
UNIT 1 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 History of the short story
- 1.2 What is a short story?
- 1.3 Basic elements of the short story:
 - 1.3.1 Plot
 - 1.3.2 Characterisation
 - 1.3.3 Atmosphere
 - 1.3.4 Narrative Techniques
 - 1.3.5 Figurative Language
 - 1.3.6 Point of View
- 1.4 Glossary of Terms
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to familiarise you with the genre of short story – how it has evolved over the centuries all over the world – its form, its meaning, its readability, etc. We shall pay special attention to the significance of the atmosphere in a short story because a proper setting and authenticity of atmosphere lend meaning to a story.

We would also like to illustrate how choosing the right characters and their convincing development add to the over all effect of a short story. Then do not forget that great masters of the short story have adopted different narrative techniques and styles to make their stories effective and interesting. Finally, you must know that an author wants to convey something to the reader – s/he writes from a particular stand point which lends meaning to a story. Last but not the least, try to study your own developing response to stories. See how far your response is a natural process of selection and elimination based on previously held experiences. Therefore, meaning significance are not to be described qualities of a text or ministrations of experts but as events, experiences of readers/listeners.

1.1 HISTORY OF THE SHORT STORY

The desire to tell stories and to listen to stories is inherent in all of us. According to Somerset Maugham, the short story began when the hunter narrated to his fellows, by the cavern fire, after they had eaten and drunk their fill, some fascinating incident he had heard or witnessed during the day. Curiosity might have killed the cat but the insatiable desire to know what happened next certainly ignited the imagination and skill of the teller and the suspense and patience of the listener. The oldest known tales are said to be of the *Shipwrecked Sailor* written on Egyptian Papyrus (about 400 B.C) or the *Book of Jonah* from the Old Testament (350-750 B.C).

The earliest written stories seem to be *The Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, written originally in Arabic but made known in Europe in the early 18th century by Antoine Galland's translation into French and Edward William Lane's translation into English. Though the source of the tales is uncertain, the framework appears to be of Persian origin. It is mentioned by Al Masudi (a.d.944), an Arab traveller and historian, as occurring in a book called *Hezar Afsane*, attributed

The Short Story

according to tradition, to Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C). [they tell the story of the king who had his wives killed successively on the morning after the consummation of their marriage, until the clever Sheherzade, the princess saved her life and that of many others by the never-ending, suspense-filled tales she told him]. The tales were probably systematically collected in Egypt sometime in the 14th-16th centuries.

Boccaccio's tales collected in *The Decameron* were written between 1348 and 1358 and were very popular throughout the Renaissance. Their setting is interesting. Florence is in the grip of a severe plague in 1348. Seven young men flee the city for the beautiful neighbouring villas, entertain each other with stories, each one telling one tale each day. These are one hundred tales in all.

These tales, relying mainly on the oral tradition, are basically discursive, focusing on a moral point. The major difference between these and other such prose tales and the more recent nineteenth century short story is the artist's consciousness and treatment of his or her tale as a distinctive art form. In the nineteenth century the short story acquired a currency and character it had not had before.

Some critics have claimed that the short story is an American invention. Peter S.Prescott claims, "The thing itself is ours, invented by us a century and half ago, and dominated by Americans ever since." ¹ While this is obviously not the case, we have to admit that nowhere else has the short story as an exacting, complex literary form been so assiduously cultivated as in the United States, consequently, profoundly influencing short story writers the world over.

The Indian short story, as distinct from the fables of the *Hitopadesh* and the tales of the *Panchatantra*, has a comparatively short story of existence. The first Hindi short story for example, is said to be *Dulai Vali* (1907), though some critics consider *Rani Ketaki Ki Kahani* (1800-1810) to be the first Hindi story. What is remarkable however, is the strides the form has made in almost all the Indian languages, so much so that it now seems to be the major form of expression of litterateurs. Fragmentation of experience as a result of the increasing complexity of social changes, seems to make the short story an apt vehicle for exploring the dark places of the human spirit and disembodied states of being. Short stories have found special favour with readers too in recent times, perhaps also because of the inability to cope with voluminous works. The frenetic pace of modern life leaves all of us exhausted – physically and emotionally. Perhaps this explains the splurge of short story collections in recent years.

The beginnings of the Indian short story in English were made under the influence of the Britishers. The Indian short story writer in English is, therefore, an inheritor of the British legacy bequeathed to him by such eminent practitioners as O.Henry, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, and Rudyard Kipling who themselves were greatly inspired by the French author, Maupassant. The Indian writer shares at least three of Maupassant's intrinsic traits –uninterrupted narration, preservation of curiosity, and the resulting clear picture of life.

The history of the Indian – English short story began towards the close of the nineteenth century with the publication of Kamala Sathianadan's *Stories from Indian Christian Life* in 1898 followed by K.S.Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* (1921) and *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937), A.Madhaviah's *Kushika's Short Stories* (1924) and K.Nagrajan's *Cold Rice* (1945). S.K.Chettur and G.K.Chettur evoked a sense of awe and the supernatural through their short fiction. The most notable of the five collections of stories by A.S.P.Ayyar was *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1929) dealing with the evils of sex and marriage faced by the Indian women of the day. Shankar Ram's two volumes were *Children of the Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1932). Most of these writers were basically reformists or sermonisers aiming at moral instruction and social amelioration.

The first artistic work in this genre was Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) voicing the concerns and predicaments of the lost ones and the sufferers in our society. Other significant names of this era are Manjeri Isvaran, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. With their humanism they lash out at the lies, shams and hypocrisies of our people. Narayan's sustaining power is his abiding comic sense and pure delight in the art of living. (We will be discussing two of his short stories in detail in a separate unit). Raja Rao evokes the Indian thought and tradition and writes mostly on social and political themes with a philosophical slant. Not at all prolific, he has made a mark in this genre with just two collections – *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978). In his nine volumes of short stories such as *Naked Shingles* (1941), *Shivratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *A Madras Admiral* (1959), etc., Manjeri S.Isvaran confines himself to the life of the low and middle classes in the erstwhile Madras State and excels in the sympathetic revelation of the female psyche. With Independence a new consciousness was noticed in writers. Khushwant Singh made his debut with *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950) launching a scathing attack on our blind beliefs and contradictions in life. Another title story "A Bride for the Sahib" is a tragic tale of the schism between an Qxonian and his docile Indian wife.

Another significant name in the world of contemporary Indian - English short story is that of Ruth Praver Jhabvala who is a Polish by parentage, a German by birth, an English woman by education and an Indian by marriage. Her four volumes of short stories convey her near total depression and disillusionment in India, which she calls a country of 'heat and dust', of slow movement and activity, of indolence and laziness.

Other memorable short-story writers are K.A.Abbas, G.D.Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuben, Chaman Nahal, Shiv K.Kumar, K.N.Daruwalla, Bala Krishnan, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi, Manoj Das and Usha John. All of them have contributed significantly to the growth and expansion of this genre. Ruskin Bond. Arun Joshi and Manoj Das we will be discussing in detail.

Margaret Chatterjee, K.N. Daruwalla and Shiv K. Kumar basically poets have experimented with this form. Anita Desai, renowned for her novels, has dealt with some deep-hidden human motives and emotions in her stories. Shashi Deshpande, Raji Narsimhan, Subhadra Sengupta and Geeta Hariharan are other significant women writers in this field whose concerns and contributions we will be discussing in detail in this Block.

Currently, one can confidently say that women writers in English are making distinguished contribution to the short story. Though Anita Desai remains a conscious experimentalist, others are attaining a new level of psychological complexity in story telling and technical innovation. They may not be debating crucial cutting edge questions as those of personal identity, self and society and the meaning of emancipation, of freedom, they do focus on the vulnerability to defeat that results from their attempt at relating themselves to others on their own terms or at withdrawing into themselves so as to preserve the autonomy of their selves.

"But they have stopped short of exploring 'the interplay between self-knowledge and social role', (which is, indeed, a pity!)"² Shashi Deshpande puts it squarely when she confessed that she is not an expressly or outspokenly feminist writer. The women writers we have chosen work within the framework of tradition-bound, male dominated Indian middle-class society. The women they depict are conscious of

"their predicament; they are victims of inequality they are creatures of conventional morality: they are the ones who are unfairly abused, misused and ill-used. But they believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord."³

1.3 WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

A relevant question that may occur to you is how to define a short story. One may hasten to state that the best course is to recognise it by brevity, economy of words, short length. But then the short story is not just a story that is brief – it requires a particular kind of literary construction. Though Edgar Allen Poe feels that it should be easily read at one sitting in order to preserve its unity of impression, it is not a quickie, nor a novel on a reduced scale. In his review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, Poe defines a good short story thus:

'A skilful literary artiste has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents: but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be brought out, he then invents such incidents – he then combines such effects as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentences tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed....'⁴

A broad analysis of a short story signifies three characteristic elements:

1. Recognition of the familiar – vivid details to create the illusion of reality and actuality, of course, suggesting undercurrents of meaning. Though familiar, the writer has to rid it of any kind of banality, cliché or formula. A short story is, after all, not a transcription of life but a dramatization of it.
2. Empathy: Identifying ourselves so sympathetically and closely with the characters and situations as to feel a part of this actuality – the well worn theme thus gets vivified by being individualized and
3. Readability: The good yarn pleasure tale – being absorbed by the fascination of the tale, we are unable to put it down until we have found out what happened. Of course, beyond the yarn lies a whole range of meaning to be explored.

The traditional notions associated with the short story such as design, continuity, effect, change etc. are likely to be questioned by present day critics and practitioners of this form who do not think that readability is/should be an essential ingredient of a short story. Not the contemporary short story anyway. And they do have a point. We can have a story without a storyline. Even without the formal narrative parameters, a story can be exciting and evocative. And it doesn't have to lead anywhere. Not necessarily, that is. Because of new fissures and new frictions, new expectations and new equations at every level, personal, family, state, national, international, the modern short story has traversed new grounds both in content and form. A short story is a voyage of discovery, of self-discovery, of self-realisation for the character, but more than the character, for the reader.

1.3 BASIC ELEMENTS OF A SHORT STORY

Having grappled and remaining cross – purposes over how to define the short story as a literary form we wish to lead you away from abstract generic debates and move towards discreet principles of writing a short story. Even though there can be no rules

for the good story, for any story for that matter, there can only be certain general principles – to establish a sense of the relation of the story to life.

About The Short Story

The storywriter tries to give a definite form to the inchoate world. A story has to have a formal *plot* or *structure* and the skill of the author lies in making it appear as natural, as lifelike, as spontaneous as possible. The artist wants to make incidents or situations appear natural rather than contrived. A well thought out plot is one in which nothing is superfluous or superficial. A story has to have a beginning and should convey a constant sense of movement. Therefore, an ideal structure would make the story interesting and true to life as also build up suspense and arouse the readers curiosity to know what happens next or how the situation gets resolved at the end. It should also give meaning to the narrative.

A good short story should strive for a unity of effect – a “single effect”, to use Edgar Allan Poe’s phrase. That is, a story should be compressed and economical the way a poem is, free from digressions and irrelevancies, and marked by its intensity. It should be complete in itself and must have unity, wholeness. A story is meant to be read at one sitting; a novel may take days to read. So the story’s effect must be sudden, powerful, revealing: whereas a novel can involve readers at a more leisurely pace, slowly illuminating complexities and nuances.

But then stories also convey psychological reality. Much of what happens in the modern story happens in the character’s minds, in the interior world. Therefore, in attempting to reveal the drama of human consciousness, many modern writers have stopped stressing the orderly progression of plots, have played down external action, and have often abandoned photographic realism in favour of a more complex psychological realism.

Do not also forget that the stories require focused attention. In a novel we may skip over the descriptions, especially descriptions of setting. No such skipping is possible in a short story without losing some part of its meaning.

Also, you should know that there is a difference between the events and episodes in a novel and those in a short story. In the novels of Dickens and Thackeray for example, there was a strong element of episode – each part of the serialized publication had to be complete in itself and also prepare the ground for what was to follow. In a short story, on the other hand, there is nothing to follow, nothing to look forward to. The end of the short story is the end. It is marked by a sense of finality, of definiteness, of tautness from beginning to end. It is self – contained. Its compression induces a feeling of expanding into life, an awareness of life expanding into our consciousness, enlarging our consciousness. In this sense a short story imparts the sense of a discovery. We shall continue in greater detail our discussion on the elements of a short story in the subsections to follow:

1.3.1 Plot

Whereas a simple narrative account is sequential, open and truthful account - a rendering of external events as they happen in time, a plot is not a simple narrative account. A plot is constructed. A plot is composed. The author of a story has in his mind, a simple narrative account but he does things with it. He may rearrange the events in time, he may tell the end first and then relate how events led up to it, he may withhold some information to arouse and sustain our curiosity and interest, he may be biased in favour of or against some of the characters and overplay or underplay certain facts to reinforce his stand. A plot is what an author does to the simple narrative account to make it a story, to give it a meaning, a purpose.

E.M. Forster made the distinction between a simple narrative account and plot very clear when he said, “The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died, and then the queen died of grief is a plot.”⁵ The author has in mind causality, a

hypothesis, a point of view. He has a vision of the occasion. The simple sequence of events has been given a meaning. "A plot, then, is a narrative account, artfully manipulated for artistic purpose. To give pleasure and to signify meaning,"⁶ according to Jack Carpenter and Peter Neumeyer.

Plot implies the idea of unity – various individual events hang together, jell of together. To begin with, there is the matter of cause and effect – we expect to find logic, a reasonable connection between the parts. This logic is not a mechanical thing. Many human responses and nonhuman things may enter into the logic of a story – in the end the central logic we are concerned with is the logic of human motivation. How do human needs and passions work themselves out? Plot then, is character in action. The various stages in terms of plot are 1) exposition 2) complication 3) climax and 4) denouement.

1.3.2 Characterisation

Not all short stories, however, have or need to have perfectly worked out plots. As the writers Wallace and Mary Stegner have stated, "The short story as a distinctive form has turned away from plot, and has tended to become less a complication resolved than what Henry James was to call 'a situation revealed'."⁷

Aesthetic pleasure can be evoked in ways other than the manipulated narrative imitation of a conflict. The highest aesthetic satisfaction may come from the reader's growing recognition and understanding of the characters and their situations. The presentation of human beings or of human situations, and the revelation of the truth inherent in that human being or in that human situation leads to a "gradual, slow illumination", of facts which is more satisfying than a manipulated plot with a neat beginning, a middle and an end. Insights emerge from the encounter between two very different characters representing two points of view.

E.M. Forster classified the characters as "flat" and "round". Flat characters stand for an idea, an attitude, a point of view. They don't grow at all in the course of the story. They become static or stereotypes. Round characters, on the other hand, go through many inconsistencies, anxieties, contradictions, etc. revealing new facets of their personality each time they deal with a new situation. They are dynamic. Flat or stock characters are often used to act as a contrast, or foil to the round characters.

Not all characters are treated equally – a clear understanding of their relative importance in the story will help us develop a proper perspective. In keeping with the central idea of the story we have to distinguish between minor and major characters.

So important is character to fiction that one may approach the story by asking, "Whose story is this?" The domain of fiction is the world of credible human beings, though an amazingly diverse and varied world. All abstractions must be made credible and significant for the reader to identify himself with. They have to be made believable.

A writer can present his characters in two ways – by telling or by showing. If he tells us about a character directly, his method of characterization is expository. If he allows his characters to be revealed indirectly through thought, dialogue and action, it is dramatic. Most writers use a combination of the two to bring their characters to life.

"One of the most important modes for character revelation is speech – the way the characters talk. All of us have our own vocabularies and our ways of putting words together. An author, in order to be convincing must have his characters speak "in character".⁸

1.3.3 Atmosphere

Atmosphere establishes lifelikeness and wins the reader's willingness to accept the world created by the storyteller. It creates the mood as well as the psychological and

physical effects essential to the theme of the story. By providing an apt locale and local colour, the author ensures verisimilitude and authenticity. A short-story writer cannot delineate in a leisurely manner or at length. His word pictures or strokes have to be economical and yet evocative.

The information given has to be to the point and yet revealing. Notice the way the place setting in *An Astrologer's Day* is evoked. "He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways..." A perfect setting for an astrologer "a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows."

The period stories and ghost stories, in particular, depend for their interest mainly on atmosphere-exotic lands, moss covered castles and abbeys, pointed arches, haunted alleys, wild torrents, thick forests, etc.

Notice how Arun Joshi has created an atmosphere of pain and deprivation with the minimum use of words by highlighting the thwarted expectations of the father and the resultant tension and trauma. Nothing dissipates the feeling of depression. Atmosphere thus controls the overall effect of the story. It is created by setting, description and dialogue.

1.3.4 Narrative Techniques

Narration is one of the most important elements of a short story. Have you noticed that the most obvious ways to make the story appear lifelike is to tell in the first person. This ensures intimacy and immediacy – making it easier for the reader to identify with the characters. The third person narrative, on the other hand, gives the author greater freedom to move back and forth, and act as an omniscient presence. A story in the first person is supposed to emphasize subjective reality at the expense of objective reality much more than a story in the third person. In the third person narrative the author can draw back from the main character at any time and tell us things that the character cannot know or does not understand.

So, "the first person point of view adds credibility, immediacy and life likeness to the story. The author seems to disappear, leaving the reader in the hands of the narrator. The effect is that the reader comes so close to the action that he begins to share the character's perception of the world. The reader begins to so completely identify with the narrator's vision that he abandons his own critical intelligence and escapes into the character's life."⁹

Some readers assume that the first person narrator and the author always share similar moral perspectives, when in fact the narrator's may be radically different from his creator. A narrator's perception of an experience may be limited, one-sided even biased. The reader may know much more about the significance of the narrator's actions and thoughts than does the narrator himself. A first person narrator is only a character in the story, not necessarily a spokesman for the author;

Some stories have trick-ending to take the reader by surprise. We are not talking of mysteries and thrillers but stories like *An Astrologer's Day* that build up a certain suspense in the mind of the reader regarding the circumstances that had compelled the protagonist to leave his village all of a sudden without any plan or preparation and take to astrology to eke out a living in the town. The revelation at the end comes as a surprise. It goes to the credit of the author though that this sudden revelation unties many knots merely hinted at earlier and weaves the parts into a unified whole. It is a logical climax reached dramatically.

Then we have stories, which may be termed comedies of manners. The author shows us what the characters are doing in such a way that we can understand why they are doing it. Out of the details of what they do and say the authors build up the conflict

and tension. It would weaken *A Trip Into the Jungle*, for example, if the author tried to describe directly the feelings that lie beneath the utterances and actions of his characters or if he intruded into his story with explanatory comments of his own.

Stories written from a particular point of view to denounce a practice or bias are more concerned with ideas than characters. Stock or stereotypical characters reinforce the point they are attempting to make. While analyzing a story we need, therefore, to ask: who is telling the story? What is his/her angle of vision and relationship to the events? Is he/she detached or involved? Is his/her view of the experience trustworthy? Is the narrator's view of the experience complete, or is it limited? Is the narrator presented ironically? How does the point of view help the writer organize his materials?

Dialect or slang is used to place a character in a particular setting. *The ashtamp farosh in Arun Joshi* is closer to the heart of the matter than any other character in the story and is assigned the role of shaking Dr. Khanna out of his cruel apathy towards his father.

In keeping with our world crammed with strange, uncanny and fantastic events, the form of narrative underwent radical changes. The chronological sequence is no longer necessary. The unity of time is no longer necessary. A story does not necessarily have to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Resolution of the complications is also not necessary. After all, life offers no solutions, nor does it follow any system or sequence. Experimental stories of today raise questions and leave the answers to the imagination of the reader. Time is no longer linear to be measured by the clock. Ever increasing complexity of human motives and actions, myriad levels of psychological and objective reality have necessitated exploration of new narrative techniques and devices.

1.3.5 Figurative Language

Writers have a way of using words to convey more than they do on the surface – beyond their literal meanings. Such a use of words is generally called figurative language. Some of the common figures of speech are simile, metaphor, personification, symbol, imagery, irony, paradox, satire, antithesis, allegory, euphemism, hyperbole, eulogy, understatement. (You may refer to Block 5 of EEG-01 of IGNOU's BDP Programme) we have explained these terms in the Glossary of this unit as well. For a stylistic appreciation of a short story, an understanding of how the writer has used language to signify something beyond itself is important. Every word will count toward the sum total of that story's significance.

1.3.6 Point of View

Happenings in stories may look lifelike and historically accurate, at the same time they are strongly marked by the authors' feelings about what happens, by their conviction that the essential reality of things is created by what people feel about them. The significant reality is in the hearts of people, hence the emphasis in these stories is on how and what the authors feel about what happens because what ultimately counts is not the events themselves but what we feel about them. Thus *The Only American...* is not really about the brilliant Dr. Khanna settling down in the USA but about the devastating effect of this event on his father. The range and subtlety of the normal dilemmas so effectively dramatized by both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das highlight the intricate codes and mores of our time and the authors' point of view in this regard.

Similarly Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narsimhan expose our deep-rooted prejudices and preferences causing irreparable damage to filial relationships.

The point of view is thus the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life embodied in the narrative. It is what we are to make of the

human experience rendered in the story – always involving directly or indirectly, some comment on values in human nature and conduct. The question most of us invariably ask about life is “What does it mean”? We like the story to work itself out into a unity – just as we feel a need to have our own lives make sense. We all work out our own scale of values and live by it. Different points of view enlarge our vision and help us gain a new perspective. We can and do make, even in disagreement, the imaginative effort to realize what underlies the logic of another’s point of view, the logic by which a theme unfolds. Given below is a detailed glossary of terms you will encounter in your critical readings of short stories.

1.4 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Action:	Aristotle says that any literary form that tells a story involves the imitation of human action(praxis). A series of events having unity and significance.
Allegory:	In allegorical stories the characters and events stand for a set of ideas or moral qualities or abstraction. Realistic plots are not important here.
Allusion:	A reference in a story to a generally well-known person, place or event or situation outside the literary work. Allusions to memorable ideas and people expand and enrich the meaning of the work. The most notable sources of literary allusions are history, literature, mythology, legends, etc.
Anecdote:	A brief narrative account of some incident or event.
Antagonist:	The character in opposition to the <u>protagonist</u> or central character. Agon is a Greek word meaning ‘public performance’ or ‘contest’.
Anticlimax:	A break in the climatic order of events or effects, a falling off from the expected intensification of effect.
Antithesis:	which uses a contrast of ideas
Atmosphere:	The mood of the story created by the plot, character, setting and diction. It is distinct from <u>tone</u> , which refers to the author’s attitude towards his subject and the audience.
Character:	A person in a story. Individual beliefs, habits, mindsets, moral choices and <u>motivation</u> distinguish one fictional character from another.
Cliché:	Usually used in reference to a phrase which has lost its force because of continual use. It is applied occasionally to fictional situations or events which have become hackneyed and stereotyped.
Coherence:	The hanging together – the interconnectedness – of the parts of a piece of fiction. Truth of coherence has to do with the internal consistency of a piece of literature.

The Short Story

Conflict:	An encounter between opposing forces creating interest and suspense. It can be between a good person and a bad person, between tradition and modernity, between ambition and obligations, etc.
Connotation:	The cluster of meanings implied or suggested by a word, as different from its literal or <u>denotative</u> meaning.
Denouement:	A French word referring to that part of the plot in which conflicts are finally resolved. The final resolution or untying of the plot.
Diction:	The words, the vocabulary used in a particular story.
Didactic:	Meant to teach or instruct the reader. Parables, fables and allegories are didactic; their moral theme determines the choice of characters and the plots.
Eulogy:	High praise of a person or his qualities
Euphemism:	Substitution of an inoffensive expression for something that is explicitly offensive
Exposition:	That information about characters and events which is necessary for the reader to understand the developing action.
Figurative Language:	Language which uses figures of speech, simile and metaphor being the most common, to create special effects and expand the meaning.
Flashback:	Interrupting the chronological sequence presenting an event or episode that happened earlier.
Foil:	A contrast.
Genre:	A French word to denote a literary form such as tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, novel or short story.
Hyperbole:	an exaggerated statement (for comic or dramatic effect sometimes) not to be taken literally
Image:	Words and phrases, which suggest concrete, physical or descriptive details, presenting a sense experience.
Imagery:	Figurative language which expands the theme of a literary work.
Irony:	Contrasts or discrepancies between what seems to be and what actually is, what is said and what is meant.
Metaphor:	comparison between two things not usually thought of as similar without using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>
Narrative Technique:	Methods of telling a story.
Paradox:	which uses a contrast of ideas

Pathos:	The sense of pity. The author must see to it that the pathos in a story emerges legitimately and naturally from the situation given. There should be reasonable basis for the pathos in character and situation.
Personification:	giving of human characteristics, powers or feelings to inanimate or non-living objects
Point of View:	Loosely used to refer to the author's basic ideas; for example, one may speak of a detached point of view, a sympathetic point of view, etc.
Satire:	which ridicules vice or folly, or attacks an individual with some kind of non-literal use of language
Simile:	Comparison between two things to present an effective word - picture by using words as <i>like</i> and <i>as</i>
Symbol:	A sign, a mark, a word or an object looked upon as representing something
Understatement:	A statement which is not strong enough to express the facts or the feelings with full force
Verisimilitude:	Means trueness to life.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have given you a brief account of the history of the short story world-wide and the basic elements of a short story such as plot, characterisation, atmosphere, narrative techniques and points of view. At the end of the unit we have listed Glossary of important terms that will help you with your critical readings of short stories.

1.6 SUGGESTED READING

- 1) Carpenter, Jack and Neumeyer, Peter. *Elements of Fiction Introduction to the Short Story*, Iowa, W.M.C Brown Company Publishers, 1974.
- 2) A.N. Dwivedi. (edited), *Studies in Contemporary Indian - English Short Story*, Delhi; B.R.Publishing Corporation, 1991.
- 3) Mizener, Arthur. (edited), *Modern Short Stories The Uses of Imagination*, New York, W.W.Norton and Company, 1979.
- 4) C.V. Venugopal. *The Indian Short Story in English*, Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1976.
- 5) E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Nove*, U.K., Penguin Books Ltd., 1966.
- 6) R.P. Brooks C. Warren. *Understanding Fiction*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979.

References

- ¹ Peter S. Prescott. Ed. "American Short Stories" in *The Norton Book of American Short story*. New Delhi Affiliated East/West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1990. P-13.
- ² Balarama Gupta G.S. "The Short Story Writers Self, Society and Emancipation" in Kamini Dinesh ed. *Between Spaces of Silence* p.148
- ³ Ibid; p.149.
- ⁴ Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. Iowa, WMC Brown Company Publishers, 1974. pp 18-19
- ⁵ E.M. Forster. *Aspects of the Novel*, U.K. Penguin Books Ltd, 1966. p.93
- ⁶ Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer: *Elements of Fiction. Introduction to the Short Story*. P.40
- ⁷ Wallace and Mary Stegner. Eds. *Great American Short Stories*; New York. Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1957 p.15.
- ⁸ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Fiction*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs. 1979. p.109.
- ⁹ Jack Carpenter, Peter Neumeyer. p.184.

UNIT 2 R.K.NARAYAN

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 R.K.Narayan
- 2.3 *An Astrologer's Day*
 - 2.3.1 Structure
 - 2.3.2 Atmosphere
 - 2.3.3 Characterisation
 - 2.3.4 Suspense
 - 2.3.5 Meaning
- 2.4 *Engine Trouble*
 - 2.4.1 Atmosphere
 - 2.4.2 Characterisation
 - 2.4.3 Meaning
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine two stories of R.K.Narayan, one of the best known Indian English writers who appeared on the Indian literary scene along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao in the 1930s. This unit will help you understand Narayan and his style of story writing in a critical perspective.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As you have been told in Unit 1 of this Block, four main elements to be kept in mind while analysing a story are:

- a. Structure - the form plays a decisive role in making it interesting
- b. Setting and environment – the authenticity of atmosphere is an essential ingredient of a successful short story.
- c. Characterisation – choice and development of characters within the constraints imposed by the form.
- d. Meaning – author's message and comment, if any, should be inherent in the design and structure.

We are going to examine these in our appreciation of R.K. Narayan's stories – *An Astrologer's* and *Engine Trouble*.

2.2 R.K.NARAYAN

The Indian resurgence received a fresh impetus during the Gandhian Age(1920-1947) which witnessed a tremendous upheaval in the political, social and economic spheres. The freedom struggle reached its peak and there was an unprecedented awakening among sections of society – women, the youth and the down-trodden - which had long suffered under the weight of traditional authority. The major triumvirate of Indian

English fiction – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao – began to write during this period.



R.K. Narayan (1907-2001)

As this Elock goes for print, we have heard of the sad demise of R.K. Narayan. V reproduce the 'In Memoriam' by Dr. Louella Logo Prabhu, published in the *University Today* dated 1 June 2001, 455 no. to this great Indian genius.

In Memoriam – R.K. Narayan

India, and the world of letters, were orphaned by the death of R.K. Narayan. To a newer generation honed by the transcontinental success of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy he may appear a back number. In fact it was he who stormed the world of English letters when Graham Greene introduced him to Hamish Hamilton who became his first major publisher.

Greene was no Narayan what Yeats was to Tagore. The generosity of the British Establishment, sometimes, is highly commendable. Without Yeats, Tagore may not have made it to the Nobel Academy. Narayan may have languished as teacher of English at Maharaja's School. It is ironic to note that when he failed in English, he took a year off to study it. His private readings developed his style and directly led to his trying his hand at creative work.

The postman, who called, would commiserate with yet one more packet arrived-with one more rejection slip.

Malgudi is to Narayan what Egdon Heath was to Thomas Hardy. He worked in the miniature to create a wholly imaginary town which is more real or feels more real than the place you live. Its nearest equivalent is Mysore. That is where his mind, his heart, his very soul lay. He came to all-India fame when one of the Nag brothers serialised his short stories over Doordarshan. It was one of DD's most popular serials ever.

As a nominated MP the one issue he took up was the weight of a child's schoolbag. Otherwise, unlike Shabana Azmi, was apolitical. He lived a long, full life up to the age of 96. It is sad that he has gone but his passing bears with it the plenitude of a life full of personal growth, the ability to take failure, with success, and in the end to be overwhelmed with an amplitude of honours.

R.K.Narayan – as is the practice in Southern India, the two initials preceding Narayan stand respectively for the village from which Narayan's family comes and the name of his father. R is for Rasipuram, a taluq in the district of Salem, to which Narayan's ancestors belonged. By the time Narayan was born (10th October 1907), the family had moved to Madras. Soon after his birth, his father Krishnaswami Iyer got a job in Mysore as schoolmaster and moved there.

R.K. Narayan

Narayan knew only two languages – Tamil and English, but having stayed so many years in Mysore could manage to understand Kannada.

Narayan has produced a sizeable body of work -- more than 10 novels and 6 collections of short stories – which makes him one of the most respected writers in the British Commonwealth.

His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) made an instant appeal to some of the leading writers and critics in England. Graham Greene hailed it as "a book in ten thousand".

Narayan wrote steadily ever since.

Narayan claimed that his purpose in art was to convey unambiguously the thoughts and acts of a set of personalities, who flourished in a small town named Malgudi (supposed to be) located in a corner of South India.

Narayan wrote chiefly about the Indian middle class because he was a part of it and understood it best. This is the middle class where people are not too well – off to be unworried about money or brutalised by the total lack of it.

Given below are the titles of his major works:

Novels:

Swami and Friends (1935)
The Bachelor of Arts (1937)
The Dark Room (1938)
The English Teacher (1945)
Mr. Sampath (1949)
The Financial Expert (1952)
Waiting for the Mahatma (1955)
The Guide (1958)
The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1962)
The Sweet – Vendor (1967)

Collections of short stories

Malgudi Days (1941)
Dodu and other stories (1943)
Cyclone and other stories (1944)
* *An Astrologer's Day and other stories* (1947)
Lawley Road and other stories (1956)
A Horse and Two Goats (1970)

Others

Next Sunday (1956, Sketches and Essays)
My Dateless Diary (1960, an account of his journey to America)
Gods, Demons and Others (1965, a retelling of some classical myths)

2.3 AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

'An Astrologer's Day' appeared for the first time in 1943 in Narayan's third collection of short stories, *Cyclone and Other Stories*. Subsequently in 1947 an other volume by the same title 'An Astrologers Day and Other Stories' was published.

Like the astrologer, Narayan had "a working analysis of mankind's troubles : marriage, money and the tangles of human ties". We may add caste, poverty, man's harshness to man, and a view of life dependent upon a profound unquestioned religious mentality.

2.3.1 Structure

"All art is an order to form", said noted art-critic Herbert Read. The artist captures the inchoate world in a certain form so that it makes sense, some sense. A well thought-out design implies an effective arrangement of incidents and situations without the slightest hint of contrivance, to make the narrative both interesting and authentic. An Astrologer's Day is an example of a perfectly worked out story with a taut control of the author.

2.3.2 Atmosphere

Narayan has an eye for detail, any significant detail. With his keen observation and "talent for the particular", to use Henry James' words, he creates an atmosphere of a perfect work place for the astrologer. His professional equipment consisted of "a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing". The boughs of the spreading tamarind tree, the surging crowd moving up and down the narrow road morning till night, the variety of traders – medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, auctioneers of cheap cloth, and vendors of fried groundnut – vociferously vying with each other to attract the crowd, the light and smoke of the crackling flare above the groundnut heap and hissing gaslights take us actually into the midst of a bewildering criss-cross of shafts of lights, moving shadows and deafening din. Just the right setting for an astrologer. The atmosphere thus prepares us for what is to follow and lends authenticity to the entire episode and experience.

2.3.3 Characterisation

In the beginning of the story we are introduced to only the astrologer. All others transacting their business nearby are there to create the right atmosphere and provide the setting necessary for the development of the plot. The astrologer whose name we don't know (and it doesn't really matter that we don't know it) has the basic intelligence to know how to go about his profession. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermillion, and he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed because this attracted people to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks, and he knew it. He also knew what his clients wanted to hear. You can tell anyone, absolutely anyone, that he is not getting the fullest results for his efforts and get away with it. Clever as he was, he never opened for at least ten minutes which provided him enough stuff for "a dozen answers and advices".

The only thing the astrologer didn't know anything about was astrology. "He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. But it didn't seem to matter at all. He said things which pleased and astonished everyone: that was more a matter of study, practice and shrewd guesswork."

We thus have a perfect portrait of an astrologer – the likes of whom we often come across, almost daily, in our own marketplace and township. And even though we may harbour doubts about their knowledge of stars, we do feel tempted to consult them to know what future has in store for us.

2.3.4 Suspense

In our discussion on the history of short stories we have told you how curiosity, and the desire to know the unknown provoked story telling and story making activities. It is the element of suspense that makes readability. Readability is of prime importance in a good work of art for Narayan. And suspense is one way of retaining the readers' interest. By way of the personal life or past history of the astrologer, all that we are told in the beginning of the story is that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life. He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. He had to leave home without telling anyone and he had to cover a safe distance of at least a couple of hundred miles before he could pause and recollect himself and his life. The distance of two hundred miles means something to a villager. We are also told that astrology was not his family business. If he had continued to live in his village, he would have tilled the land and tended his cornfields like his forefathers.

So there obviously was something in his past that had broken this ancestral cycle and forced him to leave all of a sudden. Not only suddenly but also stealthily. Without informing anyone.

At this point in the story we may gloss over this past, so taken in are we with the business of astrology and how our protagonist goes about it but we would obviously want to know these details before the story ends.

The narration continues at its normal expected pace. One night just as our protagonist gets ready to call it a day and picks up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia to put them back into his bag, he looks up and sees a man standing before him. Sensing a possible client the astrologer uses his time-tested gimmick and offers to mitigate his worries if only he sits down for a chat. This obviously means an extra buck coming the astrologer's way. And he wouldn't like to let this God-sent opportunity slip by.

It being a late evening hour, our shrewd astrologer haggles over the amount to be charged, not realising that this is no usual casual client wanting temporary respite from the routine burden of life. The stranger has specific queries and he wants specific answers. No generalities. No soothing platitudes. No bluffing, in short.

The atmosphere becomes significant all of a sudden. The nuts vendor had blown out his flame and gone home. The astrologer didn't have lights of his own. It was dark all around except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground. Obviously it was not constant. Against this background of semi-darkness, the astrologer had obviously recognised the man facing him and now ruthlessly insisting on getting his money's worth by way of satisfactory answers. But as the stranger lit his cheroot, the astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. For some obscure reason (obscure to the reader) the astrologer now felt very uncomfortable and tried to wriggle out of the whole thing, his voice shaky, almost faint. But now the stranger won't let him go. "A challenge is a challenge".

What the astrologer says hereafter takes him as well as the reader by surprise. He was left for dead, a knife had passed through him once, he was pushed into a well nearby in the field. The effect is further heightened when the astrologer even gives out his correct name. Guru Nayak is now completely stumped. He asks the astrologer when he would be able to get at the man who had stabbed him and left him for dead. Very confidently the astrologer tells him to give up the hunt -- because the assailant had died four months ago, crushed under a lorry in a far-off town. His parting/patronising advice is that Guru Nayak should take the next train and go home, stay put there and

never travel southward again. The episode leaves us with new-found admiration for the astrologer. How could he so correctly read the stranger's past and even know his name? Had he studied the stars and mastered his art, contrary to the common belief? Did he possess some uncanny powers, which could be put to good use, when needed?

The story takes yet another twist when the astrologer reaches home around midnight and talks to the waiting, anxious wife. After dinner, he tells her that a great load is off his chest. All these years he had thought that the blood of a man was on his hands. That was why he had run away from home, settled here, and married her. But the man he thought he had killed was alive. She gasped. So do we. So this was the reason why the astrologer had to leave his village without any plan or preparation. And this was how he could so correctly talk of Guru Nayak's troubled past. Everything begins to fall in place.

Guru Nayak didn't expect his assailant to take on this new garb. It was semi-dark. He could not recognise the astrologer, with his forehead resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion and a saffron-coloured turban round his head. But the astrologer had recognised him by the matchlight when the latter had lit his cheroot. That's when he had started to feel uncomfortable, shiver and pull out of the deal.

But long practice had taught him how to handle such trying situations, to his advantage. Not finding a way out and having won Guru Nayak's trust he advised him never to leave his village, never to travel southward again. Thus he ensured for himself a safe and secure life hereafter. Convinced that his assailant had been crushed under a lorry four months ago, Guru Nayak would not want to venture out of his village especially when it forebode grave risk to his life.

The story thus ends with an incredible twist : "a murdered man" turns up to consult his "murderer" regarding when he will be able to have his revenge; the "murderer" recognises him but he cannot recognise his old enemy in his garb as an astrologer, is astonished to be told his previous history, and meekly agrees to give up his search for his enemy declared to have been crushed under a lorry months ago. Prof. Percy D. Westbrook in his essay entitled "*The Short Stories of R.K. Narayan*" dismisses this as a gimmick. But we have to concede that the author has blended the atmosphere, the setting and the protagonist to perfection.

2.3.5 Meaning

Narayan is a master of irony. The story is as much a comment on the astrologer's crafty ways as on the gullible masses. He knew nothing about astrology but enough about the common man's psychology. And that has pulled him through all these years. His "eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his simple clients took to be a prophetic light and felt comforted". A comment on the ways of the simple folk and how they allow themselves to be taken for a ride. An ironic comment on how the science of astrology has been misused by these conmen in our society. An unfortunate consequence has been intelligent people's distrust of astrology and astrologers.

There is an element of social satire also in the story. As youngsters, silly youngsters, the astrologer and his friends drank, gambled and quarrelled badly. What happened one day and how it affected their lives henceforth is for all of us to see. Life could never be the same for anyone of them. We should never let things go out of hand. And yet, such things do take place every once in a while. Only the repercussions are not always so grave. According to K.R. Srinivas Iyengar "there are no good or bad characters in Narayan's works. Human nature is presented veraciously and interestingly and memorably and there is no overt condemnation or praise."

'Engine Trouble' is taken from the collection *An Astrologer's Day* (1947). A man draws a lottery ticket at a fair, winning a road engine. At first he is delighted, thinking that he has made a fortune but with each passing day the engine proves to be a useless burden, costing money to occupy space and to move. Just as the owner is deciding to leave everything and flee from Malgudi, an earthquake occurs, shifting the road engine into a disused well belonging to his creditors. The engine fits the well like a cork and everyone is delighted.

Both the theme and plot are very simple here: the road engine, a heavy inanimate object, attaches itself to the man and influences his living, his human individuality until the balance is restored in the end. There is a firm story-line and the movement is circular.

There is an element of autobiography here in that Narayan has been terrified of Arithmetic in real life and this reflects his incapacity to handle machines. Narayan failed several times in Intermediate and Degree examinations and could not graduate till he was 24. He is inept with mechanical contrivances, electrical gadgets and the camera -- almost anything requiring the use of hands. The winner of road engine in the story under discussion cannot even think of handling the engine himself, with some help and guidance.

In one of Narayan's stories, 'Crime and Punishment' an over-pampered young boy forces his private tutor to act as a stationmaster. Instead of learning the table of 16 the boy opened the cupboard, took out his train set and started assembling the track. He wound the engine and put it down, and it went round and round. The teacher got tired of the game soon enough and got up, much to the displeasure of his pupil. Luckily for him the engine also suddenly refused to move. The boy handed it to him and commanded, "Repair it, Sir". The teacher turned it about in his hand and said, "I can't. I know nothing about it...". The teacher was desperate. He could not turn the simplest screw if it was to save his life. So, *Engine Trouble* is a motif hunting R.K. Narayan since his childhood.

2.4.1 Atmosphere

If you have read *Engine Trouble* you must have gazed that a very natural description is given of the things that take place on the Gymkhana Grounds or RamLila Maidan or Gandhi Chowk of any small town. First the mela-style Gaiety Land with all sorts of fun and gambling and sideshows, with performing parrots and daring motorcyclists looping the loop in the Dome of Death, the cattle show, the breath-taking yogic feats of the Swamiji, the Cosmopolitan Club with its tennis court, the temple, the railway station and the station-master, the mail train. The fifty coolies pushing the road engine take us right into the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

The success of the story lies in the visual images evoked by the narration. The image of a mela comes alive before us with its shooting galleries, Dome of Death, different booths for fun and gambling. We can really imagine a long line of lottery ticket -- buyers waiting with baited breath for the draw results. We can also visualise our poor protagonist looking fascinatedly at his engine and its shining brass and patting it affectionately.

The next striking sight is the temple elephant yoked to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind and Joseph sitting in the driver's seat. A huge crowd collecting around and watching in great glee and letting out a joyous yell when the engine runs straight into the opposite compound wall is a familiar enough experience.

The jam-packed town hall spellbound by the Swamiji's miraculous feats, the police inspector making his dramatic entry into the eager crowd flaunting a brown envelope just as the last part of the grand show was about to be enacted, the Swamiji and his assistant leaving the accursed place in great rage – create a highly evocative dramatic scene.

2.4.2 Characterisation

With his intimate understanding of the place and keen observation, Narayan introduces us to a plethora of characters. We begin with the clever showman of the Gaiety Land. The fellow who had brought the road engine here had to be paid a hundred rupees for the job and five rupees a day thereafter. The showman, therefore, sent him away and made up his mind that if no one was going to draw the engine, he would just leave it to its fate. He had got it down just as a novelty for the show (and the move had obviously paid rich dividends). That explains how the road engine came to be included among the prizes.

The Municipal Chairman, Secretary of the Cosmopolitan Club, the sympathetic priest of the local temple, friends and well-wishers pouring in to congratulate the protagonist on his latest acquisition – not knowing how much a road engine would fetch but convinced that there was a lot of money in it, the dismissed bus-driver Joseph, the mail engine-driver pointing out that he had his own locomotive to mind and couldn't think of jumping off at a wayside station for anybody's sake, the Swamiji and his assistant, the police inspector and the owner of the compound wall, a good part of which was reduced to powder by the elephant's kick – recreate for us the entire township, alive and vibrating.

About the protagonist we don't know very much except that he was talkative (how else would he recount the tale of his woes in such great detail !) and that like Mr. Micawber in *David Copperfield*, he kept hoping against hope that someday there would come his way a lump sum to make amends for all this deficit and suffering. He is not in command of anything, not even his life anymore- he is a man trapped by circumstances so much so that feeling totally defeated and dejected he decides in his weaker moments to leave everything to fate and disappear one fine night.

His wife represents a typical Indian housewife. Unable to suffer her husband's idiosyncrasies (or so they appear to every wife) anymore, she threatens to write to her father to come and take her away.

No names of persons or places are given because they are not important. What is important is the turn the circumstances take to bring about a near devastation in the life of a common man. Even so, the author doesn't miss out on any detail – when the protagonist went to meet the Municipal Chairman, he went with great trepidation and buttoned up his coat as he entered the chairman's room.

Talkative man is the narrator of many a short story of Narayan.

Talkative Man (1986) claimed to be a short story by the blurb, but described by Narayan himself as a long short story of 116 type – written pages, is the story of an amateur journalist proud of calling himself Talkative Man (TM) who narrates the story of a futurologist, Dr. Rangan, Rann with a double 'nn' who proves to be an expert not so much in futurology as in the fraudulent art of Caspanovism, sowing wild oats around.

2.4.3 Meaning

What does the story convey to the reader? Only after the protagonist manages to get rid of the road engine by another quirk of fate, is he able to get his life back on its track. With the engine off his neck and all his dues having been taken care of by the

owner of the compound wall and well, he can hope to be rejoined by his wife. Life returns to an even keel with the protagonist gaining nothing but experience from the entire drama.

R.K. Narayan

The story has a much wider appeal. Hasn't it happened with many/all of us sometime or the other that just when we thought our troubles were coming to an end, they were in fact, just beginning?

At the social level, Narayan makes fun of the municipality and its lack of concern for the people it is supposed to serve.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

Narayan wrote that it was one of his principles in telling his stories 'to compress the range of observation and subject the particle to an intense scrutiny'³

An innate sense of irony, humour and the complete absence of pomposity and pretence is what makes Narayan the writer he is. Narayan's good – humoured irony as a firm ally of serious moral concern creates thoughtful fiction which has its centre in Malgudi but has a circumference embracing the entire human condition. "Irony is like shot silk showing different colours as it catches the light at different angles, and Narayan is above all a master of irony,"⁴

His world may be regional in that it conveys an intimate sense of a given place but it is not parochial or shuttered. His works create a comedy of sadness, suffused with a pure and unaffected melancholy but also lighted with the glint of mockery of both self and others. William Walsh sums up Narayan's art as "exact realism, poetic myth, sadness, perception and gaiety... It is kind but unsentimental, mocking but uncynical, profoundly Indian but distinctively individual. It fascinates by reason of the authenticity and attractiveness of its Indian setting, and engages because of the substantial human nature which it implies and embodies."⁵

Laxmi Holmstrom sees the commonality of themes of the two stories we have discussed as follows: "In both these stories the pattern is cyclic: a man stands outside a whirlpool of events and commitments and is drawn into it by ambition, by falling in and out of love or by accident. He is swept round with the current and thrown out of the whirlpool, having achieved nothing returning to the point where he began".⁶

Both these stories have a dramatic twist -- human beings pitted against social and/or non-human forces but the dilemma is resolved at the end. The astrologer lives happily hereafter knowing full well that Guru Nayak will not leave his village ever again and the Talkative Man will get back to the business of living with the road engine safe inside the well and the mouth of the well neatly cemented up.

2.6 QUESTIONS

- (a) The story has been narrated by the owner of the engine. Rewrite the story from the point of view of the engine.
- (b) What would you do if you were to win such a prize?
- (c) Of the two Narayan stories discussed above, which do you prefer and why?
- (d) Attempt a character sketch of the astrologer. Does this story evoke sympathy or anger for him in you?

2.7 SUGGESTED READING

1. Dwivedi, A.N. *Studies in Contemporary Indian English Short Story*. B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi. 1991.
2. Holmstrom, Lakshmi. *The Novels of R.K. Narayan* A Writers Workshop Publication, Calcutta 1992.
3. Sundram, P.S. *R.K. Narayan*, Arnold- Heinmann India, New Delhi. 1973.
4. Walsh, William *R.K. Narayan : A critical Appreciation*, Heinemann, London. 1982.

References

- ¹ Percy D. Westbrook. "The Short Stories of R.K. Narayan" in *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* July, 1968.
- ² K.R. Srinivas Iyengar. *Indian Writing in English*, New Delhi. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1984. p 86.
- ³ R.K. Narayan. "English in India" in *Commonwealth Literature*, p. 122.
- ⁴ P.S. Sundaram. *R.K. Narayan*. New Delhi, Arnold Heiremann – 1973, p.122.
- ⁵ William Walsh, *R.K. Narayan A Critical Appreciation* London: Heinemann 1982, pp.168-169.
- ⁶ Laxmi Holmstrom, *The Novels of R.K. Narayan*, Calcutta, Writer's Workshop 1973, p.86.

UNIT 3 ARUN JOSHI AND MANOJ DAS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Arun Joshi – An Overview of his Work
- 3.3 'The Only American from Our Village' – A Discussion
- 3.4 Characterisation
- 3.5 Narrative techniques
- 3.6 Manoj Das – an Introduction
- 3.7 'A Trip into the Jungle' – A Discussion
- 3.8 Characterisation
- 3.9 Narrative Techniques
- 3.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.11 Questions
- 3.12 Suggested Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to examine closely one story each of Arun Joshi and Manoj Das, two major Indian writers writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers from the perspective of cultural dualism and all its deeper implications.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed earlier stories have to be analysed keeping in mind the distinct parameters that govern form and meaning. The three main questions that we will address ourselves will be:

What is the story about?

How has the author organised the material?

Do the devices employed succeed in generating the desired effect and meaning?

Do not forget that these are open-ended narratives. This mode tries to communicate the complexity of life by its refusal to provide neat conclusions. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das have taken the dynamics of cultural interaction as the matrix of their vision. We will try to understand in the course of our in-depth analysis of the stories whether the intercultural tension is situation-based or character-based.

3.2 ARUN JOSHI: AN OVERVIEW OF HIS WORK

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was educated in India and the U.S.A. Although he occupied a very senior position in industry at the time of his untimely demise in 1993, he is regarded as one of the important contemporary fiction writers with the following four novels and one collection of short stories to his credit:

The Foreigner (1968)

The Strange case of Billy Biswas (1971)

The Apprentice (1974)
The Last Labyrinth (1981)
Survivor (1975, short stories)



Arun Joshi (1939-1993)

An existentialist novelist writing in line with Albert Camus and Franz Kafka, Arun Joshi shifted his focus from social realism to psychological realism. Existentialism was a twentieth century phenomena which challenged the then established order of the universe as a divine moral absolute system. Instead it pointed out the aimless existence of a man who is indifferent to everything and alien to everybody. Forces of industrialisation and urbanization have exerted a deleterious influence on the life of man. Joshi has explored the depth of the psyche of an individual trapped in the matrix of decaying human values. "Arun Joshi's works are an illustration of the Indian variety of existentialism"¹

Multiculturalism is today a universal phenomenon. The most distinctive lineament of a commonwealth writer is the duality of selves—the native consciousness and the acquired consciousness. According to A.A.Sinha there have been three different kinds of responses to this cultural multiplicity. "For writers like D.F.Karaka this confrontation has not resulted in any tension creative or otherwise. For the second group the intercultural tension exists but does not seriously affect the course of events in their fictional world. R.K.Narayan and K.Nagarajan have their Malgudi and Kedarlam without any marked intrusion of an alien culture. The third group comprises writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi who have transmuted the encounter of cultures in their fiction in different distinctive ways"². In Arun Joshi's fiction the encounter of cultures is wrought in the conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, rational view of life and the traditional spiritual, emotional stance. *The Foreigner* is the story of Sindi Oberoi who saw himself as an "uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself.... his alienation from the world is not merely one of geography or nationality; it is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him on from crisis to crisis".³

Arun Joshi has never been a prolific story-teller. He has published only a solitary collection of ten short-stories entitled *The Survivor*. There are two other stories, 'The Only American from Our Village' and 'Kanyakumari', which are published separately. The only American from Our Village is included in *Contemporary Indian – English Stories*, ed. Madhusudan Prasad.

3.3 THE ONLY AMERICAN FROM OUR VILLAGE – A DISCUSSION

Arun Joshi and
Manoj Das

In this story Arun Joshi brings about the predicament of a diaspora and his subsequent mental agony. Dr. Khanna, the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin (the finest of all physicists, immigrant or native in his own opinion) decides to visit India with wife Joanne and two sons, fifteen years after he had left it (for higher studies and other prospects presumably).

The four-week trip was a success by all accounts. His fame had preceded him. He was received by an official of the Council of Scientific Research, addressed a conference on Inter-planetary Radiation, inaugurated three well-attended seminars, met the President and the Prime-Minister and was offered many jobs, each of which he politely declined.

His wife and children were worshipped by his relatives whom they had never met before. In the typical tourist style they had brought for them Gillette razors, pop-records and lots of one-dollar neck-ties. Gifts brought by way of a ritual, a formality. Inexpensive gifts. What else do you bring for people you have not met before and are not going to meet again, in all likelihood. And in the true Indian style the razors were greatly prized, by the women who saved them for their teenaged sons. Anything with a foreign label is a prized possession for the majority of us. In the typical tourist style Mrs. Khanna and the children went off on a sight-seeing tour towards the end of their trip and Dr. Khanna delivered his final talk at a college in his former hometown. A perfect finale to a perfect trip, one would think. But this is where the anti-climax comes in the form of Mr. Radhey Mohan, an ashtamp farosh (seller of court paper in front of District Courts) who knew Dr. Khanna's father. He insists on talking to Dr. Khanna despite the embarrassed Principal's unsuccessful intervention because he has come here only to meet him. In the course of his long monologue he tells Dr. Khanna how much his father longed to go to America to spend time with his son and what a tragic end he brought upon himself once forced into sad realisation that his eminent son could spare no time or emotion even for his ailing father.

His story concluded, the ashtamp farosh disappeared shuffling through the dark. Dr. Khanna however, could not be his confident, carefree self again. He had done nothing but stared at his feet thereafter. And he told a psychiatrist that he had periods of great burning in his feet. His output of research had been zero ever since he came back.

The story obviously raises a very pertinent, a very contemporary question: how is making money or holding a chair or presenting brilliant papers at seminars and conferences more meaningful than doing your duty, your filial duty? Self-fulfillment. At what cost?

In *The Apprentice* Ratan Rathore reflects, "That is a terrible sensation. My friend – may God preserve you from it – the realization that one's life has been a great mistake; without purpose, without results. There are many sorrows of a wasted life...." (194)

Wasted life! Father's or son's in this story? Out of sorrow and guilt is Dr. Khanna forced to grope for the meaning of life? What is the meaning of life? The story is a scathing comment on Western emancipation and oriental indolence.

The protagonists of Arun Joshi's two other stories "A Trip for Mr. Lele" and "Survivor" are survivors of the cataclysms and disasters of the so-called progressive society. Can individuality and personal freedom exist in a vacuum? The story seems to indict the dehumanized morals of the modern society and points to a quest for a

humane society filled with natural love because it is only love that sustains human relations and imparts meaning to human existence. Depicting human angst it involves us in an exploration of the deeper sources of inner strength in the midst of contemporary anarchy and obsession with self-aggrandizement.

3.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story is not so much about Dr.Khanna as about his father, about how the latter suffered because of the callous indifference of his only son. Like a typical Indian father Kundan Lal was proud of his son, telling everyone what all the son had done, getting angry if one was not interested in the son's achievements. Dr.Khanna had left for America at the age of 25. He was unmarried at that time. Like any typical Indian father, Kundan Lal too must have hoped that the son would come back after completing his studies or assignment, marry a girl of a respectable family with his father's consent and blessings and hold a big position bringing contentment and comfort in the life of the old man. He used to say the son would be a big government man when he came back. He would say the son was coming back in one year, two years, anytime.

When the son got married there, he was quiet for many months. His dreams shattered, hopes belied. But a brave man, he started talking again – saying the son was the only American from that village. Had he realized at that time itself that by marrying an American the son would never come back – to his father, to his roots? And so he consoled himself believing and telling others it was an honour for the village. That the son had settled in America? Married an American lady?

A proud man Kundan Lal didn't want to discuss his son or his doings with the villagers. Didn't want to ask his son to send him a ticket so that he could visit America, see his son and his wife. Must have thought the son would do it himself. This was the least the son could have done. That's why he started to shave everyday, bought two new shirts and a suit. When his childhood friend, the stamp-seller asked him why he was doing all that, he took him aside and confided with a twinkle in his eyes that he was expecting a ticket, a return ticket from his son, Kundan Lal going to America: It was not something people could laugh away. The whole village knew about it before the daybreak. But the ticket never came. He drowned his grief and humiliation in religion, in hymn-singing. Hoping perhaps that God would make his son send him a ticket or at least a letter. But that was not to be.

Kundan Lal had been a very bright student. His name was on the school Honour Board. He had stood third in the state. Standing third in forty thousand boys was no joke. He won a scholarship as usual. Made a mark even in Lahore where he went for higher studies. But that didn't get to his head. He loved his mother. After her death he locked up the house and went away. He had seen very hard days. Crossing half a mile of boiling sand in May without shoes every morning and evening must have been harrowing. Tying dhak leaves on his naked feet with a string and then crossing the cho required exceptional guts and imagination.

And Dr.Khanna? We are not even told his initials. He has completely negated his ties as a son, as a brother. When informed telegraphically about his father's illness, he sent an ordinary letter saying that he had to attend a conference. The letter didn't say when he would/could come. When the stamp-seller suddenly asks him why he had not sent his father the ticket, Dr.Khanna replies, "I could not. I did not have the money." But in the very first paragraph of the story we have been told that he was among the dozen or so best-dressed men on the campus.

Dr.Khanna's indifference to his father is chilling. He obviously didn't come when his father died. That would have been sheer sentimentality. Expensive and unnecessary.

If the theory of archetypes has any validity whatever, it is only to be expected that so universal a drive as the Search would provide that collective unconscious with a number of related archetypes. The Quest pattern involves, to begin with, the call to adventure, to explore new territories. Obeying the call to adventure traditionally involves the severance, real or, symbolic, of whatever ties may serve to connect one with the past. Besides the Hero, another archetypal character likely to figure importantly in the Search pattern is one whom Jung designated as the Wise Old Man – a character generally beneficent, whose function is to act as a kind of guide to the erring Hero. According to Jung, “The old man... represents knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness and intuition on the one hand, and, on the other, moral qualities such as good will and readiness to help.” The ashtamp farosh is the archetypal Wise Old Man who reunites the son with his father, if only symbolically. In a way the father’s quest for his son is also brought to fruition by him.

3.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Radhey Mohan, the narrator, forces a complacent and smug Dr.Khanna to hear of his father’s woes and travails. And thereby fills him with remorse and repentance. Can he be seen as his father’s alter ego? Some trick of the old man, a slant of the lips, a glint in the eye, the accent -- all these reminded him of his father and made him uncomfortable. Had he been alive today, Kundan Lal too might have worn a greasy jacket with eyes heavy with cataract, with no one to look after him. And during the course of their conversation Dr.Khanna had the unreasonable feeling that the old man was going to slap him (as his own father might have).

The only native word used in the story is ashtamp farosh and it is used 16 times to reinforce the native sensitivity and sensibility of both Radhey Mohan and Kundan Lal. Contrasted with this is Dr.Khanna whose training in the new civilization had been perfect.

Is Radhey Mohan the troubled spirit of Dr.Khanna’s father who couldn’t rest in peace even after death till he had met and talked to his son on his own soil?

Does the father win in the end by making Dr.Khanna realize the futility and hollowness of his whole life? *The Foreigner* vividly depicts the cultures of Boston and New Delhi. In *The strange case of Billy Biswas* the scene shifts from New Delhi to the Satpura hills in Madhya Pradesh, the two geographic locations representing two different cultures – the sophisticated and the primitive. Here Kundan Lal and Dr.Khanna embody two different approaches to life and relationships.

Unlike the two stories of R.K.Narayan which end on a happy note with a final resolution of the tension built earlier, this story is open-ended. Dr.Khanna keeps staring at his feet and complains of burning sensation there. Like his father he too seems to have lost his mental balance. At least temporarily. Will he regain his sanity? Will he return to his research and earn more laurels?

These are questions only time will answer. Will Joanne continue to be with him and nurse him back to normalcy? Given the American life style and values? Is Dr.Khanna doomed to share and suffer his father’s loneliness? Only time will tell.

3.6 MANOJ DAS – AN INTRODUCTION

Manoj Das was born in Balasore, Orissa, in 1934. A Professor of English at Sri Aurbindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry, he also edited for years the now defunct monthly *The Heritage*.

Besides collections of short stories and novels for adults, he has written children's tales and fables, and a booklet on Sri Aurobindo. He writes both in English and Oriya. *A Bride Inside a Casket and Other Tales*, *Man who Lifted the Mountain and other Fantasies*, *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* and *Cyclones* (a novel) are his better-known works.



Manoj Das (1934-)

His first book, *Satabdira Artanada*, in Oriya, was published in 1948. At the age of 15 he had launched the monthly *Diganta*, a reputed Oriya magazine.

A recipient of the Sarala Award, Orissa Sahitya Akademi Award and Central Sahitya Akademi Award and Saraswati Samman, Manoj Das regularly contributed a column, *The Banyan Tree* to *The Hindustan Times* for years.

An authentic story-teller, he is also a social critic. Despite the ambience of fantasy, hard core realistic predicaments and problems underline his vision. His stories linger in the mind because of their satirical undertones which though never cruel or unkind are true enough to be telling.

A Trip into the Jungle was originally published as *The Jungle* in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1971.

3.7 A TRIP INTO THE JUNGLE – A DISCUSSION

A group of five – Raja Sahib, Mr. and Mrs. Mity and, Mr. and Mrs. Chakodi – went to the jungle, to turn primitive for a night as men and women must have been a million years ago, to gorge, to romp and to be violent. Mr. Chakodi, who claimed to be an

authority on the benefit of such occasional explosion of passions had lectured before they began drinking on the philosophy of such deliberate relapses.

**Arun Joshi and
Manoj Das**

Raja Sahib had arranged the outing and had spruced up his almost abandoned bungalow inside the jungle for his guests. They were driven here in the jeep by Shyamal, Raja Sahib's handsome half-brother, one of the numerous illegitimate children of the late Raja but quite low in status as his mother had not been a regularized concubine.

While they all went out hunting, after a round of light refreshment and drink, Shyamal declined to accompany them. Despite Raja Sahib's threats. Mrs. Mity stays back too, ostensibly to get over the disappointment of losing the deer on the way.

Once left alone, Mrs. Mity managed to fall into Shyamal's arms and made him play her game of flesh. He obeyed and obliged her. Stung by the smile of irony dancing on his lips all through and to shatter Mrs. Chakodi's suspicions she concocted an alleged assault by Shyamal, now sound asleep in a corner of the hall, as soon as the party returned. Predictably they all marched towards the sleeping chauffeur and began to kick him frantically. All except Mrs. Mity. Amidst their wild blows and kicks Shyamal swooned away and was dragged into a small room where they had just deposited a half-dead boar. Then they retired into the high-walled kitchen garden, made a fire, sat around it and drank. And then dancing around the fire they cut out and ate slices from the boar, which they had thrown into the fire half alive. Long into the night they ate half-roasted slices from it and sang and danced.

But the next morning when the watchman's knocks wake them up and Raja Sahib advances towards the room into which Shyamal had been thrown last evening so that tea can be arranged, Mrs. Mity stops him half-way. Suppose he opens the door and finds the boar instead of Shyamal there? But didn't they roast and eat up the boar last night? But suppose they see the boar instead of Shyamal in the room? Two hours later they return, Mr. Mity driving the jeep. They didn't look into the room, after all. Bringing Shyamal back is none of their responsibility. He is only a chauffeur, after all. But the suspicion that in their drunken stupor they might indeed have roasted and eaten up the badly thrashed Shyamal instead of the boar sends shivers down our spine.

3.8 CHARACTERISATION

Degeneration of the worst kind is common to the characters of this story. Raja Sahib was ugly, drained of all life from reckless indulgences, of late content with hovering around and brushing against and sniffing women. It was just for this benefit that he had arranged this outing. When Mrs. Mity wakes up the next morning she describes Raja Sahib as a pile of fifth, half a dozen flies hovering around his bloated lips.

Mr. Mity and Mrs. Chakodi had fallen into stupor on the floor, trying to crawl closer, Mrs. Chakodi had called Mr. Mity a wolf on an earlier occasion. Her words sounded innocent but she left the atmosphere sick everytime she spoke.

Mrs. Mity is a bundle of hypocrisy and pretences. When an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of their jeep she gave a shriek, her face all butter with pity. Mr. Chakodi used the moment to sympathise with her but actually try to come as close to the buttery face as possible. Mrs. Mity calls him a snob who snores as a pig grunts. The same kind-hearted Mrs. Mity accuses Shyamal of impudence and vulgarity when he refuses to shoot a pregnant deer. Shyamal had his barrel pointed right at the head of the deer. But didn't shoot. And to the five pairs of venom-spitting eyes he explained that the deer was pregnant. But it means nothing to Mrs. Mity – the same Mrs. Mity who had shrieked when an injured butterfly got crushed under a wheel of the jeep. She can't forgive Shyamal for his impudence. Deep anger and frustration clog her

voice. She is again on the verge of a breakdown. Not because a pregnant deer was about to be killed but because the impudent chauffeur didn't shoot the deer despite clear orders to do so, pregnancy or no pregnancy. So much for her delicate concern for the butterflies and beasts! She sat beside Shyamal, the impudent young man who seemed not to care two hoots for their sentiments.

Inside the bungalow she manipulates to be left behind with Shyamal. Manipulates to fall into his arms. Manipulates her game of flesh. She has no qualms about telling lies. To punish Shyamal for his ironic smile and to set at rest any suspicions Mrs. Chakodi might have nursed on this account, she concocts an alleged assault and has the unsuspecting, sleeping Shyamal brutally bashed and kicked. She herself stands afar and laughs hysterically. A woman devoid of any morals, any conscience.

The trouble is all them are the same – total moral degeneration has left them hollow.

The trouble also is that they represent a growing section of our society doing the same.

3.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Unlike 'The Only American....' We do not have any central narrator here whose identity; presence and comments could contribute to the meaning of the story. The narrator here is unknown. The effect is situation based. Situations, which expose all the characters in their true light.

The author builds up suspense to the point it becomes almost unbearable and leaves us there. Leaves us to draw our own conclusions.

'A Trip into the Jungle' reminds us of a very famous story 'Lady or the Tiger'. The protagonist in that story had the choice of entering one of the two doors – one leading to the beautiful lady and the other to the ferocious tiger. But no one, absolutely no one knew which door led to heaven and which to hell. And no one knew what fate awaited the protagonist once his choice was made. He could have lived in sheer bliss, he could have been devoured by the tiger – the audience were left guessing. We are also left guessing (and gasping !) by Manoj Das at the end of his story. Is Shyamal alive or dead? If alive, the chances are quite remote, how will he manage to come out of the locked doors? Will the watchman help him? Once out, will he let the by-gones be by-gones or take revenge? He was left for dead, if nothing else. Was he eaten up, as Mrs. Mity feared? All these questions are left unanswered. That's why we call it an open-ended story. The narrative is quite straight-forward.

3.10 LET US SUM UP

In both these stories the authors offer a critique of modern progress and advancement. In the rat race for name and fame Dr. Khanna forgets his father – the man who must have made all imaginable sacrifices to provide his son with all possible facilities to reach the top. The group of five in Manoj Das' story are brutal to the hilt. These men and women of means are devoid of any ethics or concern for others. They live only for themselves. Both Arun Joshi and Manoj Das compel us to look around, peep inside ourselves and assess the role money plays/ should play in our lives and relationships. And the havoc that the power of money can bring about ! And the arrogance of the moneyed people. Both these writers are deeply concerned with values – values that are fast disappearing from our lives and society. Values like love, filial dedication, familial commitment and concern for the under-privileged.

Awareness leads to understanding and understanding hopefully to a solution, sooner or later.

**Arun Joshi and
Manoj Das**

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Would you prefer stories with neat, clear resolutions to the ones that raise many questions and suggest many possibilities but leave everything dangling in mid air at the end?
2. Do you agree that both these stories are a close reflection of the life around us today?
3. Why did Dr.Khanna's father hasten his end and that too in such a tragic manner?

3.12 SUGGESTED READING

Rajendra Prasad. *The Self, The Family and Society in Five Indian Novelists: Rajan, Raja Rao, Narayan, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1990.

Tapan K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction The Labyrinth of Life*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Novels of Arun Joshi*. New Delhi, Prestige.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi*, New Delhi, Classical Books, 1986.

A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998, p.2.

References

¹ J. Tapan, K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction, The Labyrinth of Life* Prestige, New Delhi, 1996 p.11.

² A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998 p.2.

³ Ibid; p.5.

UNIT 4 SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA & RAJI NARASIMHAN

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Subhadra Sengupta – an Introduction
- 4.3 ‘The Fourth Daughter’ – Some Issues
- 4.4 Characterisation
- 4.5 Narrative Techniques
- 4.6 Raji Narasimhan – an Introduction
- 4.7 ‘A Toast to Herself’ – Some Issues
- 4.8 Characterisation
- 4.9 Narrative Techniques
- 4.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.11 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to closely examine one story each of Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narasimhan, two contemporary Indian women writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers as women. The stories we have selected attempt to draw your attention to the plight of the girl child and some of the problems women face in our society today. These are stories written from a particular point of view.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women continue to be trapped by tradition. Prosperity has not brought social progress with it. Son worship continues unabated. Both these stories are concerned with some of our social mores and modes with all their ethical and human implications. The three basic areas of our concern will be:

- i. What does the story try to stress?
- ii. What narrative devices does the author use to draw our attention to the issues raised?
- iii. Does the story succeed in generating the desired effect?

These are problem-based stories. Characterisation is not as important here as the problems stated. The main concern of the authors is to make the readers conscious of the prevalent social ills and their ethical/personal dimensions. It is hoped that awareness will lead to understanding and some possible remedy. It is not necessary to provide a resolution at the end. It is inherent in developing the right perspective.

4.2 SUBHADRA SENGUPTA - AN INTRODUCTION

Subhadra Sengupta was born in 1952 and received a Master of Arts in History from Delhi University. She has been writing regularly since 1976, and her first collection of short stories titled *Good Girls are Bad News* was published by Rupa

Awareness leads to understanding and understanding hopefully to a solution, sooner or later.

Arun Joshi and
Manoj Das

3.11 QUESTIONS

1. Would you prefer stories with neat, clear resolutions to the ones that raise many questions and suggest many possibilities but leave everything dangling in mid air at the end?
2. Do you agree that both these stories are a close reflection of the life around us today?
3. Why did Dr.Khanna's father hasten his end and that too in such a tragic manner?

3.12 SUGGESTED READING

Rajendra Prasad. *The Self, The Family and Society in Five Indian Novelists: Rajan, Raja Rao, Narayan, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1990.

Tapan K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction The Labyrinth of Life*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Novels of Arun Joshi*. New Delhi, Prestige.

R.K. Dhawan (Ed.). *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi*, New Delhi, Classical Books, 1986.

A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998, p.2.

References

¹ J. Tapan, K. Ghosh. *Arun Joshi's Fiction, The Labyrinth of Life* Prestige, New Delhi, 1996 p.11.

² A.A. Sinha. *The Novels of Kamla Markandaya and Arun Joshi*, Jalandhar, ABS Publications, 1998 p.2.

³ Ibid; p.5.

UNIT 4 SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA & RAJI NARASIMHAN

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Subhadra Sengupta – an Introduction
- 4.3 ‘The Fourth Daughter’ – Some Issues
- 4.4 Characterisation
- 4.5 Narrative Techniques
- 4.6 Raji Narasimhan – an Introduction
- 4.7 ‘A Toast to Herself’ – Some Issues
- 4.8 Characterisation
- 4.9 Narrative Techniques
- 4.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.11 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

Our aim in this unit is to closely examine one story each of Subhadra Sengupta and Raji Narasimhan, two contemporary Indian women writing in English. This unit will help you understand the concerns of these writers as women. The stories we have selected attempt to draw your attention to the plight of the girl child and some of the problems women face in our society today. These are stories written from a particular point of view.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Women continue to be trapped by tradition. Prosperity has not brought social progress with it. Son worship continues unabated. Both these stories are concerned with some of our social mores and modes with all their ethical and human implications. The three basic areas of our concern will be:

- i. What does the story try to stress?
- ii. What narrative devices does the author use to draw our attention to the issues raised?
- iii. Does the story succeed in generating the desired effect?

These are problem-based stories. Characterisation is not as important here as the problems stated. The main concern of the authors is to make the readers conscious of the prevalent social ills and their ethical/personal dimensions. It is hoped that awareness will lead to understanding and some possible remedy. It is not necessary to provide a resolution at the end. It is inherent in developing the right perspective.

4.2 SUBHADRA SENGUPTA - AN INTRODUCTION

Subhadra Sengupta was born in 1952 and received a Master of Arts in History from Delhi University. She has been writing regularly since 1976, and her first collection of short stories titled *Good Girls are Bad News* was published by Rupa

in 1992. She also writes fiction for children. The Children's books are Good Times at Islamgunj (1982), The Mussourie Mystery (1986), and Bishnu, the Dhobi Singer (1996) and its sequel Bishnu Sings again (1998) set in the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, History Mystery Dal and Biryani (2000). She has also written a non fiction book Devalya, Great Temples of India (2000).

**Subhadra Sen
Gupta and Raji
Narasimhan**

Subhadra Sengupta lives in Delhi where she works as a freelance writer and copy-writer.



Subhadra Sengupta

4.3 THE FOURTH DAUGHTER : SOME ISSUES

"A mother refusing to feed her newborn child. It was something Parvati Bai had never heard of before".

Nor had we. So much is said and made of a mother's love for her children that no one can believe it, no one can imagine it happening under any circumstances. Well under certain circumstances it may happen. If it is a daughter, if it is a fourth daughter. It does not matter that the parents and the grandparents are affluent. They too need a son. Perhaps more than the common people. Because they need an heir to inherit and take care of their vast empire. The family mansion and the jewellery shop of Seth Bhagwan Das in this case. And the logic is simple. If there is no son to carry on the line, their money would be scattered among relatives. Surely that's a thought no one could possibly bear.

But refusing to feed her own child? Rejecting the child just because she is a daughter? Abandoning the famished crying child just because she is the fourth daughter? Affluence should bring generosity, here it only brings cruelty.

The obsession with sons is deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche, particularly in the northern states. Thanks to rising consumerism and escalating dowry demands, nobody wants a daughter. Even in the most prosperous houses the girl child has little value in comparison to her brother. Traditionally the bias towards sons manifested itself in the neglect of girls during infancy and at times in infanticide by smothering or poisoning newborn girls. Today, modern diagnostic techniques enable selective abortions of female foetuses. Even after the ban on the amniocentesis test in 1994 by many state governments in the country, the situation has only worsened.

Tests are now conducted clandestinely at ultrasound clinics. Ultrasound makes the detection of the sex of an unborn child easier than amniocentesis and at an earlier stage of pregnancy. Those baby girls who are not aborted have a difficult life ahead.

Therefore, Mini, the fourth girl, began her life by nearly dying. If there is a God, then he sent her into the world with every disadvantage he could think of. Her mother was fair and exquisitely beautiful. But Mini was born with her father's dark skin and plain looks. If she had been a cuddly, pretty baby, maybe her mother would have relented. But for the mother of four unwelcome daughters there was nothing to warm up to in the thin, dark squatting baby with huge accusing eyes.

And so Mini, the unwelcome fourth daughter, survived because Parvati, the maid and family driver's wife took her up to the room over the garage, carrying a bowl of milk from the kitchen, while her teenage son went running to the market to get a feeding bottle.

And Mini continued to live because Parvati, the maid, hunted through her trunk for her children's old clothes and put them on her. Mini survived because whenever she fell ill Parvati's husband would rush to get a doctor. Mini learnt to smile when he got her a rattle. And she learnt to love because Parvati's son carried her around with him like a favourite toy and paced up and down with her in his arms when she cried at night.

So Mini grew up in a misty place between the garage room and the big house. No one ever kept her away from the house but instinctively she knew it was not her home. Her three sisters tolerantly allowed her to play with them but at meal times she would sit beside Parvati in the kitchen to eat. And at night she would follow Parvati up to the room above the garage.

And all this while her own mother, the mother who had given her birth, lived on the first floor in perfect comfort and luxury. Who says blood is thicker than water? Radha never felt anything for this child of hers, not even when Parvati told her one fine morning that Munia had said her first word and that it was 'Ma'. But even this failed to touch Radha's heart.

And Mini's fault? She was being punished for being a daughter, for being a fourth daughter. As if it was her doing. As if she could have altered it. Well, this is the fate that awaits hundreds and thousands of girl children in our country. Unwanted. Unwelcome. Neglected. Spurned. Sweets are freely distributed on the birth of a son. Sweets and greetings and smiles. But tears and silence and perhaps consolation (even condolences) await the birth of a daughter.

At least Mini was lucky to have Parvati and her husband for Amma and Babuji. And Parvati's son was her beloved Bhaiya. Most other girl children don't have even that compensation.

The irony is that her parents and grandparents were rich enough to afford a large family, to afford the education and upkeep of four daughters, to afford even their dowry. Instead they choose to abandon this fourth daughter. Three are bad enough. And Parvati, the maid, without means, without money, decides to bring the child up as her own. The child can't possibly be allowed to die.

There is thus a subtle suggestion that affluence dries up the milk of human kindness and leaves one utterly callous, even cruel. The poor, on the other hand, still have certain values and emotions intact. That explains why Radha didn't want Mini to study at all. Until Parvati, the maid got angry, Radha's argument was that Mini was only fit to be like Parvati. Working in the kitchen. But when Parvati heard about it, she went and yelled at Radha, her mistress. Parvati obviously forgot that she could be turned out of the house for this impertinence. And at her age it might not have been all

that easy to find another job. But these considerations become secondary. Her primary concern is Mini's education, Mini's future. She couldn't let this girl starve to death, years ago. Today she cannot let this girl be denied even the basic perquisites to lead a decent, honourable life.

Subhadra Sen
Gupta and Raji
Narasimhan

She cannot let this girl be denied what is her due. And this when Mini is not her own daughter, not her kith and kin. Mini's future means nothing to Radha, her real mother. Mini's future means everything to Parvati, her foster mother. And Mini's foster father, the family driver, would do his utmost to convince her that she is their best daughter, the smartest, prettiest and his favourite. With his arguments he convinces her that one's dark complexion is no limitation, no handicap. Mini is beautiful despite her dark complexion. And she also has brains. Unfortunately, those who gave her birth failed to see or chose not to see her bright intelligent eyes, her quick mind, her chatter and laughter. In fact, they hardly noticed their daughters. All their time was spent doting on their son.

This is also ironic that girls learn to accept the discrimination early in life. Mini's sisters go to a local government school in a rickshaw but their brother, their only brother, will go to a convent school in the car. And they are grateful that they are at least being educated. They obviously don't mind the car carrying their brother driving past their cycle rickshaw morning after morning.

Most of the girls wait to get married - that would end this humiliation of theirs. Mini looked for her salvation in her studies, with a desperate determination. Radha's rejection of her only intensified with time. Mini's defiance only deepened it. Her brains became her weapon of defence and she topped among girls in the school leaving exams. Press reporters came to interview her and photographers clicked her pictures. But when she announced that she planned to study medicine, her real parents ordered her to stay at home and learn to cook and sew until a suitable boy was found for her. Mini tried to argue in vain, "Suppose your son had done well would you ask him to stay at home?" Radha's attitude was dismissive, as usual, "You're not my son".

Mini persisted, "I've got a scholarship. You don't have to pay for anything."

Even this failed to thaw Radha's stony heart, "No daughter of mine will..."

The reader doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at this statement. Is Mini really her daughter? Has she ever treated Mini as her daughter? Mini's retort is to the point, "But I'm not your daughter? Mothers feed and care for their children. When have you fed or cared for me?" The best thing for the parents is to let this girl, this impossible girl, do whatever she likes.

Mini proves to be a girl of substance - a truly modern girl. The son, the heir of the clan, the darling of the family, discovers the dubious pleasures of gambling, alcohol and women. He marries the best dowry he can find. The only condition of the deal is that he would go and stay in the bride's home as her parents do not want to let go of their only child. The son and heir happily agrees, packs his bags, gets into his sports car, waves goodbye and vanishes in a cloud of dust.

Radha and her husband watch helplessly.

Mini, now a full-fledged doctor, would check Radha's blood pressure when she fell sick, help the dark man, her biological father, with his financial dealings, run errands to the bank, etc. In a way, this unwanted, unwelcome fourth daughter-abandoned and abhorred by her own parents, her own people, proves to be the only support in their old age. She almost takes on the role of her brother - providing support and succour to her parents. Tradition and modernity are thus combined in the story to prepare the reader, as it were, for the parents' change of heart at the end. The end of the story

marks a real homecoming for Mini and her newborn son – her parents at long last waiting at the door to welcome her with open arms. Something they should have done many, many years ago. But all's well that ends well. Let's hope no more daughters undergo the hurt and humiliation that would have bruised and battered Mini's childhood and adolescence but for the kind intervention of Parvati.

4.4 CHARACTERISATION

The story has been written from a certain standpoint to highlight the plight of the girl in our country and the characters are more or less stereotypical. The grandparents and parents are thoroughly conventional – eagerly waiting for the birth of a son. The birth of the fourth daughter naturally is too much for them to bear. So the child is left to die. Well, almost.

The author has exaggerated, to a certain extent, the inhuman cruelty of these people. Ordinarily under such circumstances, parents and grandparents would curse the daughter, abuse her, admonish her but not starve her to death. Not in their own presence. Not in front of their own eyes. And the mother! Ordinarily she would curse herself, her bad luck but not the innocent child.

Similarly the kind love and affection of Parvati and her family has also been exaggerated to stress the sharp contrast. Parvati's characterisation is more natural – though kind, she is practical too. When Radha told her in clear words to take Mini away, she argued, 'Bringing up a child costs money.' And Radha dropped the cupboard keys into Parvati's hand without a word. That became the ritual every month. When Mini spoke her first word, Parvati tried once more to restore the child to her mother but met with only an irritated frown.

The sisters' apathy and indifference is also quite exaggerated – they must have learnt early on that Mini was their sister. Yet they never tried to recompense, even in their own childish, sisterly fashion for their parents' cruelty.

The son's complete volte-face does not come as a surprise. It is poetic justice. His development has not been shown at all. Only his falling on evil ways and days has been reported. The third daughter's death is literally a bolt from the blue.

The characters thus are either too good or too bad. And they remain static more or less. They represent an attitude, a rigid standpoint that the author wishes to discuss, disapprove and finally discard.

4.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The narrative is straightforward. It follows the conventional chronological pattern--beginning with the birth of the fourth daughter and ends with the expected/ desired change of heart and perception of her biological parents who had so callously and cruelly abandoned her – to die.

Yet the simplicity of the narrative is deceptive. Following the conventional pattern it raises many unconventional questions and points to many unconventional possibilities.

Mini's childhood and adolescence have been described in great detail highlighting all the occasions where a rapprochement could have taken place between her and her

biological parents. The same occasions have been used to highlight the glaring difference between how Radha rejects her and how Parvati protects her.

Subhadra Sen
Gupta and Raji
Narasimhan

Things move rather fast towards the end of the story. Mini's grandparents died. So did one of her sisters. Grandparents' death would be expected, more or less. Though both of them did not have to die in a quick succession. The death of Mini's sister comes as a big shock. Apparently she was the third daughter. Quite young naturally. We are not told anything about her ailment, if any. Did she die in an accident? But she is disposed of in half a sentence. Nor is there any mention of the effect of her sudden death on either her parents or Mini. It is too sudden and abrupt.

The son's departure is also too dramatic. His parents are rich. He is the only heir. He doesn't really have to fall headlong for someone else's wealth. Is he going to forfeit his own heirloom? Is that what his parents-in-law and bride-to-be want, may want? All these details have not been given because the purpose of the author is to stress the new equation Mini will henceforth have with her biological parents. And their sense of guilt and repentance. It is never expressed in words though.

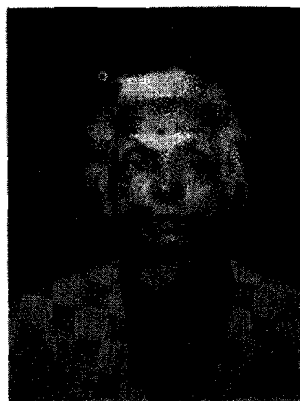
The ending is quite expected. The abandoned daughter alone comes to their aid. The darling son discards them almost as easily as they had discarded Mini many years ago. They welcome Mini back into the fold perhaps much too late. One doesn't know how long it will take Mini's scarred psyche to heal, completely.

The description of the reception Mini gets on reaching the house straight from the hospital along with her newborn son is strikingly identical to the celebrations accompanying her brother's birth years ago. "There were garlands at the door, *rangoli* on the floor" and Mini seemed to see the ghost of her grandmother feeding the beggars. The repetition reinforces the hurt Mini has nursed all these years.

The wheel has come full circle. Mini was abandoned. All the smiles and sweets of the family and friends were reserved for the brother. The brother has abandoned the family and it's only Mini proving to be a source of strength to her ageing parents.

But their change of heart? These celebrations at the end are for Mini or her son? The doubt lingers in the readers' mind and raises a series of new questions and possibilities.

4.6 RAJI NARASIMHAN – AN INTRODUCTION



Raji Narasimhan (1930-)

Raji Narasimhan was born in Madras, Tamil Nadu, in 1930. After her graduation she worked as a reporter and feature writer for *The Indian Express*. She left her job in the early '70s to take up full-time creative writing. In addition, she has been regularly reviewing books and writing critical articles for *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Literature*.

Her publications include four novels: *The Heart of Standing is You cannot Fly* (1973), *Forever Free* (1979), *Drifting to a Dawn* (1983), and *The Sky Changes* (1991). *The Marriage of Bela and Other Stories* (1978) is a collection of her short stories. Her book of criticism, *Sensibility Under Stress: Aspects of Indo-English Fiction* (1976) is recommended reading in the English literature department of some universities in India.

Her first story 'The Poor Folk Around Town' was published in *Quest* in 1969.

'A Toast to Herself' was first published in *Indian Literature* in 1986.

Her other interests are dance and theatre. For a long time she was the dance and theatre critic for *The Patriot*.

Raji Narasimhan lives in Delhi.

4.7 A TOAST TO HERSELF : SOME ISSUES

This story is about a writer. Priya's fifth book has just been published. She is expecting a review of it in the papers. Joshi of the *Herald* has told her he'll be publishing it soon. She is anxious and nervous. What if the review is bad? The fear is close and biting like a mask. One might argue that it should not matter to a committed writer like her. What is a review? Just words. "Will you stop writing if this review doesn't appear?" She asks herself sternly and hears herself whine, "Yes, I might." Every writer wants to be read and recognised. The reading public and the reviewer may not at times be aware of what their responses and reactions may mean to the writer. Stepping away from the full set of her books, Priya sees them huddled like children separated from their mother. Wrapped in their jackets, they do seem like her physical offsprings, sprung from the clay and kiln of her body. She celebrates the publication of her book as one celebrates the birth of a child. Drinking a toast means wishing happiness, success, etc. to somebody or something while raising a glass of wine. Here Priya wishes herself success and happiness drinking lemonade in the company of her mother and Dr. Kesavan under the navy blue sky.

Can one earn one's livelihood by writing in India? The answer apparently is no. Especially if it is not popular reading. Her writing brings Priya pebbles. Her mother tries very hard and persistently to make Priya realise that writing is for those with money. For people like Priya, it should only be a hobby. But Priya refuses to understand. Refuses to understand the hard realities of life. Two hundred, two fifty is the most she gets for an item – a story, an article. If she does four items a month, writing all the time, she must be making a thousand rupees. Priya knows a taxi driver makes more but she doesn't seem to mind. She wants little. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. Her books are more precious than any money she may get. Writing alone can sustain her now. This is why and how many writers continue to write and live in near penury. Writing becomes an end in itself. It becomes the be-all and end-all of one's life.

Economics however, plays a big role in our life today. Priya's mother keeps standing pressed to the gate looking out for the postman to bring her widow's pension for the month. It isn't due yet. The month isn't over yet. But she will stand there glued to the gate, forgetting to eat. Perhaps this money is her only safety. Priya may seek her

safety in writing but she slides off to a calculation of her mother's assets even in the midst of her anxiety about the review and the face of Kesavan prying in and out in a degenerate sexual recall. Obviously somewhere in the recesses of her heart, Priya is conscious of how little she has by way of worldly possessions and what it may mean in a moment of crisis.

**Subhadra Sen
Gupta and Raji
Narasimhan**

Mother-daughter relationship and the generation gap have also been stressed. Priya was far too miserable following her divorce. But her mother hated her for that. Instead of sympathising with her or supporting her, she hated Priya – maybe for her guts, maybe for her refusal to tow the traditional line and accept whatever destiny had in store for her. She was jobless too and again, her mother hated her for it actively and openly. Priya has to repeatedly assure her mother that she doesn't need her pension, that she can fend for herself. The only solution the mother can think of - to pull Priya out of the mess and morass she has so willingly bound herself to, is second marriage. If Priya will somehow agree to marry Dr. Kesavan even at the age of 50, her economic hardships will end. And once married she may outgrow her passion for writing – writing which doesn't fetch her a single paisa by way of royalty.

For most of us, for most of our women at least, marriage remains the only goal, the only worthwhile goal in a woman's life.

Not only her mother, Priya might have herself liked to get married and happily settle down in life. After her divorce, years ago, when Kesavan had called her into his clinic when he need not have and had given her an injection in her buttock because there was virus raging in the air, she thought he was about to make a proposal. And she might even have accepted him. But he didn't. Even today, at 50 her thoughts slip to Kesavan and she admits that sex always lurks in some fold of her mind, vying with writing for the possession of her. While nervously waiting for the review of her latest book, she felt herself go woman and winding like a mermaid in the presence of Dr. Kesavan. She would have liked to rest her head on his chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She wished she could take a respite from the exacting taskmaster of writing to which she had bound herself. Writing or art, for that matter, can supplement life, it can't substitute it.

The story thus depicts Priya as a woman, as a woman writer and as a writer transcending, if only temporarily, all the pulls and pressures of sex and society.

4.8 CHARACTERISATION

There are only three major characters drawn sympathetically and sensitively. Mother and Dr. Kesavan are, on the whole, conventional. Mother's concern for this divorced, jobless daughter of hers is only natural. Today she is there to willy-nilly support her, look after her but what will happen when she is there no more? Every mother wants to see her daughter happily married and settled in life. This mother is no exception. Nor can she understand Priya's obsession with writing – what has it given her all these years? She is a typical Indian mother caring for her daughter and trying to ensure a secure future for her in her own conventional way.

Dr. Kesavan is a typical Indian male – wanting Priya and not wanting Priya. He is attracted to her but something in him holds him back. Maybe it is her divorce. Divorced women are seen as aggressive, assertive and offbeat. Maybe he is not sure she will make a good wife or he a good husband – to her at least. Priya is 50. He must in all likelihood be older – but no reason is given about why he chose not to marry. Not yet.

Priya is a strong, unconventional character. A divorcee, she does not seem to have any regrets. She would want to live life on her own terms. She knows this may be hard.

She knows she may have to pay a heavy price for it and she is prepared to pay it. Her wants have shrunk suddenly ever since she went into writing. She is above all normal plentitudes now, it seems. Writing keeps her cheerful even when hunger charges into her and chaps her lips. A crumpled *kurta* pulled out of the *dhobi's* basket makes up her clothing. When she assures her mother she doesn't want a penny of her pension, she means every word of it. How far she will be able to carry on like this is, of course, a different matter. She has her moments of weakness and fatigue and anxiety. She would like to rest her head on Dr. Kesavan's chest and take the male comfort she had rejected all these years. She is a new woman torn between her newfound freedom and ambition on the one hand and her natural urges on the other. She is a brave woman who knows what she wants from life and knows how to get it. She can celebrate today without unnecessarily and unduly worrying about tomorrow.

4.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

It is a simple, straightforward, third person narrative. But for a brief flashback telling us about Dr. Kesavan's possible interest in her after her divorce, it deals with the present. Raji Narsimhan uses word pictures to convey the meaning. We can really visualize Dr. Kesavan giving Priya an injection in her buttock or her mother standing glued to the gate, forgetting to eat, waiting for the postman to bring her her widow's pension for the month. Or Priya frantically trying to ring up Joshi. Priya coming out with a full set of her books and the doctor picking up the ones on top, feeling their girth and shape. And we can actually see Priya drinking a toast to herself with her mother and Kesavan joining in. All these pictorial images heighten the effect of the narrative and help us sense the tension within and without. Instead of detailed descriptions we have intense emotions and responses – pent up and suppressed. They tell us about “the duplicities of making art from life.”

4.10 LET US SUM UP

The first story draws our attention to the status of the girl child in an Indian family, the blatant preference for a son and the resultant frustration and heartburns. The second story introduces us to the world of a woman writer – the odds she has to face at home and outside. Both these stories have for their protagonist women of substance, of firm determination and grit. These are women who defy the social code and convention, and shape, to a large extent, their own destiny. They have a purpose in life – to establish their worth and value as human beings and they achieve it. Their life is hard and arduous but it is satisfying and fulfilling. They take their own decisions and set their own priorities.

4.11 QUESTIONS

- a) Do you agree that there is a widespread bias against the girl child in our society? Do you approve of it? Do you have any suggestions about how it can be removed?
- b) Instances of divorce are on the rise these days. Whom do you hold responsible for it?
- c) Did you know that a writer anxiously waits for the review of his/her book? What, according to you, are the characteristics of a good review?

UNIT 5 SHASHI DESHPANDE AND GITHA HARIHARAN

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Shashi Deshpande – An Introduction
- 5.3 'The Miracle' – A Discussion
- 5.4 Characterisation
- 5.5 Narrative Techniques
- 5.6 Githa Hariharan – An Introduction
- 5.7 'Gajar Halwa' – A Discussion
- 5.8 Characterisation
- 5.9 Narrative Techniques
- 5.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.11 Questions
- 5.12 Suggested Reading

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will closely examine one story each of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. Shashi Deshpande is a major Indian writer writing in English. Githa Hariharan has made a name for herself despite only three publications so far. This unit will help you understand the broad concerns of these women writers transcending gender and geography. The issues they take up are universal and perennial.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the questions that we will primarily concern ourselves with are:

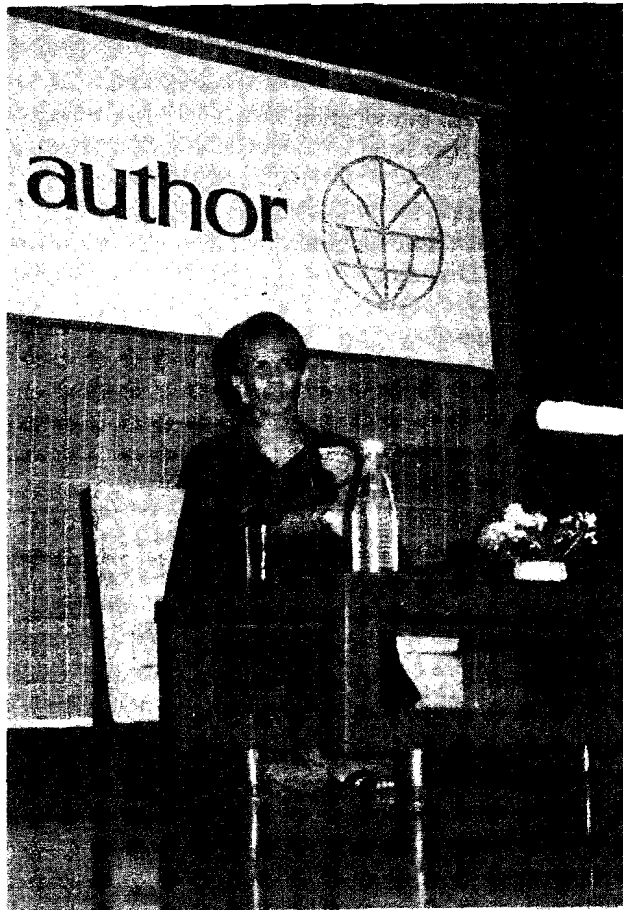
- i. Do writers remain male and female and write from a fixed, pre-determined point of view?
- ii. Do women writers write only about women's issues?
- iii. Do writers ultimately rise above the immediate, narrow consideration and develop a broad vision encompassing the whole of humanity?
- iv. Of course, the writer's own sensibility and sensitivity will determine the treatment of the theme and the direction it will take.

We have been examining stories in this Block keeping certain questions in mind. These could relate to the form or content of the stories. In the last unit we had discussed two stories written specifically from a female point of view – the plight of the girl child in a typical Indian home and the trauma and turmoil of an unmarried woman writer has to undergo, even at the hands of her own mother. Both these writers were attempting to draw our attention to certain social problems and compel us to think and do something about them. Sometimes even the recognition of something opens rooms for a dialogue or change of heart at a later date. It shakes us out of our inertia or slumber.

The writers of this present unit are also women but they are not confining themselves, in these two stories, to the issues related to women alone. They are talking of broader issues, of course, their sensibility is their own – giving a particular slant to the narrative.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan have dealt at length with the Indian stereotypes of daughter, wife, and mother – but in these two stories they concern themselves with things more basic and comprehensive.

5.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE – AN INTRODUCTION



Shashi Deshpande (1938-)

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Shri Adya Rangacharya. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay, graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College, then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law winning two gold medals. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism from the Bhavan's R.P. College of Mass Communication, winning three medals including The Times of India Gold Medal she worked on a magazine for sometime. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970, initially with short stories, of which several volumes have been published. She is the author of four children's books and seven novels, the best known of which are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *The Long Silence* which won the Sahitya Akademi Award and *The Binding Vine*. Shashi Deshpande lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband.

Shashi Deshpande's works are in their own way all about humankind and society -- the essential loneliness of being and the human predicament, a matter of interest to all humanity. She says that generally, she starts with an idea, a vague one really, and as she goes on writing she finds that she is going into other regions, exploring other ideas. Writing gives her a constant sense of discovery.

Following is the list of her novels and short-story collections:

The Legacy and Other Stories (1971)

It was the Nightingale (1986)

The Miracle (1986)
The Intrusion and Other Stories (1993)
The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980)
If I die Today (1982)
Roots and Shadows (1983)
Come up and be dead (1983)
It was Dark (1986)
That Long Silence (1988)
The Binding Vine (1992)
A Matter of Time (1996)
Small Remedies (2000)

Shashi Deshpande
and Githa
Hariharan

5.3 MIRACLE – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *The Miracle and Other stories* published in 1986. Since the time of Descartes more and more people have relied exclusively on reason and adopted a quasi – mechanical conception of the universe, which is reduced to space, matter and motion, operating strictly under mathematical laws.

Modern medical science has managed to make remarkable strides and get phenomenal breakthroughs with the help of tests carried out on animals. The rationale is that these animals are sacrificed for a big cause – the future of mankind. Considering the ultimate gain, the price paid in terms of the animals losing their lives is not much. Cures are now available for illness considered fatal till only sometime ago. Medical research continues to conduct new tests, hoping to find remedies for many incurable diseases.

Shashi Deshpande recreates one such laboratory where two doctors, a male and a female, are deeply engrossed in carrying out some test on monkeys to find out why an innocent-looking thing growing everywhere caused a strange disease when people ate it. People ate it, fell sick and died. These doctors are feeding the monkeys with this to know what actually happens inside them so that a cure may be found before it's too late.

Fair enough, one would say.

The problem arises when one particular monkey, Raaja, doesn't die even after he is given all that poison to consume. All the other monkeys have died. And that convinced Narayan, an employee there, that this is not an ordinary monkey. He is Hanuman, the monkey god himself. He is reincarnation of the great god. That in turn means that he should not be killed, his devotees should save him. Narayan sees it as a miracle -- all other monkeys have died after consuming that poisonous thing. Raja hasn't. He refused to die. Surely that's a miracle. And who other than a god can perform miracles? And Narayan cannot just helplessly and passively watch Hanuman being killed mercilessly by this team of doctors.

The doctors are predictably aghast. A miracle? A mystery? How can anyone believe in miracles in this age? There is an explanation for everything. If this particular monkey whom Narayan insists on calling Raaja has not died, they will want to know why and they will find out the cause soon enough. It would, infact, help them understand things better. There is a scientific explanation for everything.

But Narayan's faith wouldn't let him give in. He obviously understands the importance of what the doctors are doing. He only wants this monkey, this particular monkey, this Raaja, to be let off, to be set free. He is no ordinary monkey. He is none other than Hanuman himself. For the doctors all this is "shoddy bogus, religious stuff"

and they are surprised that the typist girl who should know better, is pleading for Narayan, "You can't destroy someone's faith."

"But if it's built on sand?"

"Faith is always built on a rock. It's only if you stop believing that you see it as sand."

The next morning Raaja is missing from the animal house. He has escaped. Again a miracle! Well, if he is an incarnation of Hanuman, he can perform miracles, locks and keys can't keep in a god.

The doctor duo obviously suspect Narayan of helping the monkey to escape. Narayan vehemently remonstrates – he can't possibly afford to lose his job – what would happen to his wife and children? Though he does let out to the typist that he did have a hand in Raaja's escape.

The doctor is surprised that any educated person, anyone who can think, should believe in this theory of reincarnation. The typist is put off by his self-righteousness and retorts that she would "rather believe in that than in nothing". Forgetting for the time being that she is a mere typist who shouldn't talk that way to him, she asks him, "Do you think that one is born and that's the beginning. And one dies and that's the end. Is that all of it?"

"What else?" he asked me wonderingly.

The typist looks around. The shelves are laden with glass jars, and bits of human beings pickled inside leer at them obscenely. Obviously a doctor dissects a being and puts the bits under a microscope and thinks that he/she can find all the answers. She grows defiant now, "You can put me under a microscope and you will never find ME. A human being... that's a miracle. A baby's first cry.... that's a miracle. A monkey, will to live... that's a miracle!"

The female doctor laughs and makes fun of her but the male doctor begins to understand the point she is trying to make and quotes Walt Whitman, "And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels." He again shows better understanding and empathy when he talks of Raaja, thus recognising that a monkey can have an identity.

Raaja reappears at lunchtime on the windowsill but instead of trying to have him captured she offers him her banana and helps him disappear into the branches and leaves. However, she is shocked to notice that the male doctor has been standing in the door all this while and has witnessed her act of treachery. Soon she gets over her fright – why is she afraid? What is she worried about? Her job? Well, let it be. There are limits to everything.

Her surprise and joy are, therefore, beyond words when he confesses, "There are miracles everywhere if you only open your eyes." Raaja ceases to be a mere test animal for him, he becomes a monkey called Raaja, having an identity of his own. Narayan is no mere worker either. He is a man with two daughters and a son and faith in Hanuman should be accepted and respected as such.

And the doctor finds the typist too no less than a miracle. And they get married soon thereafter. They have different tastes. She loves strong coffee while he drinks weak tea. She loves bright colours while he just blinks his eyes at them. But love is accepting the other person with all his/her peculiarities and individuality. Love is recognition of the other person, other being, as an individual, as an entity. The last sentence beautifully sums it up, "Whoever heard of an incompatible Hindu marriage?" If you recognize and respect the otherness of the other person, where is the incompatibility? The secret lies in noticing life's miracles all around us.

The importance of science, of medical science, has not been denied or undermined. What is being stressed is the importance of faith in life, in human life. The two should co-exist, the two can co-exist. After all, it's love for mankind, for the human race that compels scientists and doctor and researchers the world over to confine themselves to the laboratories and test tubes – to find remedies for ailments hitherto considered incurable and thus ensure a better future for us all. And life cannot be reduced to tests or theories or formulae. Life still contains many miracles and mysteries which no scientific discovery or invention can claim to fully fathom or unravel.

5.4 CHARACTERISATION

There are only four characters in this story -- the male doctor, the female doctor, the typist girl and Narayan. The first three are not referred to by any names -- only pronouns. Narayan alone has a proper name. And of course, Raaja, the monkey.

The two doctors are busy working on the monkeys to find a remedy for the killer disease. Human beings, living beings mean only tests and experiments and findings to them. Logic is their guiding principle. Emotions are out. Faith is out – it is built on sand. Their intentions are noble – we can't fault them there -- except that a living being is much more than the bits of body pickled and preserved inside glass jars to be studied under a microscope. A human being, a living being is much more than that. The female doctor refuses to concede that, refuses to recognize that. She derides people like Narayan for their illogicality, for their faith. She is a doctor, a scientist, inside out, and her regret is that all their work, many months' work has been wasted because of this irrational faith. She refuses to concede Narayan his individuality, his beliefs. She refuses to concede the possibility of any other point of view, different from hers. She refuses to even recognize the existence or presence of the typist in the room or around. She is depicted as a competent and committed doctor but without any emotions and any regard for others' feelings and sentiments.

The male doctor, on the other hand, is more human, more humane. Gradually he begins to see the other point of view, begins to concede Narayan's right to his faith. When Narayan and two others go to him in a delegation, he tries to explain things to them, tries to make them see reason. After the typist's outburst, he is quick to realize the limits of reason and research. Though very important, they cannot substitute life. Unlike his female counterpart, he remembers who Raaja is, and reconciles himself to Raaja's escape – accidental or intentional. He marries his typist and the two seem to be living happily hereafter.

The female doctor seems too conscious of her social, professional status. She practically looks down upon the typist, upon every one else. The male doctor, though equally engrossed in his research and experiments, treats his subordinates with love and compassion.

The typist is a proud woman. That explains why she has had to change jobs so often – ten jobs in four years. But she has been here for full one year – not because she loves her work but because she is in love with the doctor. She knows the doctor is hardly ever aware of even her presence. But that is love. Despite this weakness, she is a woman of substance who can and does take a stand, no matter how high the stakes are. She will do what she feels like doing. And if she loses her perks in the process, to hell with the perks. A new woman seeking and finding a space for herself – a woman who is capable, who knows her mind and who is willing to pay the price for her actions and decisions.

Both the typist and doctor are new women – women who have their own identity and individuality – educated, enlightened, independent in their own way.

Then we have Rajaa, the monkey, and the reincarnation of Hanuman as Naryan and others would have us believe. Shashi Deshpande makes his presence felt, his appearance and disappearance noticed. Huge and dignified, like a king, he daintily peeled the banana.... When he reappeared, he 'just sat there like a man unable to make up his mind'. Rajaa is not just a name, not just a presence in the background but a living being darting forward, jumping into the branches, forcing people to relate to him in their own way. It is because of him that there is this crisis, this commotion all around. He thus helps many people to relate to the larger, non-humane world. He helps to enlarge our vision and broaden our horizons.

5.5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Shashi Deshpande shows a preference for the first person narration but her stories are free from distorting confessional fury and achieve a remarkable sense of objectivity. She has an eye for detail, whether this relates to physical sensations or workings of the mind and shows considerable skill in the choice of background and the creation of atmosphere.

The atmosphere inside the laboratory is very matter-of-fact, clinical. The two doctors discussing the tests and their results all the time. That they are not given any names only heightens the effect of the story. They symbolise an approach, an attitude. They are no ordinary human beings talking of mundane things, of everyday routine. They can only talk of and think about research and logic and reason. Their not really recognising the typist is quite in place. They do not do it on purpose, they do not do it to humiliate or embarrass her. She has a role in their scheme of things and beyond that she does not matter.

Narayan has a name. He has his faith, his individuality, his family. He tries to defend them all. His assertion, his courage makes even the typist girl give up her fences, her reservations and come out clean with what she thinks about it all. The monkey has been portrayed without any sentimentality, in a natural manner. He does not perform any supernatural deeds, does not act larger than life. He eats bananas -- something all monkeys are known to do and relish. It is this no-nonsense, natural depiction of Rajaa that makes the narrative plausible.

Shashi Deshpande makes effective use of language. When the doctors said, "an interesting case," the typist said, "poor child." When they said, "that bronchogenic carcinoma," she said, "that poor man with the three children". The contrast is made amply clear. Human beings are only medical cases for the doctors -- they see them in terms of their ailments. The typist sees them as human beings.

The male doctor's change of perception is clearly indicated when he quotes Walt Whitman in support of the typist. Literature is emotions, human beings, and relationships. Something reason seems to negate or at least undermine. This incident successfully breaks the barrier between the doctor and his typist and proves to be a turning point in their relationship.

Shashi Deshpande uses colours also to highlight contrast. The typist is always dressed in brightly coloured *saris*. The male doctor walks past a flaming gul mohar tree in May without an upward glance. But when at long last he notices her and concedes that she is another miracle, she is dressed in a bright yellow sari. On the other hand, the female doctor always moves about in her white coat, on flat slippers. Colours denote life, zest for life.

The extreme simplicity of the styleless style hides consummate craftsmanship: the stereotypical characters reveal unexpected strength of character and conviction. The disarming quality of the narrative is only a way of bringing home basic truths about life.

5.6 GITHA HARIHARAN – AN INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande
and Githa
Hariharan

Githa Hariharan grew up in Bombay and in Manila. She was educated in these two cities and later in the United States, where she worked in public television. Since 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, first as an editor in a publishing house, then as a freelancer. Githa Hariharan has published several short stories in magazines and journals. *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* (1993) contains twenty of her short stories. Her two novels are : *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), and *Where Dreams Travel* (1999) *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994). The thousand Faces of Night her maiden novel, won her the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Award for 1993. She has also edited *A Southern Harvest* a collection of short stories translated into English from four south Indian languages. She lives in New Delhi with her husband and two sons.



Githa Hariharan (1954-)

5.7 GAJAR HALWA – A DISCUSSION

This story is a moving account of young Perumayee's life in Salem and out of it. Life for her was extremely hard in Salem. The parents didn't get along. Mother was always screaming. So the father left. It didn't seem to bother his wife one bit. 'We're well rid of him, he's a lazy drunken bastard, she said. She went to work everyday, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was empty, to the highway they were building near their village. She would leave at six in the morning after drinking the strong, sweet tea Perumayee made for her. She coiled a rag on her head, ready for the baskets of gravel she would carry all day. On her hip she held the youngest child who was still breast-feeding. We don't need much imagination to know the extent of her drudgery to fend for her four children.

And Perumayee! Young Perumayee would get her brother Selvan ready for school, feed him his gruel, oil and comb his hair, and wave at him from the door of their hut. Then, along with Thayee, her baby sister, she would begin her chores for the day. Chores which included collecting the firewood, the water queue that got longer and longer (that's where she learnt to fight and push and shove), scrubbing the clothes hitting them again and again on the, rocks near the river. Her reward! 'That Perumayee is like a little mother, everyone said, the irony is too obvious. At an age when she should have gone to school, she was taking care of her siblings. And we

cannot blame her mother either. She is doing whatever she possibly can, whatever the circumstances allow her to do, to keep herself and her children alive – so that they can have some rice or gruel or once in a while a handful of dal in lots of tamarind water.

No one could think things would get worse. They did. The highway was built after eighteen months of backbreaking work. No more work thereafter. The rains failed for the second year, making life still harder, provisions costlier.

Around that time their neighbour's cousin Chellamma was talking five of the village girls to Delhi with her. It was decided that Perumayee should go too so that she could earn something and send it home. That perhaps was the only way out.

Perumayee stuck to Chellamma like a leech on the train and didn't look at anyone's face. Then they reached her home, a small room in Munirka (a locality in Delhi) that smelt of urine. The room was actually a scooter garage but even this small, dark hole with no tap for water and no toilet, Chellamma has got after years of working for the same memsahib in the colony.

Chellamma has no difficulty finding a job for Perumayee for two hundred rupees a month. Cooking, cleaning, washing, looking after the baba. Perumayee has to give Chellamma, her mother now, fifty rupees from her salary every month. The rest she can send home.

At the milkbooth, which reminds her of the fights at the water-tap in the village, Perumayee makes friends with girls who work in the flats in the same colony. Their memsahibs are a lot like hers. They themselves are not very different from her. One can imagine the kind of childhood they have had and the family circumstances that have compelled them to take to this drudgery.

Githa Hariharan has very effectively portrayed the plight of the poor in rural India forcing them to reach Delhi in search of a better life, in quest of a dream. The hard realities of life take away their childhood, their innocence.

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Necessity makes us invent lies, falsehoods. It makes us conceal the truth. Necessity to find a job for Perumayee makes Chellamma tell the memsahib that the girl can cook, sweep and swab and look after children even though she knows full well that Perumayee has never cooked anything more than rice or gruel or perhaps a handful of dal once in a while. Telling the truth would mean getting fifty rupees less. It might also mean not getting a job and consequently taking the first train back to Salem.

Necessity not only forces Perumayee to learn enough Hindi in a few weeks but also forces her to learn how to shirk work, how to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not around or to just squeeze out the baby's stinking clothes with the yellow stains drying in crust on the diapers whereas back at home in Salem she used to scrub and scrub the clothes, hitting them again and again on the rocks near the river. Or she would steal a quick look behind her and pop bits of something or the other into her mouth. The chores she is supposed to do included peeling and grating mounds of carrots, or so it seems like to this young girl, for halwa. Scraping so many carrots leaves her arms stiff. Her fingers feel as if they will never straighten out again. And then stirring the pan of milk (with all these grated carrots) on the fire, round and round, scraping the sides of the pan again and again her arm becomes numb with pain. This is an indication of the life ahead of her.

Githa Hariharan has also managed to bring out the north-south contrast. The language problem, to begin with. It suits Perumayee in the beginning because she does not have to reply to memsahib's questions. She can pretend not to understand her instructions or queries and just say yes or no, hoping it is the right answer. Even though she quickly picks up enough of Hindi, she cannot pronounce gajar correctly. She must call

it kaachar. And she is justifiably hurt when the mistress laughs at it. Her memsahib calls her Prema. Despite her education and ability to drive the car, she can't say Perumayee, the girl argues. Perhaps Perumayee doesn't realize that it is not her memsahib's inability to correctly pronounce her name, it is some kind of a social convention, social custom to shorten the name of your retainer. The change in weather has also been indicated. The sun doesn't shine properly for days in Delhi. The water freezes Perumayee's fingers. In Salem, they obviously didn't have this problem with lots and lot of sun for most part of the year. The situation demands adjustment on various levels – physical, economic, emotional.

**Shashi Deshpande
and Gittha
Hariharan**

5.8 CHARACTERSIATION

The story is mainly about Perumayee – the young girl from Salem – and what all she goes through, in Salem and then in Delhi. It's also about her evolution and initiation into the city life and its ways. When Perumayee comes to Delhi, she feels she should speak the truth, tell her prospective mistress that she cannot cook anything more than rice or gruel and maybe dal. Quickly she learns the Delhi ways, learns to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not looking, learns to just squeeze out the baby's stinky clothes without properly washing them. She learns not to slave for her memsahib, learns to shut the kitchen door, turn the gas knob to high and hold her hands over the onions sizzling in oil to feel warm and safe. Learns also that in six months, once she has picked up the basics of city housekeeping, she can get a job for double the money in a richer colony. In a few years' time she may be no different from our wise, fawning Chellamma, bringing young girls from the village and supplying maids to the city folks making, in the process, a quick buck or two herself. Chellamma, we are told, had brought five village girls with her to Delhi. We can safely surmise that the other four girls would be as quick at adapting themselves to the Delhi ways as our protagonist. We can also safely guess what Chellamma would have been like the first time she herself came to Delhi. The process goes on – as long as the circumstances don't change, Delhi will continue to entice the poor villagers. And the young village girls will continue to become part of the metropolitan system sacrificing their simplicity and innocence.

Chellamma knows how to bargain what, to say and when, how not to give in. She knows the exact words that would please or soften the memsahib. She knows the mistress is needy but she also knows that she should not stretch things too far. She is no good Samaritan – Perumayee has to pay her fifty rupees a month for her services and liason work.

Then we have the mistress. We are not told her name. That's not important. What's important is that she badly needs a domestic help to do the chores and look after her baby. Perumayee is just a servant girl. No more or no less. The relationship between the two is very formal, matter-of-fact. She asks Chellamma her age – perhaps to gauge how much she knows, what all she can manage. She does not ask her name, does not ask her anything personal. Does not want to know why she has come all the way to Delhi at such a young age. Does not want to know if she misses her mother. Being a mother herself, she could have shown some emotion, some concern for the girl. But she does not do so. Perumayee is coming to her as a maid – she should prove herself to be a good maid, and that's that. She is a typical mistress and the mistresses in other flats in the colony are a lot like her. Other maids are not very different from Perumayee either. So we can conclude that they too would be having more or less similar relationship with their employers. Education and affluence do not necessarily bring in understanding and compassion.

Perumayee's mother has been portrayed in detail. An unhappy woman. A hard-working woman. She went to work every day, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was hungry, to the highway being built near the village. She would

leave at six in the morning after taking just a cup of strong tea. On her hip she held the youngest child she was still breast-feeding. And she would carry on her head baskets of gravel all day long. Her husband was lazy and a drunkard. Obviously not bothered about his responsibility as the head of the family. Not bothered about his wife and four children. No wonder Perumayee's mother was always screaming. She couldn't possibly see the children starve to death. She couldn't possibly watch the husband squander money on drinks – whatever little money there was. And so he left. A very familiar scenario! And she is left to fend for her four children. Again these characters are not given any names. This could be any couple in rural India. What is important is the situation, the compulsions of the situations. She is a brave woman who faces the situation with courage – accepts this backbreaking work and when even this tunnel is blocked, takes the bold decision to send Perumayee with Chellamma in search of a job.

In a way all these are stereotypical characters but together they create a very vivid, moving picture of our society, of our times.

5.9 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Gajar Halwa – a common home made sweet-dish in winter in almost the whole of north India. A favourite dish. Githa Hariharan uses it as a very effective imagery. Making it requires a lot of hard work. Hours of peeling and grating and stirring. The young maid does it all – it gives her stiff fingers and arm numb with pain. Ofcourse, the great red gold warmth of the grainy, syrupy thickness, once it's ready, spreads all over her and she becomes part of it. It symbolises the city life, the new life for Perumayee. Hard yet tempting. Like the carrots absorbing, sucking in and swallowing the sugar, the ghee and the milk, the city sucks in and absorbs numerous Chellammas and Perumayees who become part of its thickening red sweetness.

The device of contrast is also used to highlight the rural migration to the city. Back at home all that Perumayee has seen is rice or gruel or maybe a handful of dal and tamarind in the good days. She has never seen such a pile of carrots before. Nor so much of milk and sugar and ghee. There is a gas stove and fridge, and they have meat thrice a week. Almost a dreamland. And then the water queues getting longer and longer in the village contrasted with the cold, fresh water gushing out of the city kitchen pipe, never ending, as if the entire river lies inside it. Scarcity and abundance! Her mother carrying the baskets of gravel on her head all day long and the memsahib driving a car and ordering her around. The backbreaking work her mother did to provide two (?) square meals for her children and the smooth, pink skin of her memsahib who has been to school just like her brother Selvan. To a much better school. Who wouldn't want to come over?

The city has other attractions too! Before sending any money home, Perumayee would like to buy a sweater, a blue one with shiny, beaded flowers, the kind she saw a girl wearing at the milk – booth queue, for herself. Then she wouldn't have to sleep with the thin, lumpy mattress on top of her, pretending it is a blanket. Quite fair and natural, one would say. Except that her mother and siblings back in the village might not even have a morsel to eat, given the miserable conditions there. But Perumayee forgets that. This is what the city does. Saps human emotions, human ties, and human bonds. Perumayee forgets, if only temporarily, the pressing needs of her family. Her memsahib forgets that she is a frail, young girl -- too frail and too young to do this kind of work.

Language has been used to denote moods and stress points. Peel, peel, grate, and grate. The repetition conveys the size of the pile of carrots and the hard work involved. Stir, stir, the memsahib says. And then – stir, stir, she barks. This one word conveys her anger and authority.

Colours have been used to heighten the over -- all affect. The peeled carrots, freshly washed, dazzle Perumayee's eyes. Later, great red-gold warmth spreads all over her bones. The gajar halwa sucks in everything, likewise the city sucks in everyone. And the earlier spluttering becomes a faint but steady heave of red, like a heartbeat, then gentle sighs. And you eventually get used to it, accept it, and become part of it.

**Shashi Deshpande
and Githa
Hariharan**

In a way both these stories are concerned about how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society and the possibility or absence of choice in the broad context of our ethos and social mores.

5.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that the women writers in India do not confine themselves to women alone issues -- we have read that Shashi Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist. As such the two stories have broader concerns. In a way the two stories show how women make the best out of the limited space they have in Indian society. Their choice or possibility of choice, as said earlier, remains in the broad context of Indian ethos and social mores.

5.11 QUESTIONS

1. The Miracle highlights man's cruelty to animals. Have you heard of the SPCA? Do you love animals? Which character impresses you the most in this story?
2. What is the essential message of this story?
3. Why does the doctor marry the typist at the end of the story?
4. Are education and faith mutually exclusive?
5. Perumayee feels that her father left them because her mother was always screaming. Do you agree with her analysis?
6. Do you agree that 'Gajar Halwa' offers a scathing comment on our social inequalities?
7. How do you view Chellamma's role in the story? Does she try to take advantage of the situation in her own way?

5.12 SUGGESTED READING

Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal. *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction in Indian Writers series General Ed. A.N. Dwivedi, B.R. Publishing Corporation New Delhi, 1998.*

Sarbjith Sindhu. *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

Anuradha Roy. *Pattery of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers.* New Delhi, Prestige, 1999.

UNIT 6 RUSKIN BOND

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Writing for Children
- 6.3 Ruskin Bond – A Biographical Sketch
- 6.4 No Room for A Leopard – A Discussion
- 6.5 Copperfield In The Jungle – A Discussion
- 6.6 An Island of Trees – A Discussion
- 6.7 Characterisation
- 6.8 Atmosphere
- 6.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.10 Questions
- 6.11 Additional Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to identify essential features of story writing for children – suitable themes, the role of fantasy, the language and technique, the significance of illustrations and the induction of moral and contemporary values in such tales by introducing to you the art of Ruskin Bond's story telling.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the course of our discussion on stories by Ruskin Bond for children we are, going to acquaint you with the art and craft of story writing for children. But, first we need to mention the distinctiveness of this form of writing. Writing for children is a special branch of literature. Its requirements and qualities are different from adult literature. The old Indian classics are rich in material that can be exploited for writing children's stories. Nevertheless children's literature is still scant in our country though, of late, efforts have been made to promote and popularise this specialized genre. Ruskin Bond is one of the few major writers writing for children.

6.2 WRITING FOR CHILDREN

In recent times, writing for children, a specialised form of writing, has grown into a distinct genre. The writer has to select his themes very judiciously because of the special target audience he is addressing. A different approach is required for different age groups. Animal stories, fantasies, fairy tales, heroic adventures, mountaineering, sea-faring, dacoits, bandits, police, exploration and travel, space odysseys, stories of children's courage, self-reliance and initiative are generally children's favourites.

Books for children explore and portray themes which children can identify with and find relevant and meaningful. Thus this literature abounds in child protagonists undertaking all manner of journeys, voyages and adventures and negotiating the complex environment they are thrown into.

Colours have been used to heighten the over -- all affect. The peeled carrots, freshly washed, dazzle Perumayee's eyes. Later, great red-gold warmth spreads all over her bones. The gajar halwa sucks in everything, likewise the city sucks in everyone. And the earlier spluttering becomes a faint but steady heave of red, like a heartbeat, then gentle sighs. And you eventually get used to it, accept it, and become part of it.

**Shashi Deshpande
and Githa
Hariharan**

In a way both these stories are concerned about how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society and the possibility or absence of choice in the broad context of our ethos and social mores.

5.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have seen that the women writers in India do not confine themselves to women alone issues – we have read that Shashi Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist. As such the two stories have broader concerns. In a way the two stories show how women make the best out of the limited space they have in Indian society. Their choice or possibility of choice, as said earlier, remains in the broad context of Indian ethos and social mores.

5.11 QUESTIONS

1. The Miracle highlights man's cruelty to animals. Have you heard of the SPCA? Do you love animals? Which character impresses you the most in this story?
2. What is the essential message of this story?
3. Why does the doctor marry the typist at the end of the story?
4. Are education and faith mutually exclusive?
5. Perumayee feels that her father left them because her mother was always screaming. Do you agree with her analysis?
6. Do you agree that 'Gajar Halwa' offers a scathing comment on our social inequalities?
7. How do you view Chellamma's role in the story? Does she try to take advantage of the situation in her own way?

5.12 SUGGESTED READING

Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal. *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of Her Fiction in Indian Writers series General* Ed. A.N. Dwivedi, B.R. Publishing Corporation New Delhi, 1998.

Sarbjith Sindhu. *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* New Delhi, Prestige, 1996.

Anuradha Roy. *Pattery of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi, Prestige, 1999.

UNIT 6 RUSKIN BOND

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Writing for Children
- 6.3 Ruskin Bond – A Biographical Sketch
- 6.4 No Room for A Leopard – A Discussion
- 6.5 Copperfield In The Jungle – A Discussion
- 6.6 An Island of Trees – A Discussion
- 6.7 Characterisation
- 6.8 Atmosphere
- 6.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.10 Questions
- 6.11 Additional Reading

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to identify essential features of story writing for children – suitable themes, the role of fantasy, the language and technique, the significance of illustrations and the induction of moral and contemporary values in such tales by introducing to you the art of Ruskin Bond's story telling.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the course of our discussion on stories by Ruskin Bond for children we are, going to acquaint you with the art and craft of story writing for children. But, first we need to mention the distinctiveness of this form of writing. Writing for children is a special branch of literature. Its requirements and qualities are different from adult literature. The old Indian classics are rich in material that can be exploited for writing children's stories. Nevertheless children's literature is still scant in our country though, of late, efforts have been made to promote and popularise this specialized genre. Ruskin Bond is one of the few major writers writing for children.

6.2 WRITING FOR CHILDREN

In recent times, writing for children, a specialised form of writing, has grown into a distinct genre. The writer has to select his themes very judiciously because of the special target audience he is addressing. A different approach is required for different age groups. Animal stories, fantasies, fairy tales, heroic adventures, mountaineering, sea-faring, dacoits, bandits, police, exploration and travel, space odysseys, stories of children's courage, self-reliance and initiative are generally children's favourites.

Books for children explore and portray themes which children can identify with and find relevant and meaningful. Thus this literature abounds in child protagonists undertaking all manner of journeys, voyages and adventures and negotiating the complex environment they are thrown into.

The Ruskin Bond Children's Omnibus



These stories are not very lengthy because of the limited retention span of children. Lively and often colourful illustrations add to the over-all effect of the story.

The world of wonder, often ignored by the adults, fascinates every child. Adventure and excitement, dangerous and exciting situations make the child want to know what happens next. Curiosity and suspense hold the child's compassion and concern for others.

Children go on imagining things. They create a world of fancy and an atmosphere of magic and unreality. It's a world in which unreal people and creatures roam about doing unexpected things and encountering unreal adventures. But even in a fantasy there can be a moral. It must not however, be made too obvious.

Entertaining the child is the primary aim of a good story. At the same time, a streak of virtue must run through the story. Love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, and triumph of good over evil in the end are essential qualities in every good story written for children.

The genesis of story-writing for children lies in our long tradition of folk tales and the stories told by wandering story-tellers and by grandmothers in our homes at bedtime, drawing heavily on classics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharath*, the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesh*, the *Kathasaritsagara* and the *Jataka* stories. The tradition of oral story-telling puts a lot of stress on moral teaching and hero-worship.

Despite a rich tradition of creative writing for children in our country has not been very rich or even satisfactory.

Till sometime ago, writing for children was not considered a significant or serious activity. It has deemed to be a child's play, a secondary kind of writing. There were very few magazines for children. Generally speaking, parents didn't think it worthwhile to spend on books for children, apart from textbooks. It was considered a wasteful expenditure.

Of late, though, Children's Book Trust, New Delhi, has done considerable work to promote and produce good children's literature. The animal fantasy of modern times started with the *Jungle Book* and *Just-so Stories* of Rudyard Kipling. Kipling and A.A.Milne in *Winnie the Pooh* created a unique world of jungles and beasts. The animal world was later expanded by such imaginative writers as Beatrice Potter, Kenneth Grahame, Margery Sharp, C.S.Lewis, Llyod Alexander, Michael Bond and Robert Lawson. Jim Corbett's *Man Eaters of Kumaon*, *More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, *The Temple Tiger* and *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudra Prayag* have left generations of young readers breathless. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, L.Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, and Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* create a very different kind of fairy tale with all kinds of eccentric characters. In Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* very different animals form a friendship.

Many contemporary authors have written fairy tales with a new twist. Jay William's *Practical Princess* slays the dragon and lets the prince out. In another of William's story the Princess insists that she will help the prince only when he promises to shed his laziness. The traditional image of a helpless young girl quietly sitting in an ivory tower patiently waiting for the prince charming to come on horseback and rescue her has been dismissed and discarded to keep pace with the changing times. Young men alone need not display bravery or chivalry. Modern girls can take care of themselves and others.

In Roald Dahl's famous *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* too, despite its overriding surrealism, a touch of modern-day reality has been introduced in the portrayal of the poor Charlie. Of course, in the end Charlie emerges the winner and Willy Wonka declares him his heir purely on the basis of his endearing qualities of head and heart. While children's literature has evolved from a world ruled over by parents and teachers into a freer world for today's boys and girls, earnest effort is being made to inculcate domestic, ethical and social values.

Writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults because in case of the latter we can speak in our own voice, as adults. But children belong to a phase of life we have long passed. We have to thus put ourselves back in time and constantly remind ourselves of what it was like when we were eight or nine or ten years old.

Great writers of children's works do not speak as adults, always write from children's point of view, never adopt a condescending tone, use simple but vivid language and avoid clichés and complex structures. Ruskin Bond goes a step further. His child

protagonist seems to show the adults the drawbacks in their approach to nature and the animal world.

Ruskin Bond

6.3 RUSKIN BOND : A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Ruskin Bond (1939-)

Ruskin Bond is a long time resident of Landour and Mussoorie, a beautiful hill station in Uttar Pradesh of India. He is a prolific writer of poetry, fiction and non-fictional essays, and has published some 70 odd books to date. He has weekly English language columns in leading Indian newspapers. Ruskin Bond was born in 1939. As he lost his father at an early age and had to grow up in his step-father's house, he became rather an introspective reticent person who immersed himself in a world of books. As a child he spent long periods with his grandparents in Mussoorie and imbibed a love for nature and animals from his Grandfather. Ruskin Bond started writing at the age of ten. His novel *The Room on the Roof* won him the prestigious John Llewellyn Rhys Prize when he was only 18. In 1992 his collection of stories *Trees Still Grow in Dehradun* got him the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Ruskin Bond's works mainly depict children growing up and maturing through adversity and experience. The natural scenic hills of Dehradun and Mussoorie almost invariably form the setting of his works and reflect his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature.

Now at 61, Ruskin lives at Landour, Mussoorie along with his adopted son's family, surrounded by pines, the blue firmament, the sun kissed dew-drenched buttercups, vine and children. And he still continues to pour his heart out in his writings. He said in a recent interview, "I don't always write professionally or for money. It is something I feel I have to do to relate my impressions in the day-to-day life that I see around me."

Major Works of Ruskin Bond :

- 1999 *A Season of Ghosts.*
- 1994 *Delhi is not far : the best of Ruskin Bond.*
- 1994 *Quakes and flames Bond.*
- 1992 *An island of trees : nature stories and po Bond.*
- 1992 *Mussoorie and Landour : days of wine and R Bond.*
- 1991 *Snake trouble.*
- 1989 *Time stops at Shamli and other stories.*
- 1988 *Beautiful Garhwal : Heaven in Himalayas.*
- 1988 *The night train at Deoli and other stories.*
- 1986 *The adventures of Rusty.*
- 1985 *To live in magic : a book of nature poems.*
- 1980 *A flight of pigeons.*

- 1977 *A girl from Copenhagen.*
1975 *Lone fox dancing : lyric poems.*
1972 *An axe for the Rani.*
1972 *It isn't time that's passing.*
1969 *Strange men, strange places.*
1968 *My first love and other stories.*
1967 *The neighbour's wife and other stories.*
1957 *The room on the roof.*

6.4 NO ROOM FOR A LEOPARD : A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *A Bond with the Mountains* in 1998. It is a very moving account of the killing of a trusting leopard by a group of shikaris. Leopard skins were selling in Delhi at over a thousand rupees each. Of course, there was a ban on the export of its skins but there were always ways and means ... Because of such unscrupulous persons, the leopard, like many other members of the cat family, is nearing extinction in India.

Because of deforestation taking place in the hills and surrounding areas, many animals have been driven into the valleys inhabited by human beings. This exposes them to grave risks and fatal encounters – one such encounter has been described in this story. But for the rapid deforestation the shikaris would not have caught and killed the leopard so very easily. In the familiar surroundings of the forest the leopard would have found a safe haven.

Of course, this deforestation has brought one indirect advantage too – of bringing humans and non-humans closer to each other. The protagonist – we are given neither his name nor age – came into close contact with the folktales, kaleej pheasants, langurs, red foxes and even a sinewy orange-gold leopard. As he had not come to take anything from the jungle the birds and animals soon grew accustomed to his face. They began to recognize his footsteps. After some time, his approach did not disturb them. The birds would no longer fly away, they would remain perched on a boulder in the middle of the stream while he got across by means of other boulders only a few yards away. The langurs in the oak and rhododendron trees would just watch him with some curiosity and continue to munch up the tender green shoots of the oak. Not only that, when one day they saw a leopard poised on a rock about twenty feet above the young narrator, they tried to warn him of the hidden danger by grunting and chattering. They thus showed their concern for him. A deep bond thus got established between the narrator and the animal world without their ever exchanging a single word.

The difference between the children's thinking and the adult thinking has also been brought out. Children love nature. They love all the birds and animals. It comes naturally to them. No ulterior consideration enters their innocent minds. They can never ever think of harming the animals or exploiting them for their personal gain or profit. But the adults are solely driven by mercenary considerations. If a leopard's skin can fetch them a good price, they would not think twice before killing him. Compassion, trust, love ... these mean nothing to them. An idyllic world stands shattered because of this selfish cruelty.

The young narrator loved every bird and animal. He meant them no harm. They in return trusted him and accepted him and cared for him, in their own way. But their acceptance of his presence, of human presence proved to be their undoing. The leopard became trusting, became less cautious, took the shikaris also to be friends. And lost his life. Hereafter at least animals stopped trusting human beings. And this distrust soon spread far and wide. Even though all men are not selfish and cruel, many

of us deeply love animals and care for them but the act of shikaris will make them suspicious forever.

Ruskin Bond

A long and hazardous journey in pursuit of something noble is often the theme of good and absorbing children's stories. The perilous journey exemplifies the value of cooperation and the quality of friendship. Here the young narrator crosses the forest and the small stream at the bottom of the hill every morning and evening, all by himself. We are not told why he does so. It is left to our imagination. Perhaps he goes to school, though his bag of books or satchel is never mentioned. But that is not important. What is significant is the trust that develops between him and the animals and the subsequent breach of that trust.

The best in children's literature has a double purpose. While it entertains the young reader and the adult as well, it also teaches something – helps understand the norms of the society in which we live. Transmission of ethical and social values is skillfully woven into the texture of the story. Ironically, in this story, the ways and thinking of the adult world are censured. At the end of the story the child does not stand enlightened, he stands embittered, disillusioned. In a way this story is a comment on the modern world and its life style. The adults no longer provide role models for our children. Models of right thinking and right behaviour. Children are making them aware of their misdeeds.

In the last few decades we have become increasingly aware of the evils of deforestation and other environmental imbalances. And the havoc these changes are playing in our lives. This story thus takes up a very contemporary and a very relevant theme that concerns all of us today. Filtered through a child's consciousness it becomes all the more poignant and pressing.

6.5 COPPERFIELD IN THE JUNGLE – A DISCUSSION

This story was first published in *Tigers For Ever* in 1996. It is an autobiographical story. It tells us how the young Ruskin Bond could never get interested in the hunting expeditions of his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends. Perhaps he had inherited this trait from his grandfather who never understood the pleasure some people obtained from killing the creatures of our forests. Killing for food – most animals die that could be justified to an extent but killing just for the fun of it could not be justified or understood.

Even at the tender age of twelve Ruskin disliked anything to do with shikar or hunting. He also found it terribly boring. To illustrate this point he narrates an experience. Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends once took him on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwalik hills. The prospect of spending one whole week in the jungle with several adults with guns only filled him with dismay. They would all the time be thinking and talking of hunting a tiger or an elephant and he did not at all look forward to it. So, on their second day in the jungle, he managed to be left behind at the rest house. And in a corner of the back verandah of that old bungalow he discovered a shelf of books – some thirty volumes, obviously untouched for many years. Much too young to know what was good and what was not, he would have read any thing and every thing with pleasure. However much to his delight the bookshelf contained, among others, P.G.Wodehouse's *Love Among the Chickens*, M.R.James's *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, Edward Hamilton Aitken's *A Naturalist on the Prowl* and Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This chance acquaintance with Mr.Micawber and family, Aunt Betsy Trowood, Mr.Dick, Peggotty and many other characters in Dickens's novel seemed to set him off on the road to literature. James's book had him hooked on ghost stories for the rest of his life.

Ruskin's imagination becomes active the moment he discovers the books. Who could have left them there? A literary forest officer? A memsahib who got bored by her husband's camp-fire boasting? Or someone who had no interest in the 'manly' sport of slaughtering wild animals?

At the end of the week the four men with guns could only see a spotted deer and shoot two miserable, underweight wild fowls. Sitting in the rest-house with his treasure of books Ruskin Bond saw not only the spotted deer crossing the open clearing in front of the bungalow but also a large leopard making off into the jungle with one of the dogs held in its jaws. Since the leopard had done it only to help itself to a meal, it did not disturb young Ruskin beyond a point and he returned to his reading. The hunting party however, refused to believe this, attributing this bit of information to his overactive imagination under the immediate influence of Dickens's vivid portrayal of Master Copperfield. Ruskin brings the half-finished novel back with him. David Copperfield, published in 1849-50, is Dickens's veiled autobiography.

6.6 AN ISLAND OF TREES – A DISCUSSION

This story is taken from *An Island of Trees* published in 1992. This is a dialogue between Koki and her grandmother. They are sitting on a string cot in the shade of an old jackfruit tree and Grandmother talks about her father and his great love for trees and flowers. She tells Koki that she was convinced that plants and trees loved her father with as much tenderness as he loved them. She recalls how sometimes when she sat alone beneath a tree she would feel a little lonely or lost. But as soon as her father joined her, the garden would become a happy place, the tree itself more friendly.

Grandmother personifies the trees. Peepul trees are great show-offs. Even when there is no breeze, their broad-chested, slim-waisted leaves will spin like tops, determined to attract your attention and invite you into the shade. An old peepul tree had forced its way through the walls of an old, abandoned temple, knocking the bricks down with its vigorous growth. Her father rebuilt the temple around the tree. The tree protects the temple and the temple protects the tree. People believe that there's a friendly tree spirit dwelling there. Her father also believed that the trees are always trying to move – to reach out with their arms.

The same with the banyan tree. While its leaves were still pink and tender, it would be visited by the delicate map butterfly who left her eggs to their care.

Koki's great-grandfather had such a passion for planting trees that during the monsoons he would walk into the scrubland and beyond the river bed, armed with cuttings and saplings, and he would plant them out there, hoping to create a forest. And he told his daughter that he was not planting the forest for people to see. He was planting it for the earth and for the birds and animals who live on it and need more food and shelter. He also told her why mankind, and not only wild creatures, need trees – for preventing the banks of rivers from being washed away. But everywhere people are cutting down trees without planting new ones. This is the message that Koki's grandmother wants to convey to all of us. In "No Room for a Leopard" we have seen the grave consequences of such mindless acts. The thought of a world without trees is simply nightmarish.

At the end of the story Grandmother narrates an experience, which reveals the deep bond that grows between humans and non-humans if only there is love and compassion. After twenty years or more she returned to her parental house and one day walked over to the island where her father had once planted all kinds of trees. While a small spotted deer scampered away to hide in a thicket and a wild pheasant challenged her with a mellow 'who are you?' the trees seemed to know her and

beckoned her nearer. She ran her hands over their barks and it was like touching the hands of old friends. She noticed that many small trees and wild plants and grasses had sprung up under the protection of those whom she and her father had planted years ago. The trees had multiplied. The forest was on the move. Her father's dream was coming true – the trees were walking again, by multiplying, by spreading their shade and benign influence.

6.7 CHARACTERISATION

In 'No Room for a Leopard' and 'Copperfield in the Jungle' the protagonist is a young boy of about twelve years of age. We are not told his name. That is not important. What matters is his love of animals and complete affinity with

nature. In 'No Room for a Leopard' even his age is never mentioned. Only from the illustration do we surmise that he is no more than 10 – 11. We don't know why he crossed the forest every morning and evening. True, his cottage was just above the forest but we are not told why he travelled all by himself and why his people back home never worried about his safety. Surely they would have known about the many birds and animals frequenting that area. The shikaris show more concern when they tell him that there is a leopard around and he should carry a gun.

Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that they were only interested in the money the leopard's skin would fetch them. We don't know their names or number. We don't know where they came from or where they went. They symbolise an attitude – selfish materialism. And it's contrasted with the child's spontaneous love for the animals.

In 'Copperfield in the Jungle' again, all that we know is that the protagonist is twelve years of age, dislikes hunting and loves reading. Why he has to accompany Uncle Henry and his sporting friends almost against his wishes is not known. Nor are we told anything about the shikaris except that despite their tall claims they managed to shoot only two miserable, underweight wild fowls at the end of the week. And they blamed it on the beastly weather. Of course, they use typical hunters' vocabulary. They constantly talk of bagging a tiger – that is, killing or catching a tiger, beating the jungle – that is, going into the jungle to drive out game for sport or shooting usually accompanied by drum – beaters and camp fire boasting – that is boasting of their past exploits, often imaginary, sitting around the fire made with logs in the open air at night. Only in 'An Island of Trees' Kokis's grandmother controls the narrative but she is throughout reminiscing about her own childhood, when she would not have been older than Koki herself. To make Koki understand the value of trees in life she recreates her past – her happy memories of a loving and caring father.

Not yet conscious of the burdens of life and several extraneous considerations, children easily relate to the natural world, establishing a spontaneous relationship with birds and animals and plants. These children carry a message for adults. If hunting for fun or profit goes on, if trees continue to be felled, the earth will become a desert in no time.

6.8 ATMOSPHERE

Since "No Room For A Leopard" is about deforestation and its accompanying aftermath, the story gives a vivid picture of the forest along with the magic of its flora and fauna. Trees, plants, birds, animals – they instantly grip the imagination of the young. Since the forest of oak and maple and Himalayan rhododendron was just

below the cottage of our young protagonist, he must have been frequenting it since his early childhood. It is not surprising, therefore, that he knows the place almost inside out and can mention each tree by its proper name. By nature children love birds and animals. A bond of understanding and trust soon develops between them and the protagonist who is never referred to by name because that is not important. He represents all children and their innocence is contrasted with the selfish cruelty of the grown – up shikaris who have also not been given any names.

A fantasy also must have a logical framework; may be not logical from our practical point of view but some way of thinking which the characters themselves have evolved. The leopard's quest for food, the quickening cry of the barking deer, the nervous and excited grunting and chattering of the langurs, the fireflies mistaken for the eyes of the leopard by the nervous child, his heart banging away against his ribs – all have a sound logic of their own. The young child venturing out all by himself every morning adds to the magic of the atmosphere and makes him a real hero. Against the tall trees climbing into the sky, a small figure in the foreground looks solitary and courageous – quite in keeping with the spirit of the hills and forests.

"Copperfield In The Jungle" also reconstructs the jungle atmosphere. The young protagonist accompanies his Uncle Henry and some of his sporting friends on a shikar expedition into the Terai forests of the Siwaliks. We are not told his name but we know that he is twelve years of age and has inherited his deep dislike of hunting and killing just for the fun of it from his grandfather.

The terminology commonly used by the shikaris and the tall claims made by them are effectively used to stress the contrast between the adult thinking and the child's thinking. A bungalow in the jungle has its own magic. A shelf of books half-hidden in a corner of its back verandah is nothing short of a treasure for a twelve year old who has to look after himself during the long absence of his uncle and friends. Wiping the thick dust off the covers and examining the titles was really a treasure-hunt for the boy whose reading tastes had not yet formed. *The Ghost Stories*, *A Naturalist On The Prowl* and *Love Among The Chickens* only add to the child's world of fantasy. Reference to Jim Corbett earlier shows that the child was interested in books. David Copperfield establishes beyond doubt the autobiographical element. The protagonist of "No Room For A Leopard" also ends his narration with a line from D.H.Lawrence's poem.

In "An Island Of Trees" the narration is controlled by Koki's grandmother but the grandmother is recounting and reliving her own childhood all through. There aren't very many birds or animals here except for an occasional map butterfly or hawk-cuckoo or ladybird or caterpillar. The importance Koki's great-grandfather attached to trees for life on earth is the focal point. The banyan tree gave shelter not only to the human beings but many birds during the monsoon – the gossipy rosy-pastors, quarrelsome mynas, cheerful bulbuls and coppersmiths and sometimes a noisy, bullying crow. All of them would feast on the scarlet figs. Even the dark flying foxes at night!

The illustrations, almost an essential part of a children's story, animate the mood, heighten the over all impact and reinforce the deep bond of friendship between nature and children, between animals and children.

And the fantasy in all these stories is as much geared to magic as to modern science and modern ways of living. There is none of the macabre hair – raising of a dyed-in-the-wool horror story. There are no ghosts but the stories have a haunting atmosphere which stays with us for a long time.

We reproduce below the poem by D.H.Lawrence that is referred to at the end of "No Room For A Leopard":

MOUNTAIN LION

Ruskin Bond

CLIMBING through the January snow, into the Lobo
canyon

Dark grow the spruce-trees, blue is the balsam, water
sounds still unfrozen, and the trail is still evident.

Men !

Two men !

Men ! The only animal in the world to fear !

They hesitate.

We hesitate.

They have a gun.

We have no gun.

Then we all advance, to meet.

Two Mexicans, strangers, emerging out of the dark
and snow and inwardness of the Lobo valley.
What are you doing here on this vanishing trail?

What is he carrying?

Something yellow.

A deer?

Que tiene, amigo?

Leon -

He smiles, foolishly, as if he were caught doing wrong.
And we smile, foolishly, as if we didn't know.
He is quite gentle and dark - faced.

It is mountain a lion,

A long, long slim cat, yellow like a lioness.

Dead.

He trapped her this morning, he says, smiling foolishly.

Lift up her face,

Her round, bright face, bright as frost.

Her round, fine-fashioned head, with two dead ears;

And stripes in the brilliant frost of her face, sharp, fine
dark rays,

Dark, keen, fine eyes in the brilliant frost of her face.
Beautiful dead eyes.

Hermoso es!

They go out towards the open;

We go on into the gloom of Lobo.

And above the trees I found her lair,

A hole in the blood-orange brilliant rocks that stick up,
a little cave.

And bones, and twigs, and a perilous ascent.

So, she will never leap up that way again, with the yellow
flash of a mountain lion's long shoot !

And her bright striped frost-face will never watch any
more, out of the shadow of the cave in the blood-
orange rock,

Above the trees of the Lobo dark valley-mouth !

Instead, I look out.

And out to the dim of the desert, like a dream, never
real;

To the snow of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, the ice
of the mountains of Picorisi,
And near across at the opposite steep of snow, green
trees motionless standing in snow, like a Christmas toy.

And I think in this empty world there was room for me
and a mountain lion.

And I think in the world beyond, how easily we might
spare a million or two of humans

And never miss them.

Yet what a gap in the world, the missing white frost-
face of that slim yellow mountain lion !

6.9 LET US SUM UP

It is important to remember that even in a fantasy there should be a moral. Of course, it should not be made too obvious. Children are indirectly and subtly taught certain virtues like love and kindness towards animals as well as other human beings, helping those in trouble, punishing or defying the wicked, truthfulness, respect for elders, etc. Paradoxically, these stories have a very clear message not for children but for adults. We, the adults, have to realise and remember what trees mean to us, to our future. We, the adults have to realize and remember what deforestation can and will do to our environment and ultimately to us. We, the adults, have to realise and remember the harm mindless killing of animals, for the fun of it or for monetary gains, will ultimately do to life on earth in the days to come. Children, the future of mankind, are asking the adults to ensure a safe future for them in a healthy environment.

6.10 QUESTIONS

1. Why does the young protagonist feel responsible for the killing of the leopard in 'No Room for a Leopard'?
2. What is the full implication of the leading hunter's remark in 'Copperfield in the Jungle', "Young Master Copperfield says he saw a leopard"?
3. What do you learn about Koki's grandmother in 'An Island of Trees'?
4. In the first two stories the young protagonists have not been given any proper names. Does it adversely affect the over-all effect of the stories?
5. What is the strength of these stories? How are they different from 'The Miracle'?

6.11 ADDITIONAL READING

1. *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*, eds, Carpenter and Prichard, Oxford University Press, 1984.
2. *Writers, Critics and Children*, eds Geoff Foxetal, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1976.
3. *Children's World*, a magazine published by the Children's Book Trust, New Delhi.