India, China, Greece, and Ukraine, and "directly from the land of Gup". He has also published a book of translations, *Three Chinese Poets* (1992).

His first conventional novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993), became famous even before publication for receiving a very large advance from its publisher. Critical opinion was divided -- it won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1994, but the Booker Prize jury savagely condemned it. It presents a panoramic view of life in a north Indian town in the years just after independence. It has been condemned as lacking in depth, but no one can find fault with his vivid recreation of the social life of the time. The central story -- of Lata, a young girl who falls in love with a boy who is not suitable because he is a Muslim -- is only one of the many strands in the novel which is 1349 pages long. It is very readable, and is being made into a 500 part television serial, in English and Hindi.

His latest novel, *An Equal Music*, is much more like *The Golden Gate*, which was a romance set in California. *An Equal Music* is set entirely in the West, and there is no Indian element whatsoever. Life in modern London is recreated in loving detail, with some scenes set in Vienna and Venice. The narrator is a violinist in a string quartet, and the novel centres around Michael's love for Julia, a fellow music student, whom he has loved and lost. The descriptions of western classic music, full of technical words, make the novel slow reading for the uninitiated. The style is slow and convoluted, very different from the simple linear narrative of *A Suitable Boy*.

6.2 FROM HEAVEN LAKE

Vikram Seth lived in China as a student at Nanjing University from 1980 to 1982. In the summer of 1981 he returned home to Delhi via Tibet and Nepal. *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* is based on the journal he kept and the photographs he took while he was on the road. As he tells us in the "Introduction":

The land route -- for this was a hitch-hiking journey -- from the oases of northwest China to the Himalayas crosses four Chinese provinces: Xinjiang (Sinkiang) and Gansu in the northwestern desert; then the basin and plateau of Qinghai; and finally Tibet.

The short book is divided into nineteen chapters, dealing with different stages of his journey, starting with "Turfan" (Chapter 1) and "Heaven Lake" (Chapter 2) and ending with "Kathmandu; Delhi" (Chapter 19). Seth provides a map of China, Nepal and a part of India, showing the route he took. The book contains about twenty black and white photographs, of the various scenes he describes -- Heaven Lake, the small town of Turfan and its people, a mosque at Lian, Lhasa, the Bhotakoshi river in Nepal, yaks, a dust storm, trucks stranded on a flooded plain. The second edition of the book, published in 1990, contains a foreword giving Seth's reaction to the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989, when the Chinese Army opened fire on hundreds of students who were demonstrating peacefully. He is filled with regret at China's increasing repression in Tibet. He makes it clear that *From Heaven Lake* was not intended as a political commentary. I quote the opening lines of the "Foreword to the 1990 Edition":

This book is an account of what I saw, thought and felt as I travelled through various parts of the People's republic of China as a student. It is not intended as a summary of the political or economic situation of that country, although I did occasionally digress into such ruminations in the course of writing the book.

The book is basically a travelogue, describing his journey. Comments on the people and the Chinese political system are incidental.

Seth starts his account from Turfan, a small town in the province of Xinjiang which has a common border with U.S.S.R. A three-week tour has been organised by Nanjing University for its foreign students. Being part of an organized tour has advantages --the authorities have taken care of transport, accommodation, guides etc. But he feels stifled by the restrictions -- in group travel, they have to follow a strict time schedule "rushing from sight to sight, savouring nothing" (p.5). He decides to leave the group in Urumquai, their next stop, even though he is aware of the restrictions on travel in China -- a travel pass is needed for every place, and the Chinese authorities do not want foreign students wandering away from a group. In all the places, it is the human interaction which is important. The second chapter, "Heaven lake" is memorable not for the wonderful description of the lake, but for the old man from whom he buys a cap. The people of Xinjiang are an ethnic minority, Muslim by religion, with their own language, Uighur, and it is only the schoolgoing boy who understands Seth when he talks to them in Chinese. Seth wants to communicate with the old man who is selling caps, so he lets them know that he is from India by writing the word "Hindustan" in Urdu (which has the same Arabic script as Uighur). The old man is touched. He not only reduces the price of the cap for the Indian, he even stitches it again to strengthen it (pp27-28).

Seth found his way across central China by travelling in a variety of vehicles. The excerpts in your Reader are from the middle of the book, Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, describing the coldest part of his journey and the harsh weather conditions he had to face when crossing into northern Tibet. August 14th, the eve of India's Independence Day, finds him in a thoughtful mood, comparing India and China.

From Heaven Lake is written in a simple realistic mode. There is no attempt to follow anything but a simple chronological narrative, and he does not combine narrative with philosophical musings. The qualities which distinguish his fiction -- vivid recreations of places and situations, and character portrayal-- are revealed in this travelogue. Sui and Gyanseng, his companions in the truck, come across as very interesting people. Sui is Chinese, posted in Tibet; the lonely life of a truck driver crossing some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world is made tolerable by the friendships he has built up with people living in small towns and villages on the way. Gyanseng is Tibetan, and keen to be in Lhasa as soon as possible. Seth's talent for presenting memorable character sketches is not confined to prose; some of the poems in *All You Who Sleep Tonight* are centred around specific characters. Seth's experiences with bureaucracy in China could constitute a funny satire of bureaucrats the world over; but he also shows how some officials have very human feelings, and go out of their way to help him, a stranger in the land.

The poet in Vikram Seth is revealed in passages of nature descriptions. He gives us precise details, providing a sort of word painting of the scene. Consider his description of the yaks, for instance:

... a herd of black, thick-haired yaks who emerge from behind a slight rise up ahead. They stop about a hundred metres up the road and graze calmly, lowing and snorting now and then. They are huge beasts, and have a solemnity becoming to animals their size; not so the little yaks, however, who run around, alarmingly playful and ebullient. Some of them stand in the middle of the road. When a truck passes every ten minutes or so, they stare at

it in shock until it is almost upon them, then kick up their heels in panic and scamper off into the plain.

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Yaks look like Pekinese dogs of willow trees in the way that their hair sprouts downward off them. For all their largeness and solemnity, they are friendly beasts. I would like to see them at close range sometime. (p.96)

Seth uses short sentences, and common words, unlike Nirad C. Chaudhuri who always looks for Latinate adjectives. Seth uses no foreign words or quotations, and an educated reader does not need a dictionary when reading him. (This unit does not have a glossary.) This does not mean that Seth's vocabulary is limited; if the context demands it, he uses difficult words in order to write concisely, as in his description of the terrain at the ferry. He writes, "At Yanshipin, on the bank of this stream, is a ferry. The tall green hills are riven by serrated ribs of red rock" (p.96). "Riven" and "serrated" are not common words, but they are the most appropriate ones in the context.

Factual details are mentioned: "black, thick-haired", "hundred metres", "tall green hills". After a straightforward description (the yaks are grazing calmly, lowing and snorting"), Seth goes on to his impressions about them. He feels that the adult yaks move in a slow, serious manner which suits their big size. But the young ones are different. He describes the childish behaviour of the young yaks, who stare at the trucks till the last moment, and then run away in confusion. Chaudhuri says in his introduction to his last book, *The Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse*, that he is "a speaker of the *mot juste*. I often ponder for a long time over the words of a given passage, and I never sit down to write or type until I have the whole wording in my head. . . . I request the reader to get my meaning from the following dictionaries: . . ." We do not know about Seth's method of composition, whether he "ponders for a long time" before writing it down, whether he consciously searches for the *mot juste* ("the exact word"). The important thing is that Seth always uses words which perfectly fit the meaning. Consider the word "scamper" in the above passage, which correctly describes the way the young yaks scramble to safety. Seth uses comparisons from ordinary life, not art or history. Many people would be familiar with Pekinese dogs, a breed with long, drooping hair which is very popular as a pet. Willow trees are very common in England or America. It is a tree which grows well in cool climates, so Indians who have visited hill stations would have seen this tree which has drooping leaves, hanging downwards. As we have seen in the passage about yaks, Seth consistently combines description ("buttercups and cornflowers among them") with his impressions; human qualities are imputed to the yaks who do not like to be disturbed, the herd "disperses indignantly".

As the truck crosses the 4000-metre-high Tangula range, Seth suffers from high altitude sickness (many people, including mountaineers on the Himalayas, suffer from headache, nausea and other distressing symptoms because of the cold and the thin air which provides less oxygen. He is conscious of the natural beauty of the place, but cannot appreciate it because he is suffering from headache and fever. He tells us how the beautiful scene has become like a horrible dream:

Our route takes us straight into the low sun. The atrocious glare merges with my atrocious headache to give this beautiful landscape the quality of a scene in a nightmare. What's more, I cannot tell if the nightmare is in colour or in black-and-white. The antics of the light cause grass and water to turn suddenly from green and blue to black and silver. Round a corner the sun strikes directly again, and the scene is again green and blue. As with the Kunlun Pass, the higher we go, the flatter, more indefinite, more marshlike the terrain becomes. Then the sun sinks and everything is permanently black and silver. (p.97)

Seth manages to convey both the beauty of the scene, as well as the fierceness of his headache. The changing light makes the colours appear different: in direct sunlight, the land with grass growing on it looks green, and the rivers blue. But in shade, and after sunset, they look black and silver respectively.

Seth occasionally introduces short poems to break the monotony of the prose. These poems, like much of his poetry, are written in regular metre and rhyme. The short poem at the end of Chapter 9 sums up the difficult situation of the three travellers, and concludes by laying stress on their common humanity, their common love of home. All of them are suffering from the high altitude and cold: "I have my headache, a sore arm . . . Sui now has his smoker's cough compounded by a running eye. Gyanseng has neck-and toothache . . ." Each of them -- the Tibetan Gyanseng, the Indian author and Sui who is a Han (the majority community in China) all dream of home:

And sleeping drag the same
Sparse air into our lungs,
And dreaming each of home
Sleeptalk in different tongues.

Seth's expository prose is equally effective. He uses short sentences, without imagery or adjectives, to present facts:

One overwhelming fact is that the Chinese have a better system of social care and of distribution than we do. Their aged do not starve. Their children are basically healthy. By and large, the people are well clothed, very occasionally in rags.

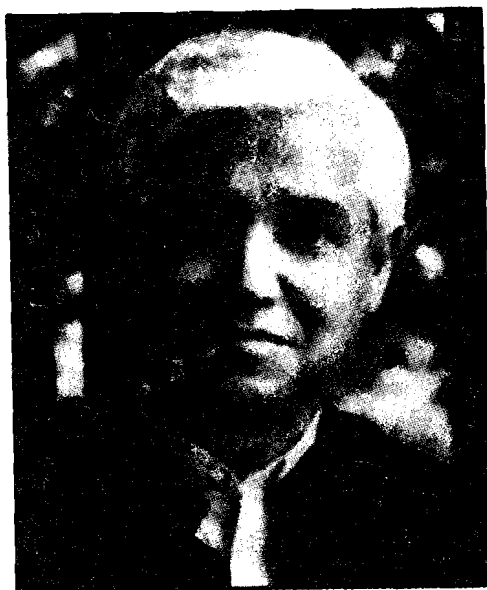
The comparison between India and China, their success and failure, which follows this passage is thought provoking. Seth has no hesitation about using long sentences, to explain his ideas better:

I am often asked (and I fear that a new spate of such questions will be forthcoming from the moment I arrive in Delhi) about the relative success of our two large overpopulated countries in satisfying the most basic needs of their people. What is sometimes forgotten when making this comparison is that, except for the greater mineral wealth of China (a result of its far greater land area), all the *a priori* advantages lie on India's side. India's needs are fewer, and its agricultural production possibilities are greater.

This passage has parenthetical comments. The effect is that it gets a conversational tone. Seth puts in comments in brackets ("I fear . . .") to qualify what he is saying, interrupting the main sentence with a side thought. The next sentence is long and complex, but to express the same idea in short sentences would need half a dozen clumsy sentences. For once, he uses a phrase from a foreign language, *a priori*. But that is probably because there is no elegant English equivalent for the idea, he would have to indulge in long explanations like "as far as one knows, not based on experience or effects". Seth hardly ever uses foreign phrases.

The book ends with him reaching Kathmandu, and taking an aeroplane to Delhi: he actually walks down to the border between Tibet and Nepal, and crosses on foot. He is one of the few travellers to have made the journey from China to India over the Himalayas. His travelogue is a straightforward account of his experiences of travel, and his impressions of the Chinese people he met on the way. There is no attempt to explore history or philosophy. In the next unit, we shall read a very different kind of travelogue. *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* is based on Amitav Ghosh's visit to Cambodia and Burma, but it is not a simple chronological account. It incorporates history in a fictional format to present complex philosophical problems about the growth of nations and cultures.

6.3 AMITAV GHOSH: INTRODUCTION



Amitav Ghosh (1956-)

Amitav Ghosh is the author of four highly acclaimed novels; the fifth, *Palace of Glass*, is going to be published later this year (2000). He was born in Calcutta in 1956, and spent his childhood in Calcutta, Dhaka and Colombo. He graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and went to England at the age of twenty-two to study social anthropology. After obtaining a D. Phil. from Oxford University, he taught at the prestigious Delhi School of Economics. In 1987 he started teaching social anthropology and comparative literature at various universities in U.S.A. At present, he is based in New York, with his American wife; they have two children. He has travelled widely. As a student, his research into the identity of a slave mentioned in a twelfth century manuscript took him to Egypt. He regularly contributes articles to literary journals like *The New Yorker* and *Granta*. He has written two books of non-fiction, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *at Large in Burma* (1998) and *Countdown* (1999), a powerful protest against nuclear testing by India.

His first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) reminds one very much of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The hero, an orphan, is called "Alu" (potato) because his head is shaped like a lumpy potato. He is brought up by his uncle Balaram, a school teacher and passionate believer in Louis Pasteur, who believes all evils can be fought with carbolic acid. Weaving is an important metaphor in the novel, and Alu is fascinated by the loom. Alu runs away from his home because the police think that he is a terrorist. Das, the police officer who is handling the case, follows him to the Western Ghats in Kerala and on to al-Ghazira, a small town in the Persian Gulf. From there Alu flees to Cairo and Algeria, meeting all kinds of unusual characters on the way, including a team of Indian doctors in Algeria trying to stage Tagore's play. There are all kinds of fantastic incidents, like Alu's miraculous escape from the basement of a multi-storeyed building which collapses.

Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) won the Sahitya Akademi award. It is an introspective work, centring around the growth and maturity of a nameless narrator. In Joseph Conrad's novel *The Shadow Line* (1916), the narrator crosses the line dividing early youth from maturity as a consequence of his experiences as the captain of a ship. In Ghosh, the lines have wider ramifications -- they are the lines on a map which separate countries in an atlas, the lines which divide cultures, the lines which separate reality from imagination. The narrator's experience of foreign lands, recreated from scraps of information he picks up from his Bohemian uncle Tridib and

well-travelled cousin Ila, is more real than Ila's actual experience. Three worlds -- of pre-Partition Dhaka, Calcutta and London -- are seamlessly woven together, with no dividing lines of geography or time. The characters, such as the narrator's grandmother, the beautiful Ila, and Tridib's brother Robin, the same age as the narrator, are presented with great clarity.

His fourth novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), is centred around Ronald Ross's discovery of the malarial parasite in 1895. The novel is partly a detective story, partly science fiction, and partly a tale of the supernatural. The novel operates in three time frames, in different centuries. It begins with Antar, an Egyptian in New York in the middle of the next century. He is searching for Murugan, a colleague who suddenly disappeared in Calcutta on August 21, 1995. Murugan was doing research on Ronald Ross, and had a theory that some people had secretly pushed Ross along certain paths in his research. Ghosh's fascinating narrative takes us to India in the 1890's and the events leading up to Ross's discovery. But the ending is somewhat unsatisfactory: we do not quite know what to make of this secret religious group with supernatural powers which has been manipulating Ross.

Of all his novels, it is his third novel, *In an Antique Land* (1992) which is nearest to non-fiction prose. Some critics have considered it a travelogue. It is interesting that R.K. Narayan's latest novel, published in the same year, also reveals a mixture of fact and fiction. In *Grandmother's Tale* (1992), the novelist's grandmother tells him the story of her mother, and this account is supplemented by Narayan's own reconstruction of the past. In his "Explanation" at the beginning of *Grandmother's Tale*, Narayan says, "The borderline between fact and fiction, between biography and the tale wears thin and ultimately vanishes in the following chronicle." This comment is equally true of Ghosh's book. The title is from Shelley's famous sonnet "Ozymandias", in which the ruined fragments of the famous king's statue show that fame and fortune are ephemeral. The poem begins, "I met a traveller from an antique land . . ." History usually deals with figures like Ozymandias, King of Kings. Ghosh is attracted by a minor figure, an Indian slave casually mentioned in letters found in the Cairo synagogue and subsequently kept in a Cambridge library. From the letters, Ghosh learnt about Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant from Tunisia who journeyed from Egypt to Mangalore in the twelfth century. He acquired an Indian slave who travelled to Aden and back as his manager. As an academic, Ghosh has published a scholarly monograph on his research into this subject: *The Slave of MS H.6* (Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1990). The novel has two travellers, Ben Yiju, the merchant, and Ghosh himself who travelled to Egypt as a research student. His autobiographical account of his interaction with the local people in a small village in Egypt provides a lot of humour, but also reveals the common human traits of the peoples of two "antique" lands, India and Egypt. Ghosh shows how intimately linked different cultures and religions are, though modern history and politics divide them into watertight compartments.

6.4 DANCING IN CAMBODIA, AT LARGE IN BURMA

Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma (1998) is based on three articles which had appeared in *Granta* (1993), *The Observer Magazine* (1994) and *The New Yorker* (1996). The first chapter, "Dancing in Cambodia" is based on his visit to Cambodia in 1993. Ghosh makes skillful use of counterpoint to evoke the admirable resilience of a society ravaged by the Pol Pot years. Descriptions of the present destitution are juxtaposed with an account of the visit of Cambodian dancers to France in 1906. People, past and present, come to life vividly, ranging from King Sisowath who visited France in 1906 to the young Bangladeshi sergeant working with the UNTAC to rebuild modern Cambodia. The second chapter, "Stories in Stone", describes his experience in Angkor Wat, and the dedication of the workers trying to restore the

monument. The life story of Kong Sarith, a forty-year-old worker totally devoted to Angkor Wat reads like a well written short story. "At Large in Burma" is dominated by Aung San Suu Kyi, who represents the very spirit of hope, but Ghosh also describes a Karenni guerrilla camp on Burma's eastern border, and sympathetically presents the point of view of the tribal minorities, who want to maintain their autonomy. Ghosh is completely self-effacing, he hardly appears in the book. *Dancing in Cambodia* outdoes Ghosh's novels in the felicity of the language; it is a moving account of the undying courage and the common humanity linking people of different countries.

The Khmer Rouge, lead by Pol Pot, took control of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, on April 17, 1975. Then followed years of terror, when the upper and middle classes and everyone of Vietnamese origin was butchered. Society was broken up; intellectuals were sent into the countryside to work in the fields, where those who did not die of overwork or starvation were killed by Pol Pot's soldiers. These killing years 1975 to 1978 were followed by years of turmoil. Ghosh visited Cambodia in 1993, when a semblance of peace was being restored with the help of the United Nations, and elections were held under the auspices of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). One of the first things Pol Pot did was to kill artists, and any cultural and aesthetic expression was banned. Dance, which had been encouraged by the royal family, was prohibited. The first part of Ghosh's book juxtaposes King Sisowath's state visit to France in 1906 with other journeys -- that of young Saloth Sar, who travelled to France to study and was inducted into the communist party, who disappeared into the jungles in 1963 to emerge as Pol Pot, the dictator of Cambodia, and Ghosh's own journey to Cambodia, and his travels there in search of Pol Pot's ancestral village. The revival of dance in war ravaged Cambodia is symbolic of their will to put their life together again. Many talented artists had been killed, others slowly emerged from hiding. Large quantities of musical instruments, costumes and masks had been destroyed. Instead of silk, they had to make their costumes from cheap cotton fabric. The city was full of debris, there was a shortage of food, but still the people came pouring in to watch the first show in 1988, and "wept through the entire length of the performance. It was a kind of rebirth: a moment when the grief of survival became indistinguishable from the joy of living." Ghosh's description of the revival of dance is based on the account of Eva Mysliwiec, one of the few foreigners present at the first performance (she had come to Cambodia to set up a Quaker relief mission) and his own interviews with the artists. But the description is so vivid that we feel as if we ourselves have witnessed it.

The huge multi-storeyed temples at Angkor Wat and the nearby ancient capital of Angkor Thom are world famous. They represent a global cultural heritage, and there is an international campaign to reclaim them from the tropical jungle which has grown over these stone structures. A French naturalist, Henri Mouhot, visited the courtyard of Angkor Wat in 1860. He spent three weeks among the ruins of the ancient monuments, preparing sketches which created a sensation when brought back to Europe. Earlier travellers, mainly merchants and missionaries from Spain and France, had mentioned a fabulous capital city swallowed up by the tropical jungle in Cambodia, but it was Mouhot's well documented, first person, account which aroused the interest of the western world. Many scholars and collectors travelled to this far away land to see this fabulous town. In 1867, the first photographic album of Angkor was published in Edinburgh, featuring sixteen photographs taken by the British explorer J. Thompson, and in 1873 the first comprehensive study of Khmer art was published: *Voyage d'exploration en Indochine* by Francis Garnier. Ever since, these magnificent monuments have captured the imagination of the world, and repeated attempts have been made to conserve them. These efforts received a severe setback during the Pol Pot years (1975-79). But now restoration work is in full swing, with the help of the United Nations. "Stories in Stones" (the excerpt in your Reader) examines the significance of Angkor Wat, and how this medieval monument has

become a symbol of modernity for the people of Cambodia. It also shows the importance of stories in human culture.

The main temple at Angkor Wat symbolises Mount Meru. King Suryavarman II (who reigned in the first half of the twelfth century) started its construction in 1119. Suryavarman himself was a worshipper of Vishnu, but he supported Buddhism and the worship of Shiva -- another temple in the metropolis has a shivalinga as the central idol. After his death, Cambodia was defeated by the king of Champa in a surprise attack from the sea in 1177. But its fortunes were revived by King Jayavarman VII, who came to the throne in 1181. He defeated Champa, and organized measures to revive the economy. He was an indefatigable builder. Ambitious irrigation dams and several new towns were built all over the country. The biggest was the royal capital of Angkor Thom, not far from Angkor Wat. Jayavarman made Buddhism the state religion, and so Angkor Thom is dominated by statues of the Buddha. The friezes there depict day-to-day life, and tell stories of military conquests and economic activity, unlike the Hindu Angkor Wat, which Jayavarman continued to foster. The monuments contain many inscriptions about the building activities of the rulers, giving us a clear idea of the social and economic systems of the time. The walls of the temples are covered with bas reliefs featuring stories from the Mahabharata and other Puranas; Angkor Wat presents Hindu mythology through sculpture.

"Stories in Stone" has a blend of narrative, descriptive and expository prose. Ghosh's account deals with basic concepts like the importance of storytelling in keeping a culture alive, but it also operates at the level of a simple travelogue, vividly showing us the places he has visited. He begins with a description of the monument: "The device is a vast one -- it is said to be the largest single religious edifice in the world-- . . ." He takes care to present facts: "The cast is the entire pantheon of gods, deities, sages and prophets with which that cosmos is peopled." Ghosh never tells us how impressed he was, how awesome he found the temple, how it was a unique experience etc. He lets the monument speak for itself, through his descriptions and the effect it has on the Cambodians. A unique characteristic of Ghosh's travelogue is that he never talks about himself -- the focus is always on the place, its history and people.

The people he meets are described in such a way that we can visualize them. Kong Sarith "was a thin, slight man, in his early forties, with a wispy, incongruously villainous-looking moustache. He spoke fluent English, in a rapid, gravelly voice that sometimes broke into a hacking laugh. His hands were never without a cigarette . . ." For him, the stories depicted in the bas-reliefs are alive, "he told them in the confiding, urgent way in which people describe their neighbours' overheard quarrels".

Without any overt comment, Ghosh shows how culture is not determined by geography or religious affiliations; the Hindu mythological stories of Angkor Wat have become part of the cultural life of a country where hardly anyone follows Hinduism. Ghosh lets us draw our own conclusions about the spirit of tolerance; for centuries, there had been a Buddhist monastery within Angkor, and it had to be shifted under pressure from French archeologists who were restoring Angkor Wat. Through neutral description, Ghosh shows how there can be more than one aspect of the truth, depending on our viewpoint. For people round the globe, Angkor Wat is a symbol of a lost civilization swallowed up by the jungle, and nineteenth century explorers like Mouhot are given the credit for discovering it. But it had never been lost for the people of Cambodia; Buddhist monks continued to live in the pagodas in the complex even after the Angkorian period, and it was well known to the Buddhist Sangha and to the nobility of Cambodia and Thailand. The West reinvented Angkor Wat: they "discovered a mirror for themselves of the Imperial State, *l'Etat*, in all its power and splendour." They separated the monument from the untidy uses of its present day inhabitants, as a prelude to restoring it scientifically. The contrast continues into the present day: tourists and archeologists go to the restored

monuments, the local people and pilgrims visit the Buddhist shrine in the great courtyard.

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Ghosh helps us appreciate the importance of Angkor Wat in the life of the people by describing how it appears on flags, uniforms, banks and brands of beer: the national airlines, Kampuchea Airlines "even succeeded in transforming this most earthbound of structures into a symbol of flight, by lending it a pair of wings." This image of a lost glory is used by the Cambodian people as a symbol of modernity. Another paradox is that Angkor Wat, a temple, never figures in anything to do with religion. The Buddhist Wats found all over the country bear no reference to Angkor Wat, these shrines ornamented with carved woodwork are very different from the massive stone structures of Angkor.

Ghosh effectively uses narrative prose to convey ideas that less gifted writers would express through expository prose. The story told by Kong Sarith is a terrible exposure of the terrors of the Pol Pot years; his tale is as effective as the photographs of mountains of human skulls. He saves his life by making up a story that he is poor and illiterate, not a student at the university of Phnom Penh. He invents a new identity for himself as a waiter in a roadside eating place. The well practised story saves his life, for intellectuals were killed without further enquiry. He is released from this labour camp in the north-west of the country only with the approach of the Vietnamese army. He started walking towards Phnom Penh; on the way, a young woman in their group reveals that she is an archeologist, and takes them to Angkor Wat. They listen spellbound as she tells them the stories carved on the panels.

Ghosh's prose is rich in detail: the pagoda is "an untidy, thatch-roofed structure", "the scrubbed tile floor of the shrine", the pilgrims "had come in share-taxis and others had bicycled all the way from the town of Siem Reap, several miles away", they "boiled their rice in empty milk-tins, over open fires." The similes he uses are quite original: the elderly Buddhist monk is "a tall, aquiline man whose saffron robes hung upon his skeletal limbs like sheets on a wire fence." There is often a touch of humour: the Buddhist monks "were allowed to remain within Angkor Wat, but in purdah, as it were -- on the condition that they moved the pagoda off its old site and rebuilt it at a suitable distance." Now the pagoda is hidden behind rows of trees in the great courtyard, instead of being directly in front of the galleries of the temple. Kong Sarith tells the mythological stories "in the confiding, urgent way in which people describe their neighbours' overheard quarrels".

Ghosh is as much concerned with metaphorical implications as with surface meaning. The dialogues he has with a variety of people is always expressed in simple, short sentences. Consider the concluding page of this chapter:

"You must remember," said Sarith, "for years we had seen nothing but hunger, death and famine". Now they would not let the woman stop; they listened entranced as she recounted those old, old stories. Slowly they worked their way around the vast galleries, listening to the stories over and over again.

We are left to draw the conclusion for ourselves: storytelling is a strategy for survival. Inventing a new identity by making up a credible story saved the lives of Kong Sarith and the woman archeologist in the labour camp; now listening to old stories carved in stone provides a way for them to get back to normal human life.

6.5 LET US SUM UP

The two travelogues have significant differences, though both vividly recreate the countries the writers have passed through. Seth's prose is simpler, and can be read at

the literal level. We get a clear picture of the author himself, his emotions and experiences in the new places he travels to. He does concern himself with larger issues, such as the difference in the growth rates of China and India, and the progress the two countries have made. But these ideas are expressed separately, not blended into the narrative.

Ghosh has a gift for playing with ideas, and his English prose style has unrivalled beauty. In his hands, the general and the abstract turn into concrete realities. *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* does not recognize any dividing lines between travel, history, cultural anthropology, and political analysis. The blend is used to provoke thought on the meaning of freedom, and why human society involves so much violence. We are told very little of Ghosh's own emotions and experiences. The enthusiasm with which he greets people with a link to India, such as the soldier from Bangladesh (in the first chapter) or the Burmese freedom fighter of Indian origin (Chapter 3), reveals his emotional attachment to his motherland, but there is never any direct expression of his feelings.

Seth always has both feet on the ground, he hardly ever strays into metaphysical speculation. *From Heaven Lake* is a very good conventional travelogue. Ghosh's book can be read and enjoyed at the primary level of a journey through modern Cambodia or Burma, but it is more than that, it is a travel through history, culture and philosophy.

6.6 GLOSSARY

abacus:	a mechanical device for mathematical calculations. It consists of an oblong frame with rows of wires on which you slide coloured beads used as counters.
bas relief:	a method of carving in which the design stands out from the surface; the objects depicted project outwards slightly. The walls of the monuments in Angkor Wat are covered with panels executed in bas-relief.
colonnaded:	having a row of columns placed at regular intervals; the columns are generally used to support the roof above the hall or corridor.
<i>l'état:</i>	French for "the State". The imperial nation, Louis XIV, King of France, identified himself with his empire, declaring " <i>L'état, c'est moi</i> " (I am the state).
Kampuchea:	the native name of the country; Cambodia is the form popular in the west.
pagoda:	a temple (usually Buddhist) with a many-storeyed tapering tower, each storey with a projecting roof, in the Far East.
quotidian:	pertaining to everyday life, ordinary, commonplace.
riven:	split, torn apart.

serrated:	having a saw-like, toothed edge.
sinuous:	with many curves, undulating, bending easily.
vegetal:	having the nature of plants, lacking in animation, of a level of life below the sensitive.
Ven.:	abbreviation for "venerable", used as an honorific for respected religious figures.
wat:	Buddhist shrines in Cambodia.

Vikram Seth and
Amitav Ghosh

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. Seth's writing is said to be uni-dimensional, lacking depth. Do you agree with this view?
2. Write a note on Seth's prose style.
3. "Seth achieves an almost photographic realism in his travelogue. We feel that we are travelling along with him on his journey." Comment.
4. Do you agree with the view that people are more important than places in the book *From Heaven Lake*?
5. "We travel not through geographical space but through history and culture in Ghosh's travelogue." Discuss.
6. Comment on the significance of Angkor Wat as a symbol of the future, not the past, with reference to *Dancing in Cambodia*, *At Large in Burma*.
7. *Dancing in Cambodia*, *At Large in Burma* is fiction, not a factual travelogue. Do you agree?
8. How does Ghosh bring out the significance of storytelling as a strategy for survival?
9. "The prose in *Dancing in Cambodia*, *At Large in Burma* is a blend of narrative, descriptive and expository elements." Discuss.
10. Compare and contrast Seth and Ghosh as writers of travelogues.

6.7 SUGGESTED READING

This reading list has two parts. The first part lists works by Seth, the second by Ghosh. You must make a close study of the works marked with a double asterisk (**). Read some of the other works also, especially those marked by an asterisk (*). Secondary material, i.e. books and articles about the works of Seth and Ghosh, has not been listed, because they focus on their fiction and poetry, not their travelogues.

Part I: Books by Amitav Ghosh:

The Circle of Reason. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986; Delhi: Roli Books, 1986.

**The Shadow Lines*. (1988). Educational edition Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995.

**In an Antique Land*. Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1992.

***Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*. Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1998.

Countdown. Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1999.

Part II: Books by Vikram Seth:

Mappings. Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1981.

***From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet*. (1983). New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990.

The Humble Administrator's Garden. Manchester: Carcanet, 1985.

Beastly Tales from Here and There. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1991.

The Golden Gate. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

**All You Who Sleep Tonight*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1990.

Three Chinese Poets: Translations. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1992.

The Complete Poems. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1995; paperback edition 1999.

An Equal Music. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1999.