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# Syllabus

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## FICTION AND INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

H-325

Thomas Hardy "The Mayor of Casterbridge"

R.K. Narayan "The Guide"

General Topic "Problems of Creative Writing in English"

Prescribed text "Raja Rao-The Serpent and the Rope"

General Topic "Colonial and Post Colonial Discourse"

Prescribed text "Kamala Markandya-Nectar in a Sieve"

## UNIT

# 1

## THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

—Thomas Hardy

### STRUCTURE

- ▶ Summary
- ▶ Thomas Hardy as a Novelist
- ▶ Main Features of Hardy's Characters
- ▶ Characters
- ▶ Very Short Answer Type Question
- ▶ Short Answer Type Questions
- ▶ Long Answer Type Questions
- ✧ Test Yourself

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- ▶ "The Mayor of Caster Bridge" a novel by Thomas Hardy
- ▶ Writing Style of Thomas Hardy

### ✧ 1.1 SUMMARY

As the novel opens we are introduced to Michael Henchard, a 21 year old hay thrasher, his wife Susan and his infant daughter Elizabeth Jane. They were approaching the large village of Weydon Priors in upper Wessex on foot.

When they reached there, they were badly tired and hungry. They entered in a tent where firmity was sold but Susan realized that she made a mistake because the firmity seller mixed wine with the firmity. Henchard took so much of firmity of that he got intoxicated and started cursing his wife and actually started the auction for his wife. Suddenly, Newson a young sailor entered in the tent and purchased Susan for five guineas. Before leaving, Susan threw the wedding ring on the face of Henchard.

Next morning when he awoke, he was ashamed to remember his foolishness. He cursed the foolish simplicity of his wife and realized that he was guilty. He went to a nearby village church and took an oath not to take wine for 21 years. After coming out of the church, he made a thorough search for his wife and daughter but failed. Some months later, he came to know that a family like that, had gone to Canada. Thinking that further search was futile he went to live at Casterbridge in Wessex.

After a lapse of eighteen years Susan and Elizabeth returned to Weydon Priors Fair. Susan recognized the old furnity seller and tactfully reminded her of wife selling episode. Mrs. Goodenough, the old furnity seller told her that man returned to Weydon Priors the very next year and told her, if someone asked for him, she should be sent to Casterbridge.

Susan told her daughter that Henchard was one of her relatives. After leaving Henchard Susan married Newson her buyer. They went to Canada but returned to England after 12 years. They settled in Falmouth. Here Susan came to know that her relationship with Newson was illegal. Deeply shocked by this she decided not to live with Newson. He realized her distress and went to sea and did not come back. Susan thought him dead. She thought that now she could live with her legal husband Henchard. Susan was travelling to find Henchard and live with him. It was for the sake of her daughter's future as she wanted to be an accomplished and cultured lady.

They went to Casterbridge. Here she was doubtful about Henchard's social status so she decided to make confidential inquiries about him instead of going direct to him.

In Casterbridge people were talking about bad wheat that was supplied by Henchard to local bakers and millers.

When they reached Casterbridge a dinner, presided over by the Mayor, was held in the best Hotel 'Kings Arms'.

Susan came to know that Henchard was the mayor of Casterbridge and had grown to be a very rich corn merchant. She also came to know that he did not take wine. There was a hot discussion about bad wheat. Henchard told that if bad wheat could be made wholesome, then he is ready to replace it. He gave them an assurance that such a thing would not happen again. He declared to appoint a Manager to look after his business, and bring in improvement.

Outside the King's Arms hotel there was a young Scot, Donald Farfrae who heard mayor's comment about food, wrote something on a piece of paper and sent it to mayor. After reading it Henchard came out but he had left for Three Mariner's Inn. Susan and Elizabeth had also gone to the sense inn.

To pay part of their lodging Elizabeth Zane started working in the inn. When Elizabeth took supper of Farfrae to his room, Henchard also arrived there. He told him how to make bad wheat good. Henchard offered him to joint him as a manager but he was determined to go to America. Farfrae offered wine to him but he did not accept it saying that he had committed misdeed earlier under its influence. Susan was overhearing this conversation and was deeply affected.

Next morning Farfrae ultimately agreed to join Henchard as a manager. Susan sent message to Henchard. Iashua Jopp had applied for the manager post but Henchard did not employ him as he had appointed Farfrae. Jopp grew angry at it. Just after Elizabeth went to meet Henchard, She gave him her message. In the reply of the message he gave a letter to her describing the manner, place and time of meeting Susan. Along with the letter he also sent a sum of five pounds and five shillings. Susan was deeply moved and went to meet Henchard at ring, at eight the same night. When Henchard met his wife, he expressed his shame over his past act. He informed Susan about his vow of not taking wine for 21 years. His heart was pained to see Susan in this condition. He decided to keep Elizabeth ignorant of their past. Henchard decided that they would remarry after some time.

On his return after meeting with Susan he told Farfrae everything about his past life from the sale of his wife till his affair with a lady in Jersey. He was about to marry her but now his first wife and daughter had returned so he had abandoned the idea of marrying that woman of Jersey. However he wanted to compensate her liberally. So he requested Farfrae to write a polite letter explaining the situation. Farfrae wrote the letter Henchard copied and enclosed a cheque with it and posted the letter. He took a sigh of relief.

After some time Henchard married Susan and local people were greatly surprised what Henchard saw in Susan, an unattractive lady. Henchard had great love for Farfrae but one day his employee Abel Whittle, who was in the habit of rising late and causing Henchard's work to suffer again did the same thing and Henchard treated him inhumanly. Farfrae opposed his behaviour and Henchard's attitude towards him was changed.

Farfrae and Henchard organised a function separately. Henchard's function proved out to be a total failure whereas, Farfrae's was quite successful. This made Henchard quite furious and in a fit of rage he terminated Farfrae. Farfrae thereafter started his own business independently.

Here Susan fell seriously ill. She wrote a letter with an instruction not to open it before Elizabeth's wedding. She tried her level best to bring Farfrae and Elizabeth closer. Susan died after some time. Henchard was left alone. One day he tactfully revealed Elizabeth about his past and to convince her he searched for some proof. Here again destiny played vicious role and he found Susan's letter which was half opened, he went through it and came to know that Elizabeth was Newson's daughter. After this revelation he started treating her very rudely. He ordered her to leave his house. Here Lucetta entered in the novel city and she offers Elizabeth to stay with her at High Place Hall.

Lucetta sent a letter to Henchard about her arrival and wrote that he could visit her house to meet his daughter. Now Henchard and Lucetta wanted to marry but when Lucetta came to know that Henchard and Elizabeth had strained relationship, she decided to remove Elizabeth from her house. She sent her away and called Henchard at her place. She ordered her servants to bring the visitor to her room as soon as he came but the visitor was Farfrae. He came there to meet Elizabeth. They talked to each other in a very gentle manner and when they parted they both were in deep love. Again Henchard and Elizabeth became the prey of destiny. When Henchard went to meet Lucetta she refused to do so.

Henchard Now decided to ruin Farfrae in business. He appointed Jopp. as his manager and superstitiously believed on the foretelling of the weather prophet. Due to this superstition he suffered heavy losses. On the other hand Farfrae invested carefully and earned heavy profit.

So many incidents added fuel in the envy of Henchard for Farfrae. He compelled Lucetta to marry in spite of knowing that she was in love with Farfrae.

Destiny again played vicious game with Henchard when Mrs Good enough the old firmity seller woman's case was presented before him. She revealed his black past in front of the people and his social position was demolished. Lucetta left Casterbridge for the time being.

In the meantime there happened bull episode with Lucetta. Henchard saved her life and asked her to tell one of his debtors, Grawer that they are getting married the next fortnight. So, he would

not ask for his debt at least for 15 days then Lucetta broke all hell upon her by saying that she had already married Farfrae and Grawer was the witness there.

Henchard was completely ruined. He was shifted from his residence to humbler quarters in the locality of the poor. He came to know that Farfrae had bought most of his furniture. He felt very sad. But Farfrae again impressed him with his kindness and offered him to work with him. Henchard accepted the offer but he again became envious to know that Farfrae is the next mayor of Casterbridge. He was now looking forward to the day when the oath of not taking wine would expire.

After the completion of his oath he started drinking heavily. When Elizabeth came to know about she took care of him. He cursed Farfrae very much. Farfrae now became the mayor of Casterbridge. Lucetta requested Henchard to return one of her letters Henchard wanted to tarnish the happiness of Farfrae and Lucetta but being good at heart he could not do so. He agreed to return all the letters. He was living in the cottage of Jopp. He asked him to deliver a sealed packet to Mrs. Farfrae. He opened the packet and found that it contained Lucetta's love letters. He hatched a plan to take advantage of these.

He reached Peter's Finger, an inn in Mixer. The people of doubted character collected there. He read the letters in front of them and they decided to hold and use the letters to humiliate Lucetta on the night of the royal visit to Casterbridge.

Casterbridge was preparing enthusiastically for royal visit. Henchard also wanted to welcome the Royal guest but Farfrae did not allow him to do so. He was publicly humiliated.

It was decided that the skimmity possession would be taken out the same night. People wanted to humiliate Lucetta. Some people decided that to keep Farfrae away from the possession. So they sent him an anonymous letter requesting to visit a place outside Casterbridge on business. Lucetta was unaware of all this. Soon she heard some indistinct musical sounds. People were talking about some possession in which effigies of a man were set on a donkey back to back. She was shocked when she came to know that the effigies were of her and Henchard. After seeing this she was deeply affected and fainted. Doctors told Elizabeth that her condition was serious and Farfrae should be immediately called.

Henchard returned from bridge. He saw the procession and immediately learnt all about. When he came to know about Lucetta's condition he rushed immediately to call Farfrae but he did not believe on him and reached to his place two hours later. Lucetta's condition worsened despite best medical aid and she expired.

Elizabeth intimated Henchard about Lucetta death. When she was away, Newson, the sailor arrived and asked about Elizabeth. Henchard told him that she is also dead. But after doing this he became so gloomy and went to 'Ten Matches Hole' on the river to commit suicide but he was horrified to see that a human figure floating in the water so he withdrew himself. That human figure was the effigy of the skimmity ride.

Here Farfrae again started taking interest in Elizabeth but Henchard did not like the idea as he did not want to get separated from his daughter. One day Henchard saw Newson coming. Now he told Elizabeth that he was leaving Casterbridge and requested her to remember him sometime and forgive him for his many sins.

Henchard reached Weydan Pagnas and started working as a hay supplier. He always thought of Elizabeth Jane. One day he heard of a wedding in Casterbridge. He decided to go there thinking it might be Elizabeth's marriage. He bought some good clothes and caged golden bird as a wedding gift. When he reached there a dance was in the progress. He gave the gifts to the maid. When Elizabeth came there she addressed him 'Mr. Henchard'. This pained him very much. She told him that she would never forgive his deception. He left the place immediately.

The discovery of the cage with dead bird upset Elizabeth. Soon she came to know that a humble farmer came to her wedding. She at once recognized him as Henchard. She went immediately along with Farfrae to search for Henchard. On their find they met Abel Whittle who told them that Henchard had died and before dying he made a will. according to it Elizabeth was not to be informed of his death; no bells were to be tolled at his death; he was not to be buried in a consecrated ground; no flowers were to be planted on his grave; no mourners were to talk behind his body; nobody was to see his dead body; and nobody was to remember him.

Elizabeth and Farfrae respected the will and Elizabeth Zane lived a life of happiness thereafter.

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## ❖ 1.2 THOMAS HARDY AS A NOVELIST

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**1. Introduction :** Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in Dorset, a rural county in the south-west of England. He began writing in his spare time. Thomas Hardy is universally recognised as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. Indeed, he claims of being called the greatest novelist in the whole range of English Literature. Some critics have even gone to the extent of calling him the Shakespeare of the English novels.

**2. The Classification of Hardy's Novels :** Hardy's first novel, the 'Desperate Remedies' appeared in 1871. Thereafter, he produced novel after novel in quick succession. His last novel 'Jude the Obscure', was published in 1895. With its frankness, the novel was vehemently criticised as being immoral. Consequently, he gave up novel writing for good. He exclaimed, 'a man would be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at.' 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'---The Return of the Native, 'Tess of The D'urbervilles' and 'Jude the Obscure' are regarded as his masterpieces. The scholars have compared these novels with the four great Shakespeare tragedies.

**3. A Regional Novelist :** Thomas Hardy is painfully dissatisfied with his age. All of his novels plainly reveal his dissatisfaction. He considered modern trends as corrupters which, instead of modernizing or civilizing, in fact decivilized and weakened those who were endowed with stout hearts, clear heads and enduring spirits by Nature. Hence, Hardy retires to Wessex is the old England with its woods, heaths, barrows, barns and byres. All of these natural phenomena were rooted firmly in Hardy's imagination.

**4. Themes of Hardy's Novels :** Thomas Hardy is the creator of the philosophical novel. It was a novelty. Earlier to him, English novel had remained to be a vehicle of social criticism. Man in society had been its theme. But Thomas Hardy setting it aside, used the novel to inquire into the cause of things. His novels are questioning about life. He inquires about the why and where of things. He attacks vehemently at the accepted beliefs.

**5. Democratic Element in Hardy's Novels:** Thomas Hardy claims to have democratised the English novel. The heroes and heroines of the great Hadrian tragedies are all drawn from the lowest rank of life. Some examples are as under:

1. Henchard, the hero of the Mayor of Casterbridge is a hay-supplier.
2. Tess is a milkmaid.
3. Giles is a cider-maker and pine-planter.
4. Gabriel Oak is a shepherd, and
5. Clym is a furze cutter.

**6. Sex in Hardy's Novels :** Hardy was the first English novelist who dared to make an adulterous, the heroine of his novel.

Tess is a woman with a past, yet Hardy had made her the heroine of *Tess of the D'urbervilles*.  
2. Sue Bridgehead, heroine of '*Jude the Obscure*', is an adulterous.

**7. Art of Characterisation In Hardy's Novels:** Thomas Hardy is a master of the art of characterisation. Some of his characters are among the immortal figures of literature. Whenever we read his novels, the characters remind us of the immortal creations of Shakespeare. He chooses his characters from the lower strata of society. It is his belief that while the characters and actions of people from high society are concealed by convention, the rustics are free from any such control. Hence, their character can be fully revealed and easily portrayed. Thomas Hardy excels in the portrayal of simple, elemental nature. However, his range of characterisation is limited. All his important characters belong to Wessex and to the lower strata of society. They appeal to people of all ages and countries. One has to think only of Henchard, Clym, Tess, Eustacia, Giles Marty South etc. to realise the truth of this statement.

**8. Hardy's Plot-Construction:** Hardy's novels have an architectural finish and symmetry. The architectonics of Hardy have been praised by all who have studied him. His plots are massively built.

**9. His Situations:** In Hardy's novels, love situations form the nucleus of his stories. He adopts a simple outline and develops it with great vigour. The remarkable feature is that the complication is in situation and not in action. But in the simple outline Hardy weaves the great drama of human soul. At times, his plots are marred by too much interference of 'chance' and 'fate'. His plots grow out of the elementary passion of love, ambition, greed, jealousy, and thirst for knowledge and are motivated by psychology. Accidents interrupt his story. Besides, the chance is the third party in all human relationships. Despite all the criticism about overdependence on fate, chance and accident, the main fact remains that his plots are self-supporting.

**10. Role of Nature:** A study of Hardy's novels reveals that nature exercises an active influence on the course of events in his novels. Nature is a shaping influence on the dispositions of human beings. However, his attitude towards nature is not Wordsworthian.

**11. Hardy's Pessimism:** Thomas Hardy is believed to be pessimist for the following reasons :

- (i) **Dark picture:** He has painted very dark and grim picture of human life.
- (ii) **Sufferings and Longings:** There is a great abundance of thwarted desires, unsatisfied longings, underserved sufferings, clash of duties, disillusionments, and disappointments, high and noble aspirations ending in dismal and miserable failure.



(iii) **Will of Dynasts:** The imminent will of 'The Dynasts' is the Supreme power which is indifferent to human affairs. This power takes delight in causing misery to human beings. The observation is made on Tess's execution.

"Justice was done and the president of the immortals had ended sports with Tess."

However, in due course of time, a change creeps in Hardy's attitude. He comes to believe that the imminent will is neither good nor evil but indifferent, blind and purposeless.

(iv) **Atheism :** Later on, Thomas Hardy concludes that there is no active intelligence, no just and loving God behind human destiny. He opines that the creation is motivated by an unconscious mechanical force, Sightless, dumb, mindless and indifferent to the joys and sufferings alike of mankind.

**12. Hardy's Prose-Style :** Hardy's style, according to Duffin is "Essentially of the philosophic type. It is imagination of his mind." His style is highly individualistic. He makes conscious efforts to develop and perfect his style. Consequently, his style betrays his vast scholarship knowledge of the great works of literature, astronomy, modern scientific speculation, philosophy, the Bible, his native culture, history, customs, tradition and superstitions. He makes the best use of this vast fund of knowledge and information. This treasure coupled with his artistic temperament produces a remarkable effect on the reader.

**Main features of Hardy's style are as under :**

1. **Poetic :** Hardy's style is a poetic style.
2. **Felicity of Expression :** Hardy has an almost Shakespearean felicity of expression and the rare and invaluable skill of using the best word for his purpose.
3. **Sincerity :** At every step his style reveals the sincerity of the man.
4. **Exact :** He uses obsolete words and expressions and scientific terminology only because he wants to be exact.
5. **Figurative :** He is master of the use of similes and metaphors image after image come out of his pen as sparks from a chimney fire.
6. **Rustic Touch ;** His rustics speak their own dialect, but they use it most forcefully and effectively.

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### ❖ 1.3 MAIN FEATURES OF HARDY'S CHARACTERS

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1. His characters are watched with pity and terror.
2. They are human beings, men and women, with flesh and blood. They have their own feelings and emotions besides, ambitions and despairs.
3. They are not puppets in the hands of their author.
4. His heroes and heroines are completely at the mercy of fate. He does not make any effort to guide them.
5. His female characters are the main sources of all sufferings.
6. Although we do not have a great variety of types yet there is a very rich gallery of memorable characters, both male and female like Jude, Angel, Henchard, Oak, Troy, Tess, Bathsheba, Elizabeth Jane, Fanny Robin, Sue, Eustacia, Elhelberta etc.

7. Hardy penetrates very deep into the hearts of his characters.

8. Hardy's heroes are not men of high rank and consequence, kings, princes, generals etc. Instead his heroes are men of ordinary circumstances and social position.

Some examples are as under

- (i) Michael Henchard is a hay-trusser.
- (ii) Oak and Boldwood are agriculturists.
- (iii) Jude is a stone mason.
- (iv) Tess is a milk-maid.
- (v) Sue is a school mistress, etc.

**Common Features**—Some common features of his characters are as under—

**1. Reason Versus Emotion :** All his major characters reveal something less ephemeral and evanescent than emotion and more spontaneous than reason : something that is spiritual and mysterious.

**2. Romantic Atmosphere :** They are surrounded by a romantic and poetic atmosphere.

**3. Common Material :** They are multiple, exclusively made of elemental and common material of which humanity at large is made.

**4. Universality:** His characters are universal and each character has the whole human race in him or her. Compton Rickett remarks, "His characters are elemental forces on a background of vaster elemental forces; they are the natural express! Or of sleepy woodland places, gaunt austere hills, purling streams, lonely open spaces."

**5. Female Characters :** About Hardy's female characters Compton Rickett writes, "Admirable as many of his male characters are, they yield both in clarity and intensity of interest to his women and since woman is more elemental than man, swayed far more by the instinctive life, their superiority is another illustration of Hardy's peculiar skill in dealing with the primal type." Hardy's female characters are all distinct from one another.

**6. Male Characters :** According to Lionel Johnson his male characters may be divided into two classes as under :

(i) **Bold Characters :** Country-heroes and lovers, solid massive men like Gabriel Oak or Giles Winterbourne. They face the world boldly and squarely.

(ii) **Delicate :** The youths like Clym, Yeobright are too delicate to be impulsive, too gentle to be vicious; yet, they have a certain hardness about them which helps them in fighting against their destiny.

**7. Common Human Beings:** Thomas Hardy's characters are all human beings, with common human weaknesses and virtues. They are neither saints nor angels nor unredeemed villains.

**8. Grand and Noble:** His characters may have some faults, they may sin but they are never mean. We never hate them; we love them despite their faults. They are grand even in the faults they might commit.

**9. Conscientious:** His characters have conscientious i.e they have great conscience, they always speak of justice and injustice and right and wrong. They are torn within themselves when

they do some wrong. Henchard is jealous and revengeful. But his wrongs are the result of impulse. They are never the results of calculated malice. We can never call him mean. 'Tess' has sinned, but she is essentially a pure woman whom we pity and whose heroic struggle against heavy odds we admire.

**10. His Female Characters:** Hardy's female characters are definitely better than his male characters. They are vivid and vigorous and can be divided into three main categories as under :

**(a) Full Length Studies of Women:** These include Tess, Sue, Bathsheba, Eustacia and Elizabeth Jane

**(b) Women of Less Personal Importance:** These are Vivietta, Grace, Anne, Elfride, Ethelberta.

**(c) Women of Much Less Importance, partially Drawn at Times :** These include Paula, Fanny, Fancy, Marty, Lucetta, Matilda, Charlotte. Although these female characters stand in the background they have deep personal interest.

Thomas Hardy has delineated his female characters with a wonderful felicity, range and depths. Although these characters are numerous yet they are as different as the primary hues. Hardy delves deep into female psychology. He uses his knowledge to a very good account. In 'Tess' he exhibits the supreme art of psychological revelation and depicts the tragedy other soul in all its depth and poignancy.

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#### ❖ 1.4 CHARACTERS

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##### **(i) Michael Henchard**

**1. Introduction:** Michael Henchard is the most towering personality among all the male characters of Hardy. He is the axis around whom the whole novel revolves.

**2. A Perfect Tragic Hero:** Among all the heroes in modern English Literature Henchard comes nearest to Aristotle's definition of the perfect tragic hero. "Henchard" is not in the tradition of heroic goodness, such as Springrove, Smith Oak, Yeobright.

**3. Centre of the Novel :** Hardy writes about this novel in its preface : "The story is more particularly a study of one man's deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Exhibition of Wessex Life".

**4. Tragic Character of the Novel :** The novel is really a story of a man of character, a tragic and a very poignant story.

**5. An Ineffectual Struggle:** It is tragic and poignant because it deals with a grim and ineffectual struggle of a helpless individual, Michael Henchard, with the Supreme Power which moves the universe; the power which is malignant and which takes pleasure in the human misery.

**6. Moody and Superstitious:** There are a number of instances in the novel which show that the Michael is superstitious by temperament:

(1) He visits Conjuror Fell to know if the weather would be fine or not. He meets his tragic end, for the forecast of the prophet turns out to be wrong.

(2) Sometimes, he thinks that someone has been melting a waxen image of him or ruin him.

(3) When from the bridge he sees his own effigy in the river he thinks that the effigy is an intervention of some mysterious invisible power. This power wants him to live.

**7. A Complex Character:** Henchard's character is complex. It is not easy to predict or foresee his reaction to a particular situation. He is capable of strong love and equally strong hate. He is affectionate and indifferent for the same person. He is indulgent and rude. In many ways his nature is self-contradictory. *He is a man of violent and vehement emotions. He is volcanic and stormy, both in his likes and dislikes and his actions.*

**8. A Haughty and Vengeful Character:** We have so many instances of his haughtiness and vengefulness, against Farfrae, and to some extent against Lucetta. This characteristic nature contributes largely towards his doom.

**9. His Heroic Endurance:** He takes the buffets of fortune very patiently and heroically. He has remarkable powers of endurance. Like all the country-folk, he believes in the irony of fate like any fatalist. He accepts his misfortunes as inevitable. He says, "I am to suffer. I perceive." This patient endurance expresses his inner conviction that the scheme of the world is ruled by some cruel power. The human life is more a tragedy than a comedy in this scheme.

**10. A Man of Character:** Hardy has rightly called Henchard, a man of character. A man of character is one who possesses a remarkable tendency to act in a particular manner. He is a man of strong opinions, of strong likes and dislikes. Nothing can deflect Henchard from the course that he has chosen for himself.

**11. A Man of Iron Will and Determination:** Henchard can work hard against heavy odds, and brush aside all obstacles in his way to achieve his aim. It is drink which causes him to sell his wife and child. But he repents and overcomes this weakness. He takes a vow not to touch wine for twenty one years. He keeps that vow faithfully for the full term.

**12. Affectionate and Generous :** His treatment of Farfrae shows him to be affectionate and generous. He repents for his sins. The feeling of shame and repentance is a recurring note on his character.

**13. A Man of Character:** Although Henchard is reduced to nothing yet, emotionally, professionally, socially and financially he is a man of character. He has waged a lonely, though ineffectual, battle against the Supreme power. Even in his final degradation Michael Henchard is heroic and grand.

He being a Man of character is confirmed by his will that—Elizabeth Jane Farfrae be not told of my death.

Or made to grieve on account of me.

And that I be not buried in consecrated ground,

And that no sexton be asked to toll the bell;

And that nobody be allowed to see my dead body,

And that no flowers be planted on my grave;

And that no man remembers me;

To this I put my name.

## (ii) 'Donald Farfrae'

*The Mayor of  
Casterbridge*

### The Evil Genius of Henchard

**1. Introduction :** Donald Farfrae is a young Scotch, He is "Slim, and slight in built, fair in complexion, bright eyed", He is a man of handsome personality and charming manners. He is introduced to us a little late. He comes to Casterbridge on his way to America, via Bristol. There, he overhears Henchard's challenge that none can change bad wheat into good one. At this he suggested a way of doing what to the Mayor seems something impossible. Being impressed, the Mayor presses him, to stay with him. In the beginning he is reluctant but late, on the Mayor persuades him to change his plans and stay back in Casterbridge as his manager. Thus, Henchard takes Farfrac into his service, who would prove to be his "evil genius", and would supplant him in business, in love, and in social prestige.

**2. His Modernity :** He possesses knowledge of the latest scientific developments and researches in the field of agriculture.

**3. His Popularity :** Farfrae has charming personality. He soon becomes popular in the town. All talk of him, and praise his winning manners. He is a special favourite with the women folk. Both Elizabeth and Lucetta love him.

**4. Romantic and Commercial :** Farfrae is a lover of dance and music. His melodious voice and poignant songs about his native Scotland move many a maiden heart. They endear him to the common rural folk at the "three Mariners" inn of Casterbridge. His nature is informal and sweet. Consequently he is an instant success. He is universally liked, loved and admired. We may see the romantic side of his nature of his love of Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane. As he is romantic he loves the remote, and the unfamiliar. This romantic craving compels him to leave his own country and decide to sail for America.

**5. Dutifulness :** He uses his talents to further his business interests. He applies himself to his work immediately after assuming the charge as the business Manager of Henchard. He is sincere in all actions and devoted to duty and people around him.

**6. Straight Forward :** Farfrae has the moral strength to speak out what he feels. He has the courage to oppose injustice. When he feels that Henchard's treatment of Abel Whittle is inhuman he speaks out although it displeases his employer.

**7. Sense of Self-respect :** He has the equal sense of self-respect also. When Henchard hints that Farfrac's days as manager are limited, he takes Henchard at his word and resigns immediately.

**8. His Majestic Personality :** He possesses a very majestic and attractive personality. Hence, he is so popular with the men and women; especially the women, of Casterbridge. Lucetta and Elizabeth Jane start loving him at first sight.

**9. A Gentleman :** Donald Farfrae is really a gentleman. Michael Henchard is his greatest adversary. Farfrac has supplanted Henchard in every field—professional political and emotional. Yet Farfrae does nothing to harm Henchard. When Henchard has fallen, Farfrae shows full sympathy for him. He invites him to live in his own house. He buys Henchard's furniture with a view to offer back to him such items of it as might have some special associations for him.

**10. Evil Genius of Henchard :** Farfrae has been called the evil genius of Henchard. Undoubtedly, Henchard's fall begins after his arrival in Casterbridge. He defeats Henchard in business as well as in love. But in fact he himself does nothing to harm Henchard. Rather, he does his best to help Henchard. If Henchard suffers, he suffers due to his faults of character or because cruel destiny is hostile to him and favourable to Farfrae. On his own part, he is noble, generous and graceful, considerate and kind to all.

**(iii) "Elizabeth Jane"**

**1. Introduction :** Elizabeth Jane is, undoubtedly, the heroine of the novel. She has been correctly described as the finest flower in the Wessex garden. She is a typical English girl, virtuous and upright. She is the only girl in all Hardy with, "aerial grey-eyes which fit well with her serious and sober conduct". She is a girl of deep feelings, grave and sedate.

She comes before us in the novel, 'The Mayor of Casterbridge' as a young and beautiful girl of eighteen years of age. She is very conscious and watchful of her manners and conduct. She does not like her mother's going and talking to an humble firmity seller when they reach the Weydon Priors Fair in search of Michael Henchard.

**2. Her Various Virtues :** Elizabeth Jane has a keen desire for honour. She always tries to improve herself but she is also aware of her many shortcomings. She continues to make sincere efforts to achieve knowledge and refinement.

**3. A Simple-Minded Country-Bred Girl :** In fact, Elizabeth Jane is a simple-minded country-bred girl. She is very polite and courteous especially to the poor and the unfortunate.

**4. Detached and Philosophical :** Elizabeth Jane has experienced the miseries of poverty and misfortunes in her life. This experience has left a deep constructive effect on her. She has grown to be thoughtful, and philosophical.

**5. Her Wit and Presence of Mind :** She keeps her presence of mind even in the face of the gravest danger. This is the reason why she is able to extricate herself and others from serious difficulties. During the encounter with the bull she keeps her presence of mind. On the contrary to it, Lucetta is nervous and frightened. Even in the management of their little seed business, Henchard leaves everything to her. She runs the business so efficiently that it flourishes with remarkable rapidity.

**6. Devoid of Envy :** Elizabeth is very virtuous, she does not suffer from the vice and evil of envy. Donald Farfrae is in love with her. But when he comes to meet her and meets Lucetta he falls in love with Lucetta. She is neither envious of Lucetta nor does she complain against Farfrae for his unethical conduct. She suffers silently.

**7. Self-Sacrificing and Humble :** She is always ready to efface herself for the good of others. She is unselfish and generous. She thinks more of others than of herself.

**8. Affectionate and Kind :** She is greatly affectionate and kind. When she learns that Henchard is ill she forgets his rude treatment and rushes to nurse him. She resides with him, when she finds him lonely and miserable after Lucetta's death. But when she learns that Henchard has sent her father Newson away with a lie, she starts hating him for this deception. Yet she becomes restless to find out Henchard when she realises the miserable agony of his lonely heart.

To conclude, Elizabeth Jane is grand, virtuous and noble. Lucetta fades into insignificance and oblivion before the purity of her moral grandeur.

*The Mayor of  
Casterbridge*

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### ❖ 1.5 VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Where did Michael Henchard and his family reach one summer evening?**

**Ans.** Weydon Prio Faire.

**Q. 2. Who were the members of Henchard's family?**

**Ans.** Susan, the wife and Elizabeth Jane, the infant daughter.

**Q. 3. What did Henchard do after taking furrnity.**

**Ans.** After taking furrnity laced with rum Henchard sold his wife by an auction.

**Q. 4. Who purchased his wife and for what price ?**

**Ans.** Richard Newson, a young sailor, purchased Henchard's wife for five guineas.

**Q. 5. What did the wife do before leaving the tent with the saillor ?**

**Ans.** The wife took her infant daughter with her and threw the wedding ring on the face of Henchard before leaving the tent.

**Q. 6. What did Henchard do immediately after leaving the furrnity tent ?**

**Ans.** Henchard registered an oath, of not taking wine for the next twenty one years in the nearby village church.

**Q. 7. Where did Henchard go to settle down ?**

**Ans.** Casterbridge.

**Q. 8. Why did Susan come to Weydon Priors ?**

**Ans.** To learn about Michael Henchard.

**Q. 9. What was the King's Arm.**

**Ans.** The best hotel of the Casterbridge.

**Q. 10. What did Susan and Elizabeth learn about Henchard in Casterbridge?**

**Ans.** That Henchard was a prosperous coin merchant and mayor of Casterbridge.

**Q. 11. What was the cause of trouble at the dinner at the King's Arm ?**

**Ans.** The bad wheat supplied by Henchard to the local bakers and millers.

**Q. 12. What was Henchard's offer to Farfrae if he agreed to stay in Casterbridge?**

**Ans.** Henchard offered him to be his business manager and proposed to give him commission also.

**Q. 13. Why was Elizabeth Jane so delighted after meeting Farfrae on the stairs?**

**Ans.** Because he sang a love song on seeing her in undertones.

**Q. 14. What two things had encouraged Susan to send message to Henchard?**

**Ans.** (1) He had been described as a lonely widower.

(2) He had expressed shame for the past transaction of his life.

**Q. 15. What was the Ring ?**

**Ans.** It was an ancient Roman monument. It was a circular stone structure used earlier as a stadium. It was a beautiful piece of architecture.

**Q. 16. Who was Lucetta ?**

**Ans.** Lucetta was an extremely beautiful cultured lady of Jersey.

**Q. 17. What was the effect of Abel Whittle episode on the relations of Henchard and Farfrae ?**

**Ans.** The warmth and affection disappeared from Henchard's behaviour towards Farfrae.

**Q. 18. Why did Henchard lose so heavily in business ?**

**Ans.** Henchard lost heavily in business because he was superstitious and he lacked foresight and was impulsive.

**Q. 19. What did the old firmity woman disclose in the court ? What was its effect ?**

**Ans.** She disclosed that Henchard had sold his wife with infant daughter. It shattered Henchard's social reputation.

**Q. 20. What is a skimmity ride.**

**Ans.** Skimmity ride was a musical possession in which the effigies of unfaithful man and woman were sat back to back on a donkey's back with a view to condemn their immoral act and to bring shame on part of the society.

**Q. 21. What was the effect of skimmity procession on Lucetta.**

**Ans.** She was shocked with shame and apprehension and suffered miscarriage. It resulted in her death.

**Q. 22. What was Henchard's will ?**

**Ans.** Henchard's will reflected his character in war :

- Elizabeth was not to be informed of his death, no death tolls were to be tolled at his death.
- He was not to be buried in a consecrated ground.
- No flowers were to be planted on his grave.
- Nobody was to see his face after death and nobody was to remember him, and to this he put his name Michael Henchard.

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#### ❖ 1.6 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q.1. Write a brief summary of the novel in not more than 300 words.**

**Ans.** Young, poor Michael Henchard feels trapped by his wife and child and one night gets drunk at a fair and sells them to a stranger called Newson. Horrified by what he has done, he swears not to touch alcohol for twenty years. Eighteen years later he is the mayor of Casterbridge and a successful businessman. Believing Newson is dead, his wife, Susan, and daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, arrive in Casterbridge to find Henchard because she has no money. He marries her again and they have a short happy life together. Farfrae, a young man with modern business ideas, arrives at the same time and becomes Henchard's farm manager. Susan dies, and Henchard learns that Elizabeth-Jane is really Newson's daughter. Henchard falls out with Farfrae, who sets up a rival business, and soon outdoes him. A woman from Henchard's past, Lucetta, comes to Casterbridge. Henchard now wants to marry her, but she and Farfrae fall in love. Henchard's business fails and he loses his house so he starts drinking again. Lucetta dies of shock after the



local people make fun of her and Henchard in public. He sees that he will now lose his 'daughter' as well as everything else. He leaves Casterbridge on foot. He is penniless and has lost his family – just as at the beginning of the story. Elizabeth-Jane remains loyal to Henchard, but he dies before she can find him.

**Q.2. Describe in your own words how does Hardy bring out the difference between Traditional and modern in his novel "The mayor of Casterbridge" and how he uses this difference in his plot?**

**Ans.** The two men Henchard and Farfrae represent contrasting ways of life in the country. Henchard is

traditional and old-fashioned. Farfrae is young and modern. Hardy was always fascinated by country customs and ways. He often includes strange country rituals like the skimmity-ride in his novels. They make useful plot devices and allow him to paint pictures of colourful but less important characters. He also uses them to reveal the conservative side of society, which can be very cruel to people who fall outside its strict rules of moral behaviour. Lucetta dies because of the skimmity joke. This breaking

of the moral code becomes a very important theme in Hardy's later novels, which shocked the reading public and ended Hardy's novel-writing career.

**Q.3. Describe in your own words the wife selling episode. What were its consequences?**

**Ans.** As the novel opens, we find Henchard proceeding towards the village of Weydon-priors, where a fair is on. He is addicted to strong drinks and would have liked to enter a tent where Beer was sold; However, his wife takes him to a tent where 'Furmity', a harmless drink, is sold. However Susan realises her mistake as the furmity woman mixes rum with the furmity. Henchard signals to the old woman to mix his furmity too with rum. he takes four glasses of it one after another the result is that he is soon drunk.

A number of other people are assembled in the tent. They are talking on several topics. The talk turns on unhappy marriages. it is shown by them how careers have been ruined by early imprudent marriages. A young man participates in the conversation. He tells them that he got married early in life and had wife and child even before he was twenty years old. He felt that he had committed a mistake. He opined that his marriage had been a hindrance in the way of his advancement in life. Henchard, too, takes part in the conversation. he discloses how his own career has been ruined by his early marriage. He expresses a wish that he may get rid of his foolish marriage, thereafter he would have a rapid rise in life.

In the meantime, they hear the voice of a man auctioning horses outside. This suggests to Henchard the idea of getting rid of his wife by auctioning his wife, as they auction the horses. He tells the assembled company that he is prepared to sell his wife to the highest bidder. Susan, warns her husband repeatedly not to humiliate her in that way. But the drunken husband does not care for her feelings. He begins with one guinea. When he gets no response he says that he would not sell her for less than five guineas. All the persons assembled there think it to be huge joke. However, a sailor Newson, suddenly enters that tent. He offers to buy Susan and the child for five guineas. He throws the amount on the table. Henchard takes the money. Having no other alternative, Susan

picks up the child. She throws her wedding ring at her husband. Then she flings a last sorrowful look at him, and goes away with her purchaser. Under heavy intoxication, Henchard fell asleep.

**Q. 4. State the circumstances under which Henchard takes oath not to touch wine for twenty-one years.**

**Ans.** Henchard auctions his wife for five guineas under intoxication. Thereafter, he falls asleep. Next morning when Henchard wakes up from his sleep, he has only a hazy idea of what happened the previous night. He is not sure if it had happened so. But the bank-notes in his pocket and the absence of his wife and child soon convinced him that it was a reality. Now he is full of regret at what he had done. However he cannot undo what had been done.

He comes out of the furnity tent. He first goes to a church and there swears on The Bible that he will not touch even a drop of wine for full twenty-one years hence. Henchard is man of character, a man of courage and determination. By swearing not to touch wine for twenty years he seeks to punish himself for the sin he has committed in selling his wife. He is twenty-one at the time and thus he seeks to punish himself by not drinking for an equal number of years.

After taking this solemn oath, Henchard makes a frantic search for his wife. After several months he reaches a sea-town. There he comes to know that man and a woman, with a child, answering to his description, had recently sailed for a foreign country. Hence, Henchard gives up his search. He goes towards the town of Casterbridge in a far distant part of Wessex.

**Q. 5. Give a brief account of the career of Susan and her daughter till they return to Henchard at Casterbridge.**

**Ans.** After purchasing Susan along with her daughter Elizabeth-Jane for five guineas, Newson took her to Canada. They lived there together as husband and wife. When Elizabeth was twelve years old, they came back to England, and settled at Falmouth, Newson entered in to Newfoundland trade. At this stage Susan had an awakening. A friend to whom she confided her history ridiculed her grave acceptance of her position. Susan realised that she was not Newson's wife in principle. She was unhappy to know this, 'Seeing this change in her, Newson was much grieved. So, when the season for fishing on the sea again came, he went away and never returned. On making enquiry Susan was told that he was drowned. She now found herself free, "The desire sober and repressed of Elizabeth Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge higher repute, better as she termed it this was her constant inquiry of her mother." Besides she noticed an increasing desire in her daughter to know more about her past. Hence, she decided to forget the past conduct of Henchard and join him, Accompanied with her daughter. She came in search of Henchard. They reached Weydon-Priors and contacted the furnity-seller.

At first the woman did not seem to remember. But later on she told Susan that the man who sold his wife returned the next year and told that if someone asked for him she should be sent Casterbridge.

**Q. 6. Give a brief account of the 'Skimmity Ride'. What were its consequences?**

**Ans.** Lucetta was completely unaware of the coming event. She heard some women talk of the wicked procession that was being taken out. Lucetta heard a maid servant conversing with a maid across the street.

"They are coming up corn sheet after all! They sit back to back!"

"What two of them are there two figures?" yes, two images on a donkey, back to back, their elbows tied to one another! She is facing the head and he is facing the tail. However Lucetta did not understand its nature. However, Elizabeth came to know of it. With a view to save the situation she came to Lucetta and kept her engaged in conversation. But Lucetta opened the window and saw the procession. She was shocked at the sight of the two effigies on a donkey, one representing herself and the other Henchard. She cried and shrieked.

Elizabeth shuts the window. "It is of no use" Lucetta shrieked, "he well see it, won't he?" Hence forth he will not love her. She fell down unconscious and was at once moved to her room. The doctor was called in. He declared the fit to be serious because she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, he advised that Farfrae must be sent for immediately.

As soon as the people involved in procession came to know about the condition of Lucetta, they felt immensely happy at their success. But as soon as they heard that a magistrate and two constables were coming to arrest them they dispersed. The wicked procession led to two major results directly to the death of Lucetta, and indirectly to the marriage of Farfrae and Elizabeth Jane

**Q. 7. Give a brief account of the career of Michael Henchard till Susan returns to Casterbridge.**

**Ans.** After selling his wife, Susan, eighteen years ago at Weydon-priors Henchard went to Casterbridge. Susan reached Casterbridge in search of him, on a day when a dinner was being given in his honour at King's Arms, Susan peeped inside the hotel and recognised him. At this time she was told by one of the rustics, Solomon Longways, that Henchard came to the town almost penniless. Thus, by virtue of his hard work and determination he had risen to his present position. He was a corn merchant, besides the Mayor. As such, he was the richest man in the town- He took only water, and did not even touch wine because in his youth he had taken a solemn vow never to touch intoxicating drink. In his words, "He scorns all tempting liquors; never touches nothing. O, yes, he've strong qualities that way, I have heard that he swore a gospel oath in bygone times and has abode by it ever since." Christopher Coney added that Henchard was a widower, and a rich merchant. He was very popular. However his popularity had some what declined of late for he had sold rotten wheat to the people.

**Q. 8. Describe in your own words the first meeting between Farfrae and Elizabeth Jane.**

**Ans.** Elizabeth Jane met Farfrae for the first time when she carried his dinner to his room in the Three Mariners Inn. She was deeply impressed by his youthful, handsome personality. However, on this occasion Farfrae did not even look towards her. They really met each other for the first time a little later, the same night. A large number of Casterbridge people were gathered in the dining hall of the inn. Farfrae also joined them. Elizabeth stood at some distance. It was a place from where she could watch unobserved, the goings on in the hall. "She could not help pausing to listen and the longer she listened the more she was enraptured. She had never heard any singing like this and it was evident that the majority of the audience had not heard such frequently for they were attentive to a much greater degree than usual."

At the request of the assembled guests, Farfrae sang a song, "It's home and it's home fair would I be". There was emotion in his voice and the people were much delighted to hear his melodious song. On continuous request Farfrae then sang, 'O' Nannie" and "Allud long Syne". This song again delighted the whole company. When he told them that he intended to sail for America from Bristol, all the people were grieved. Elizabeth shared their disappointment.

**Q. 9. Why did Farfrae not believe Henchard when the latter, informed him about Lucetta's critical position? What was its result?**

**Ans.** Henchard was returning from the bridge. As stood at the bottom of the street, a procession burst upon his view. The horns and multitudes started him. He saw lanterns the mounted images and knew what is all meant. Being unable to control himself hurried homeward. Then he went to meet Elizabeth. There he was told that she was on visit to Lucetta. He went there. He was told that Lucetta was seriously ill and a man had been sent in search of Farfrae on the Budmouth road. "But he has gone to Mellstock and Weathebury exclaimed Henchard, now unspcakably grieved "Not Budmouth way at all."

But alas ! for Henchard, he had lost his good name. They would not believe him. So he determined to seek Farfrae himself. He saw Farfrae coming on the road. He told him to take short cut and reach home at the earliest as the life of his wife was in danger. But, Farfrae had not forgotten all what had happened in the morning. So he thought that this was a trick to entrap him and kill him. "He who four hours earlier, had enticed Farfrae in to a deadly wrestle stood now in the darkness of late night time on a lonely road inviting him to come a particular way, where an assailant might have confederates instead of going his proposed way, where there might be a better opportunity of guarding himself from attack." Henchard entreated him, telling him that he was a changed man, and that he was in earnest. Even then Farfrae did not listen to him. He took around about route which delayed his arrival at home by two hours.

Henchard returned to Farfrae's house. There he found that Lucetta's condition had grown serious. They were all disappointed to find that Henchard had returned alone. He came back to his own lodging. When Farfrae returned home he was much shocked to see the critical condition of his wife. He was sorry to have disbelieved Henchard. Another doctor was sent for from Budmouth. Lucetta was much consoled and relieved by her husband's arrival. She tried to speak to him something. "But he checked her feeble words lest talking should be dangerous, assuring her there was plenty of time to tell everything."

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❖ **1.7 LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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**Q.1. Discuss the theme of the novel and its moral significance.**

**Or**

**Discuss Irony of Fate in the novel.**

**Or**

**"The great novelist Thomas Hardy poured into the present novel 'The Mayor of Casterbridge: a great philosophy.'" Discuss.**

**Ans. Two Themes :** The basic themes of the novel are two :

1. First, that man in this life is the victim of the cruel and tragic irony of fate. Man bears great sufferings which eventually lead him to death. It is so, not because of his faults, but primarily because cruel and malevolent destiny works against him and thwarts all his striving.

2. Secondly, much of human suffering can be meliorated through tact, prudence, and patient forbearance.

**The Moral :** The moral of the novel is that life is, no doubt, tragic, but instead of complaining and grumbling we should try to make the best out of the worst. We can do it through intelligent understanding and tact. This moral is illustrated through the life and career of Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane.

**Meaning of Irony :** Irony is a literary device. The writers frequently use it to indicate the contrariness of human life. In fact, in life everything is uncertain. Often we do not get what we expect or desire. Sometimes we expect one thing and we get its exact opposite. This is an instance of Irony of life or circumstance. In this way, we can define irony of life circumstance as situation which is the exact opposite of what has been expected and desired. At such a time it seems to use that such a situation has been contrived by malignant fate. It is also called irony of Fate. Thus, in nutshell, irony of fate, circumstance or life lies in the frustration of human aspirations. It implies Fate or the powers that act against humanity and mocks at its frustration.

**Hardy's Novels and Irony of Fate :** When we go through Hardy's novels we find that his irony plays an important part in them. It is most frequently used by him to create tragic effects. C. Duffin opines, "In life it is the unexpected that happens, in the world of Hardy's novels it is the undesirable-unexpected. His whole novels are built upon the doctrine of the irony of fate as commonly understood."

**Irony of fate :** In the novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Hardy's characters are all the victims of the irony of Fate; We find that everything happens contrary to their wishes and calculations. Some examples are as under:

1. **Elizabeth Jane:** She feels that there is no necessary connection between one's desires and reward, desire and attainment and endeavour and accomplishment. Elizabeth Jane is a victim of this irony, for in the words of the novelist "Continually it had happened that what she had desired had not been granted her, and that what had been granted her she had not desired."

2. **Henchard:** Henchard suffers at the hands of this mocking sequence of things. He had pining for long to make Jane his daughter and teach her to call him her father. He has to make a lot of efforts. After patiently waiting for long he succeeds and she agrees to call him 'father'. On the next moment he goes up to bring some proofs but discovers that she was not his real daughter. As such, he finds no pleasure in the achievement of his wishes. "Henchard bent and kissed her cheek. The moment and the act he had prefigured for weeks with a thrill of pleasure, yet it was no less than a miserable insipidity to him now that it had come. His reinstatement of her mother had been chiefly for the girl's sake and the fruition of the whole scheme was such dust and ashes as this." He is thus a victim of the irony of life: "The mockery was, that he should have no sooner taught a girl to claim the shelter of his paternity than he discovered her to have no kinship with him. The ironical sequence of things angered him like an impish trick from fellow creatures."

It is true that Henchard is a "man of character", and his tragic flaws lead him to his failure yet, we cannot believe, the fact that his whole career shows that human life becomes a hopeless record of failure and defeat. This defeat and failure is not primarily because of character, but because of the tragic irony of life. He is a man of dominating character, but his life and death show that man is not the sole maker and ruler of his destiny. He is not the maker of his circumstances. His career shows that character is nothing more than one of the circumstances in man's environment. The character is a circumstance of a special and unique nature. It is unique and special in the sense that it automatically modifies all the other circumstances. It affects and changes them in a manner and degree peculiar to itself. As a result two men with similar outward circumstances enjoy an environment different in every detail from each other. Thus, it is apparent that character alone does not determine destiny, but it profoundly modifies all the determining factors.

In the novel, it is character that enables Henchard to become the mayor and the wealthiest citizen of Casterbridge. But it is his character also which, reacting upon certain of his circumstances, has brought about several facts which are part of his destiny. These facts are to ensure his fall. These are as under :

1. The first group of facts are those connected with his drinking activity at Weydon-Priors for nineteen years.
2. The second are the facts concerning Lucetta Templeman.
3. Lastly, he has with great affection, induced a young Scott to stay in Casterbridge. The young Scott was passing through the town. Henchard is so much charmed by him that he makes him the manager of his business. The irony is that this last action, an honest action is the most direct and persistent cause of his downfall.

Some Critics hold the view that although Henchard suffered considerably, yet on the whole he deserved thin at the hands of fortune and his own errors. But in case we read between the lines we catch a glimpse of the essential irony and agony of it all. The novel is no mere record of misfortune. It is simply the most pessimistic book ever written. It shows the utter helplessness of man. The tone of the telling, in the latter half of the story, is one of despair.

It is pathetic to learn about Henchard's loneliness. Henchard's wife was severed from him by death. His friend and helper Farfrae is severed by estrangement; Lucetta is severed by ignorance. It seemed to him that only one of them could possibly be recalled and that was the girl.

"Susan Farfrae, Lucetta, Elizabeth—all had gone from him, one after one, either by his fault or by his misfortune."

"The sense of supernatural was strong in this unhappy man and he turned away as one might have done in the actual presence of an appalling miracle."

"And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied five and twenty years before." the novel reads but the ingenious machinery contrived by the gods for reducing human possibilities of amelioration to a minimum.

It is quite evident that man is the victim of the tragic irony of life, and he suffers and suffers terribly as a consequence.

**Elizabeth Jane :** She highlights Hardy's view of life. "Her experiences had been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly that the doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world

hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half way point by day dreams rich as hers. But her strong sense that neither she nor any human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who had deserved much more. Although she was forced to class herself among the fortunate, she always wondered at the persistence of the unforeseen. She always remembered that happiness was but an occasional episode in a general drama of pain."

Now let us see the other aspect. No doubt, happiness may be an occasional interlude in, "a general drama of pain", but the lot may be improved. One may make this very painful drama bearable through such tact, intelligence and patient forbearance as Elizabeth has. Her example teaches us the lesson that we can reduce, lessen or soften the human suffering by following her example. She does not complain and grumble, but tries to improve herself when Henchard finds fault with her and rebukes her for her dialect and her bold handwriting. She studies hard and thus, tries to acquire refinement and culture. Although she is a victim of the irony of life, like Henchard, she is not embittered by the buffets of misfortune. Instead she bears her lot patiently and tries to improve her circumstances intelligently and tactfully. We do not find her growing, violent. Rather, she becomes helpful and loving. She places service before self. As a result, ultimately she achieves what little happiness is possible on this, "blighted planet of ours."

To conclude the moral of the novel is that human life may be tragic we must not be frightened. We can ameliorate pain, suffering and make it tolerable through our own tact, understanding and patient forbearance.

**Q.2. Write in brief summary of the novel indicating important events and turnarounds.**

**Ans.** Henchard, a farm worker aged twenty, has a family, no job and no home. He gets drunk and sells his wife and child for five guineas to a sailor named Newson at a fair. Devastated at what he has done, he looks for them without success. Henchard makes a solemn promise not to touch alcohol for twenty years.

Susan, widowed and poor, and her eighteenyear- old daughter, Elizabeth-Jane arrive in Casterbridge to find Henchard. She is relieved to find he is now the Mayor and a businessman who needs a corn manager for his growing business.

Henchard employs Farfrae, a handsome innovative Scotsman as corn manager and the business improves. He also meets Susan and devises a plan so that the townspeople do not find their marriage strange. He draws closer to Farfrae and tells him about his past; including a woman in Jersey he promised to marry.

Henchard marries Susan, but she is reluctant to have her daughter's last name changed. He and Farfrae

disagree publicly over a worker. Henchard is jealous and organises a rival entertainment day to Farfrae's, but it fails. Farfrae leaves him and sets up a rival business. Susan dies but leaves a letter with the truth about her daughter.

Henchard tells Elizabeth-Jane what happened at the fair twenty years ago but reads in Susan's letter that she is really Newson's daughter. He begins to treat her coldly, and even encourages Farfrae to see her. Elizabeth- Jane meets a woman at her mother's grave who is friendly and offers her to share her house.

Lucetta, the woman from Jersey, has inherited property in Casterbridge and has employed Elizabeth-Jane as a housekeeper. Henchard tries to see her but they fail to meet. Farfrae calls in to see Elizabeth-Jane, who is out. He likes Lucetta and she loses interest in Henchard.

Henchard goes bankrupt because of the weather and his own impatience while Farfrae's business succeeds. Henchard realises he and Farfrae compete for Lucetta's love, so he threatens her with making their past public so that she accepts his proposal of marriage.

Henchard agrees to postpone their wedding if Lucetta helps him buy some time to repay a debt to Grower. She can't because she has secretly married Farfrae and Grower acted as witness.

Henchard claims the letters from his safe, and reads them out to Farfrae without disclosing the sender.

He promises Lucetta to give them back to her and asks Jopp to deliver them.

Jopp asks Lucetta to help him become her husband's manager but she refuses. In a pub, he reads out the letters to two women and they plan a skimmity-ride in town to scorn Lucetta and Henchard.

A member of the Royal family visits the town but Henchard is not allowed to greet him. Hurt, Henchard fights Farfrae in a barn but cannot bring himself to kill him.

Henchard is back in town to see the ride. Farfrae does not see the ride because he is lured away from town but Lucetta after watching the ride dies of the shock.

Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane live together happily. Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae renew their relationship and get married. Newson returns and tells his daughter the truth, which makes her very happy. Henchard leaves the town.

Elizabeth-Jane marries Farfrae and tries to find her father to take care of him but he dies before she can find him.

### **Q.3. Discuss about all the characters of the novel in brief.**

#### **Ans. Michael Henchard**

He is the mercurial main character, the "man of character" that the novel follows. Like his wife Susan, he believes that an evil fate is responsible for his misfortunes. However, unlike his wife, he tries to fight back against this fate with his bullish-nature. He does have a kind spirit, wanting to make amends to Susan and Elizabeth-Jane, happily taking Farfrae under his wing, caring for the poor of the village. He also lives with high morals, confessing in several instances when he could easily lie. Yet when he believes he is crossed, he becomes extremely angry and will stop at nothing to ruin his rival. Unfortunately, he always comes to regret his anger, usually when it is too late to make amends. The whole novel tries to determine whether his character works against him, or if a heartless fate has brought him down.

#### **Susan Henchard Newson**

She believes that everything that happens to her is controlled by a menacing fate, and the events of the novel seem to support her view. She accompanies Michael Henchard to Weydon-Priors, and seems to be a dutiful wife to him. However, upon being sold for five guineas, she becomes angry and willingly leaves with Newson the sailor, effectively dissolving the marriage with Michael. After Newson's death, she returns to Wessex to find her husband.



Although she eventually has a normal marriage with Michael, she carries the secret of Elizabeth-Jane's birth with her to her grave, revealing it in a letter that should be opened on Elizabeth-Jane's wedding day.

#### **Elizabeth-Jane Henchard**

She is the first Elizabeth-Jane introduced in the novel. As a small girl, she is sold with her mother for five guineas to Newson the sailor. Three months later after the auction, she dies. She has black hair, one trait that Michael remembers about her.

#### **The furmity-seller**

She is the owner of the furmity tent in Weydon-Priors, where Susan and Elizabeth-Jane Henchard were sold. She is the one who adds liquor to Michael's furmity, which in turn makes him angry enough to sell his wife. She only remembers the auction when Susan mentions it eighteen years later. Later, she again leads Michael into despair by disclosing the whole story of the auction at her trial.

#### **The townspeople of Weydon-Priors**

These are the witnesses to the sale of Susan Henchard. Unlike the people of Casterbridge, they make no attempt to get involved in the lives of others. Although they do not approve of the sale of a wife, they make no attempt to stop the auction or to show him the error of his ways.

#### **Richard Newson**

He is the kind sailor who offers to buy Susan and Elizabeth-Jane Henchard, but not before asking Susan if she is willing to go with him. After Elizabeth-Jane Henchard dies, he becomes the father of Elizabeth-Jane Newson. Later he fakes his death at sea, planning to return after a few months for Elizabeth-Jane. Even though he discovers that Michael has lied about Elizabeth-Jane's death, he asks Elizabeth-Jane to forgive him.

#### **Elizabeth-Jane Newson**

She is the daughter of Susan Henchard and Newson the sailor, and from her parents she inherited her fair hair. She is overly concerned with manners and respectability. Although she has a melancholy air, Elizabeth-Jane has a great ability to love, giving it to her mother, her father, her stepfather, and later her husband.

#### **The townspeople of Casterbridge**

Unlike the people of Weydon-Priors, the people of Casterbridge make it a point to remark and get involved in the affairs of the other townspeople. They are the ones who point out that Michael's crops don't sell, that Farfrae is a charming and wise young man, that Lucetta needs a comeuppance. Through these remarks, they serve as a Greek chorus.

#### **Donald Farfrae**

He is a young Scotsman who passes through Casterbridge on his way to America. However, Michael quickly realizes Farfrae's great head for business, and makes him general manager. Farfrae is well-rounded: he knows business, and he also understands society's desires for courtly manners and entertainment. Michael greatly respects Farfrae and asks him for advice on several occasions. However, Farfrae has everything that Michael doesn't: the love of Lucetta, the support

of the townspeople, and eventually the mayorship of Casterbridge. At the end of the novel, Farfrae finds happiness in his marriage to Elizabeth-Jane.

#### **Joshua Jopp**

He is the first applicant for the position of Michael Henchard's general manager. Because Farfrae was chosen, Jopp hates him and will do anything to ruin him. From this point, Jopp behaves as the typical villain. He hates Lucetta because she refuses to help him, and he plays upon the hatred of the townspeople and the weaknesses of Michael to ruin her.

#### **Abel Whittle**

Abel works in Henchard's company, but he is always a bit tardy. Michael becomes so angry one day that he punishes Abel by making him come to work without pants. Nevertheless, Abel remains a faithful employee. Because Michael was kind to his mother, Abel willingly cares for Michael in his final days and delivers his last will to Elizabeth-Jane.

#### **Lucetta Templeman (Le Sueur)**

She is a flighty and indiscreet woman who follows her emotions. In her youth, she met Michael Henchard in her native Jersey. She wishes to marry him, but is stopped when Susan returns. After Susan's death, she moves to High-Place Hall in Casterbridge to keep an eye on Michael. However, she falls in love with Michael's rival Farfrae and marries him. She constantly fears that Michael will reveal their past connections through her scandalous love letters. Eventually the letters are read by the townspeople of Casterbridge, and they hold a skimmity-ride to mock the relationship between Lucetta and Michael. The shock of seeing the skimmity-ride kills Lucetta.

### **Test Yourself**

- Q. 1. What important role does the liquor play in the story "the Mayor of Casterbridge" what effect does it have on Henchard's life?
- Q. 2. Did Henchard really deserve what the destiny had for him. He moved on to become the mayor of Casterbridge but later on died a lonesome way amongst everyone's hatred. Discuss.
- Q. 3. In what respects is Farfrae's character "the reverse of Henchard's"?
- Q. 4. How does Hardy employ a social gathering to reveal Casterbridge's attitudes to the older Michael Henchard?
- Q. 5. What impact has the "grown wheat" had on Henchard and on the poorer people of Casterbridge?

## UNIT

## 2

## THE GUIDE

—R.K. Narayan

**STRUCTURE**

- Summary
- Life and Career of R.K. Narayan
- The Structure or Plot
- Critical Review of the Novel
- The Characters
- Very Short Answer Type Questions
- Short Answer Type Questions
- Long Answer Type Questions
- ✦ Test Yourself

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After going through this unit you will learn :

- “The Guide” a novel by R.K. Narayan in detail along with its characters
- Life and career of R.K. Narayan

**❖ 2.1 SUMMARY**

As the novel opens we find Raju, formerly a tourist guide has just been released from the prison and is sitting on the bank of the river Saryu. His appearance is quite saintly. When he was brooding over his past suddenly a villager Velan came and impressed by Raju's personality sat two step below and started talking to him. He confided in Raju and expressed his grief regarding his step sister, who eloped with some boy on the day of her marriage, has now been brought back but now she sulks all day. He seeks Raju's advice. Raju was a railway guide. To give advice to others was his habit, although it had invited so many problems in the past but he said to Velan to bring his sister to him. Velan bowed his head and left the place. Next day Velan came with his sister and brought some offerings for him. Raju fixedly looking at the girl and declared what must happen must happen; no power on earth or in heaven can change its course, just as no one can change the course of that river. The words had dramatic effect on the difficult sister and she went from there a changed girl.

Now the novelist tells why Raju became a railway guide. In fact railway was in his blood, he grew amongst railways, railway engine, coolies etc. His father had a small grocery shop, in which

he also used to sit. He told Velan that his father sent him to the Pyol School. From the past now the story returns to the present. Velan comes to Raju and thanks him that due to his miraculous words his sister has now changed completely. Ironically Velan established Raju as a saint with extraordinary powers, though Raju did not want this because due to his habit of advising others he had invited troubles so many times. He told Velan at a later date that he owned all his troubles due to Rosie, she was the wife of Marco.

Soon Raju's admirers grew by leaps and bounds and he felt uncomfortable at being treated as a saint. He wanted to do something to earn his livelihood but he could not go back to his village for he would be jeered and mocked by the people and moreover he had mortgaged his house, and had no place to live in.

One day when his devotees arrived he hid himself behind the bush. They waited for him and became very disappointed when he did not come. Seeing their devotion he succumbed before the circumstances and got himself ready to acquire the status of a saint.

Now there is a flash back and Raju takes the story to the past. The coming of railway train at the Malgudi station was a turning point in Raju's career. His father acquired the privilege of running the shop at the railway station. Raju took the charge of this shop. In this his education came to end, and his connection with the railway began.

Again the story moves to the present. Raju has come back, this news was flourished all over the village and the people came to him in large number for his "darsan". He was of the view that village boys must study. He called the school master of the village and started teaching in the temple hall.

Raju also shared his views on life and eternity before the boys. Reflecting on the episode in retrospect he says that he got all his wisdom from his railway shop where he used to read lots of magazines newspapers and got practical wisdom by talking to the passengers.

Velan asked him to oblige all the fellow villagers with his sermons. His influence now was unlimited. He not only changed holy verses and discoursed on philosophy but also started prescribing medicines. He did not have personal life now. There came a stage when he had to be up early and rush through all his personal routine before his visitors should arrive. It was a strain upon him and he yearned for a quiet, peaceful life.

It was in this way that the "Railway Raju" acquired the status of a saint.

The action moves down vertically into the past and Raju again takes up the story of his past at the point he had left us. He soon became famous as a guide and came to be known as Railway Raju. Strangers asked for him for visiting Malgudi. He pleased the tourists and was well paid for his services. He made a friend taxi driver Gaffur whenever any tourist wanted to go home or to a particular place he sent them to Gaffur who was to be found in the market square. The passengers after coming back talked about their experiences and added new things into his experience.

It was in this way that he came across Marco and his wife Rosie. He did not know his name but he was deemed like an eternal tourist so he immediately named him Marco. His wife Rosie was a dusky beauty. Raju was highly impressed by her. She asked him to show king cobra and when she tried to match her steps with king cobra, he came to know she was one of the greatest dancers.

They returned to the hotel in the evening. Marco gently asked him to come to his hotel next day with taxi. Next day when he went to the hotel he was alone. Raju could not directly ask him about Rosie so when he asked about cave paintings he tactfully says if they go there they would have to stay there overnight. Marco immediately rushed to call Rosie but she did not come. Raju seeks his permission to call her and he made her to come with them. Marco was excited about the place very much. They asked Rosie to come with them but she refused to do. She stayed at Bungalow and he left with Raju for caves.

While he was busy in surveying the caves Raju felt bore and went back to Bungalow and asked Rosie some personal questions about her married life. Surprisingly she told him everything including she belongs to dancers family. She was not at all happy with her husband. Raju sympathized with her and thus became lover.

Next day Raju and Rosie went to their hotel to bring black box. Marco had decided to stay there for the night and return to hotel the next morning.

He left her at hotel and came to his house, took bath and changed clothes. Then he returns to Rosie and took her round the town for sight seeing. They reached hotel and Raju locked the door on the world. Thus did Rosie became his mistress. In this affair with Rosie lies the germ of all his future troubles.

Now Raju won the faith of Marco and got more and more intimate with Rosie. He did not remain what he was earlier. Gaffur would often cast shy glances at him and warn against these modern educated girls.

He stopped paying attention towards his shop. Raju's problems were multiplying, as he continued to neglect his personal affairs. Rosie was getting quite conscious. Often she became too whimsical to handle. But Raju found the way out, he praised her out of dancing and she was filled with pleasure.

She started practising dance. In the meantime she prepared herself for public appearance and she asked Raju to fix her public engagement but before that she had to take the permission of her husband. When they reached peak house, Marco was away and was happy because he had found another cave. Rosie was quite optimistic that he would not say no to her. But things changed Marco and Rosie quarrelled badly and Marco decided to leave the place at once but he had to complete the work. Raju tried to calm down both of them but Rosie shouted at him and directed him to leave the place at once.

Raju became very disappointed. In all such circumstances there passed one month. Raju had started his old work again but not with that enthusiasm. He could not forget Rosie. One day he saw Rosie was standing at his house. He took her inside and asked his mother to look after her Rosie told him that since that day Marco was behaving with her in a very cold and brutal manner and one day he left her all alone so she came to Raju to take refuges.

Rosie continued her dance practice. Raju's mother did not like it and cautioned him time to time but he did not pay heed to her words.

Raju's financial worries were also increasing. He fought with the boy whom he had kept on his shop. Station master intervened and Raju's mother dragged him to home, Thus ending Raju's association with railway.

Raju's complications knew no end. He had taken so much credit from a merchant. He could not pay it. He involved Raju in litigation. He asked Gaffur to lend him five hundred rupees. By that money he will use the art of Rosie. But Gaffur denied to give the money.

Rosie continued her practice but Raju's mother did not like so she called up her brother of whom Raju was afraid. He said harsh words to Rosie. At this Raju could not keep himself in control and attacked his uncle.

His mother, uncle all insisted Rosie to go back to her husband but Raju was adamant that she will not go anywhere. His mother could not bear this and left the village with her brother. Again a very important person deserted him due to his own deeds.

After this they started living as married couple. To meet their financial ends Raju persuaded the clerk of the Albert Mission School to allow Rosie alias Nalini to perform in the Annual function. They agreed to let her perform in their function.

Rosie's performance in the Albert College was the beginning and then she soared rocket-like. Raju managed all her affairs. People started giving him too much attention. They bought big house and spent lavishly. She also kept an assistant Nani. Everything was going good. Suddenly one day a book entitled Cultural History of India arrived by post. It was written by Marco. Raju was filled with unknown fear and hid the book to not to show to Rosie. But somehow she came to know about it and they had heated arguments but with the course of time everything was suppressed. Then came the letter from Marco's lawyer which caused the big explosion. It was letter regarding the release of some jewellery box which was kept in the bank locker and to receive this box both of them i.e. Marco and Rosie had to sign the attached form. Here Raju did the blunder of his life. He had seen that letter and hid it from her. He forged her signature and sent the letter and kept waiting for the parcel but nothing came.

One day out on the eve of function police came with arrest warrant and the charge was forgery. He tried to explain everything to Rosie but she remained unperturbed.

Raju went to jail and somehow the bail was arranged but after that his life was completely changed. Rosie looked after all her affairs herself. She hired one of the best lawyers for him but the prosecution case was strong and Raju lost the case and was sent to imprisonment for two years. At jail his conduct was ideal soon he became the model prisoner.

In the course of time he came to know that Rosie had gone to Madras and was living there independently. When after two years, the time came for his release he felt shocked with tears. He would have been most happy to have continued to live in jail permanently.

This was all the story he narrated to Velan and the cause was that during his stay there he had passed so many years. but his troubles began when there was a total failure of rains, cholera broke out. People were unable to bring food to live. Time passed and still there were no rains. The crops failed, there was shortage and the local shop man demanded higher and higher price for his goods. This irritated customers and there broke out quarrel. Many people were injured Velan was one of them but they did not want to tell this to "Swamiji" (Raju) but Velan's half witted brother told everything to him. Now Raju was afraid that if police would come on this matter then they would recognize him and his reputation will be ruined. So he told the boy to tell the villagers that he does

not want them to fight and he would not eat unless they were good. The boy half understood half not. He said to the villagers that the Swami will not accept food till it rains. The irony is that, that the cause of Raju's ultimate martyrdom was the folly of an idiot.

The drought increased in severity. People reached swami. Since they were under impression that swami was fasting they did not bring anything to him. He had not even an inkling of the fact that he was supposed to be fasting like the mahatma. When people did not leave till late night, he asked Velan about it. Then he came to know that he was supposed to be fasting to bring down rains for them. Velan gave a very clean account of what was expected, to stand in knee deep water, lost to the skies and utter the prayer for two week fasting completely, hearing this Raju was bewildered. Velan sat with him like a purified sentry. Now Raju was caught in his own trap.

He pondered over many ways of escaping martyrdom then decided that he will tell each and every detail of his life to Velan. He told everything to him. He listened without uttering a word of surprise, little more serious.

Raju was disappointed to know that Velan was not disturbed by his reality. The news of his past fast spread. It was published in newspaper. People came in large number for his "darshan". Soon it became a picnic spot for people.

Raju kept facing the situation for some days and wanted to runaway but after some time he decided to face the situation boldly.

The place was full of reporters. An American press reporter interviewed Swami and took photos of him from various angles. The Prisoner turned swami had become a world figure.

On the morning of the eleventh day, the last day of the fast it was with great difficulty that Raju could stand. Doctors declared that his condition was grave. Raju's life became important for the nation and it was to be saved at all costs.

It was with difficulty that Raju was carried to the place in the river where he has to stand in the river knee-deep water. He entered in the river, muttered his prayers. He opened his eyes and looked towards the distant mountains and said 'Velan it is raining in the hills. I can feel it coming under my feet/up my legs—'. He sagged down. The end is shrouded in malignity. Was it really raining, or was it merely the hallucination of a starving man? Did Raju die, or did he merely fall down unconscious? Who can say?

## ❖ 2.2 LIFE AND CAREER OF R.K. NARAYAN

**A Pure Artist :** R. K. Narayan is now regarded as one of the greatest of Indians writing in English.

**Birth and Parentage:** As is the custom in the South 'R' in his name stands for the name of the village to which his family belonged—Rasipuram— in the district of Salem. 'K' stands for the name of his father Krishnaswami Iyer.

**Education :** The novelist was never a good student. He failed both in the High school and Intermediate examinations. He could get his degree only when he was twenty-four years old. These failures at school and college had made him shy, reserved and diffident, an introvert and not an extrovert.

**Success as a Writer :** His novel, *The English Teacher* was published in 1945, and since then novels have flowed from his pen in quick, succession, at the rate of one book every two years. An *Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert*, (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *Lawley Road* (1956), *The Guide* (1958), *Next Sunday*, a collection of sketches and essays (1960), *My Dateless Diary* (1960), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *Gods, Demons and Other Stories* (1965), *The Sweet Vendor* (1967) and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970). A version of the Ramayana based not on Valmiki who wrote in Sanskrit but on Kamban, the Tamil poet, was published in 1973, complete the list of his works published up to date. He leads a quiet and uneventful life in his home in Mysore and his autobiography is currently being published.

**The Old Man : Fame and Recognition :** An old man of 77, Narayan enjoys good health, and there has been no decay or decline in creative powers. His *The Guide* received the Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1960. The novel has been filmed, though Narayan himself is not very happy with the film. He was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1964. University of Leeds conferred on him the Honorary D. Litt in 1967, and Delhi University followed suit in 1973.

**Character and Personality :** His works throw considerable light on his character and personality. Narayan himself tells us that, 'for the past many years his weight has been the same, i.e. 140 lb., whether he starved, overate, vegetated or travelled hectically. He started smoking at the age of eleven without the knowledge of anybody at home, but has now given it up having lost the taste for it.

Though shy and reserved, yet like his own Railway Raju, he talks fluently and at length about Karnataka which is his home and which he loves.

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### ♦ 2.3 THE STRUCTURE OR PLOT

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The frame-work of a Narayan novel, as also of *the Guide*, is not mechanical or external, There are no thrills and sensations, no long lost heirs and no accidental discoveries. The action flows out of character, and also influences and moulds character. The hero is just ordinary, the common, the average, the great, but not so great, and the action illustrates his ordinariness as well as brings out his potentialities for greatness. Thus Raju is just ordinary, the action flows out of his character and shows his attainment of maturity. All the events are organised round this central theme and this imparts unity and coherence to the plot. There is nothing superfluous or external, every event that takes place has a bearing on the hero's character and takes him a step forward towards maturity. There are also comic elements which provide dramatic relief, sustain interest, give additional emphasis on action, and also serve as a sort of sub-plot without, in reality, being one. As the events follow each other logically, and are causally linked together the end is implicit in the beginning. In the beginning there is disorder, usually a conflict between traditional morality and individual aspiration and by the end the conflict is resolved, either by death or by the acceptance of the existing order. All these remarks are applicable to *The Guide* and can easily be illustrated from the novel.



## ❖ 2.4 CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE NOVEL

### Publication and Popularity

The Guide, R.K. Narayan's most popular novel, was published in 1958. Narayan came to it after he had already written seven novels and a large number of short stories and sketches. By this time his powers had fully matured, and the result is that he could produce a work which received immediate acceptance and recognition, and which has continued to enjoy popularity ever since. Narayan was awarded for it the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1960, a rare distinction. The novel has been translated into most of the important languages of the world. It has also been filmed, and the film has never failed to draw packed houses. It is the triumph of R.K. Narayan's art, his masterpiece. It is one of the immortal classics of the world. 'The sex interest in the novel—husband-wife-lover—tickles the average reader whether Indian or foreign, while the usual "properties" the Westerner associates with India—caves, cobras, dancing-girls, swamis—are all present to make a special appeal to a European or an American'. In other words it is a great work of art, having one thing or the other to please every taste—and so universal in its interest and appeal.

### The Title : its Significance

The title of a novel or a short-story or any other piece of literary composition is like the signboard of a shop. Just as the signboard indicates the contents of a shop, so also the title must refer to the subject matter of the work concerned. The title *The Guide* is quite apt and suggestive, for it deals with the life and career of Raju, popularly known as 'Railway Raju' who is a tourist guide, and the novel shows that he is a 'guide' in a number of other matters also.

Raju begins his career as stall-keeper. Soon he acquires tit—bits of knowledge by going through old journals, magazines, etc., which he stocks. He is intelligent, observant, and a shrewd judge of human character. He has an inborn gift of eloquence. He has sound common sense and is tactful in his dealings. Those who come to his stall are pleased with his manners as well as with the information he provides them regarding Malgudi and its scenes and sights. He is always ready to help and arranges for their board, lodging, taxis, etc. His fame spreads and the tourists who come to Malgudi at once inquire for 'Railway Raju'. Raju learns as he earns. He acquires detailed knowledge about Malgudi and its whereabouts by talking with the tourists, and uses the knowledge to great advantage. He has rare knack of sizing up his customers, their means and their tastes. His understanding of human psychology is profound. He never says no, and makes vague, ambiguous statements so that he is never 'caught' even when talking about things he does not know. Soon he engages a boy to look after his stall, and himself sets up as a full-fledged tourist-guide. Raju is a model guide, and those who intend to take up the vocation of a tourist guide can learn much from his example.

Soon there is a slight change in Raju's role. From the tourist guide he becomes the guide to one single family. This change takes place as soon as Marco and Rosie come to Malgudi. Marco is immensely pleased with him and engages him as a whole time guide. Raju takes Rosie by storm, as it were, and is able to win her heart and seduce her within no time. He shows himself to be an adept lady-killer, one who can play havoc with the female-heart with his bold compliments, smooth talk

and flattery. In this respect also he is a model 'guide', and valuable lessons in the art of love-making may be learnt from his example.

The next role which Raju plays is that of *theatre-manager or impresario* or the guide and manager of a dancer. It is he who launches Rosie as a dancer, manages her affairs so ably that soon her fame spreads and contracts pour in. They earn a lot of money and begin to live in a lavish style. His tactful handlings of Rosie's affairs, his shrewdness in business dealing, are beacon lights to those who intend to play this role. They can learn much from Raju. They can also learn from him that, whether out of jealousy or a feeling of insecurity, a man should not commit forgery, for it is *sure to land him in jail*. One should beware of mysterious enigmatic people like Marco, for all the time they may be plotting and laying traps.

In jail, Raju proves to be a model prisoner. He is well-mannered, hard-working and helpful. The result is that he is quite happy and comfortable in jail, and is surprised that people are afraid of prison. Indeed, he is so comfortable that when his release comes, he goes out with fear and regret in his heart. Raju's example, therefore, should be followed by all prisoners. Raju is a 'guide' in this respect also.

Next, Raju takes up the role of a Mahatma, or to be more exact, the role is thrust upon him. After coming out of the jail, he becomes a spiritual guide or Mahatma and plays the role with rare success. He makes mystifying statements, and talks big, and tries to look big. The people are impressed, his fame spreads, and devotees flock to him with their gifts and offerings. His example shows that the same qualities make a man successful both as a *tourist, guide and a spiritual guide*.

In short, the title is apt and suggestive, for its central figure plays the role of a 'guide' during the successive stages of his career. The novel is a guide to life also, for it tells us both how to achieve success in life and how to avoid the various pitfalls which were Raju's undoing. It is also a guide to conduct, for it teaches us what to do and what not to.

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## ✦ 2.5 THE CHARACTERS

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### **Raju— His Character, Life and Career.**

**Ans. A Complex Character :** Raju, popularly known as "Railway Raju" is the central figure in the novel. According to Paul Verghese, "he is one of the most complex characters of Narayan. In him we find the craftiness, dishonesty and credulity of Margayya, the flashy bombast of Mr. Sampath, the adventurousness of Mali in *The Vendor of Sweets*, the romantic excess of Sriram in *Waiting for the mahatma* and the mystical leaning of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts* and Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath*."

**An Anti-hero :** His Ordinariness: Raju has nothing heroic about him. Rather he is an anti-hero, a typical Narayan figure, a common man with a touch of the uncommon. He is just ordinary, certainly not 'so great', as he is considered to be. He is one of those unformed, shapeless characters, who easily take up the suggestions of others, so much so that it may rightly be said that his personality is the product of other peoples convictions. He is extremely susceptible to the suggestions of others, and this plasticity of response determines his career and ultimate destiny.

**A Born Romantic:** Raju was born in a lower middle-class family of Malgudi. He was a born romantic, and the panorama of life enchanted him. He took immense delight in men and vehicles, boys and dogs, bullock-cart rides, games and wandering. Romantic curiosity impelled him to

know the unknown. However, he was not so good at studies and his father condemned him as "clay-headed" and his mother once called him an, "unmitigated loafer" a boy who was good-for-nothing, and who was sure to come to a bad end. When the Railways came to Malgudi, Raju, the romantic, was thrilled, and it was a pleasure for him to stroll on the station watching the trains, as they arrived and departed, and the people they brought to Malgudi. A significant step in his life was taken when his father took a stall on the station and gradually left it to Raju to look after. Raju may not have been a good student, but he was certainly very observant and intelligent, and could acquire much knowledge by glancing at the papers, magazines, periodicals and old books which he stalked, as well as by talking with his customers.

**Secret of His Success-Knowledge of Human Psychology:** From a stall-keeper, Raju gradually drifted into playing the role of a tourist guide. His career was determined by his inability to say 'no' to anybody. It was not in his nature. "If he had the inclination to confess the truth about his abilities and capabilities, he would not have invited trouble. He knew his customers by their faces, showed them places of their interest. As a tourists' guide, he knew all places where exactly a particular thing could be obtained or what suited most at a particular moment, whether closeted with a 'monster' like Marco, or the divine creature, Rosie, or the ignorant villagers of Mangala." He was always ready with the answer that would suit the occasion or the person. He had the water diviner's instinct and self-confidence, coupled with a delightful nature which came almost always to his rescue. "He is a grotesque character almost fantastic for those who believe in human industry and cause-effect theory." Says William Walsh in this connection, "Much the most vivid part of Raju's life was lived in public places: first the streets, the shop, the railway station; and later, concert halls, jail, the temple. He was always in some sense an institutional figure."

At the station he came to be known as "Railway Raju" and he was sought out by everyone who wanted advice and directions. "It is written on the brow of some," he tells Velan, "that they shall not be left alone. I am one such." "He couldn't be left alone because he was felt to be naturally public character, one of those who seem hardly to exist in private. It is a compulsion of such people (we feel we have known them intimately, perhaps because they display something latent in us all today, but grossly, extremely) to respond in the way the audience wants. Raju's answers to his questioners at the railway station bear no relation to conviction or reality but only to the feeling he senses in the questioner. It was inevitable, therefore, that he should become a guide, but a guide with no content in his message, only an attitude determined from outside. As a guide, a projection of his audience, he was great success. Tourists from all parts insisted on his services. And whatever he did for them he did with a certain detachment, not for any private gain, but simply because they asked him. "Anything that interested my clients was also my own interest. The question of my own preferences was secondary," he learned as he earned, and soon acquired not any intimate knowledge of Malgudi and its surroundings but also of human nature. Indeed, throughout his career he shows an amazing understanding of human psychology.

**As a Lover:** Raju would have remained a tourist guide, but for the arrival of Marco and his fascinating but discontented wife, Rosie. Raju is at once fascinated by her and wins her heart by his sympathy and consideration, as well as by his keen interest in her art. Both of them are born romantics, and it is the coming together of two similar temperaments. Says William Walsh, "She

and Raju are two of a kind and they fall in love at once. Not that there is anything headlong or tumultuous about their affair, which strikes one as being as much a crisis of nerves as of passion. Their relationship, both at the beginning and later when she breaks off with Marco and comes to live with Raju, appears to be much more one of reeling than sensuality, a temperamental rather than a passionate union. Sexual passion, in fact, is not a theme which Narayan anywhere develops very convincingly in his work, he seems to think of it as something too private and holy to be allowed to appear publicly in art."

**Lack of Passion :** In any case, the comparative unimportance of passion between Raju and Rosie looks surprising only at the beginning of the affair. But soon after they begin to live together, which they do in spite of the opposition of Raju's formidable but sympathetic mother, their relationship takes on a different character. "From being primarily personal it becomes primarily functional or official." Rosie has great talent as dancer and with Raju's eager support she applies herself rigorously to develop her art. As she succeeds, as her gift gains recognition, Raju's status enhances. He is less the lover and more the manager, trainer and agent. Rosie--or Nalini as she becomes in the theatrical world--blooms into a great artist, and Raju thrives as a successful entrepreneur. They enjoy a period of immense success, and the money, parties, drinks, and acclaim that go with it. "And as one would expect--there is a kind of logic in the reversal--it collapses as suddenly as it came about. out of some muddled system of motives, a mixture of curiosity, jealousy, goodwill, sheer love of the devious, and the habit of doing things for no adequate reason at all, Raju forges Rosie's signature on a document claiming her jewel-box, which is in her husband's keeping. AT once Marco, all this time a distant, faintly ominous presence, takes his revenge. Raju is prosecuted, his friends evaporate, his lawyer is a shark, the judge is unsympathetic. He is sentenced to two years in jail and this phase of his career is summarily terminated."

**A Model Prisoner:** Raju turns out to be model prisoner. He is perfectly happy in jail. "Now I realised that people generally thought of me as being unsound and worthless, not because I deserved the label, but because they had been seeing me in the wrong place all along. To appreciate me they should have come to the Central Jail and watched me." Raju responds enthusiastically to the various calls made on him by the prison community. He becomes the teacher and comforter of the prisoners, whom he could talk out of their blackest moods, the friend of the warders, and personal servant and secretary to the Superintendent. "I visited all the departments of the prison as a sort of benevolent supervisor." he worked with pleasure on a vegetable patch in the backyard of the Superintendent's home, "watched with delight the beans and cabbages and brinjals grow, plucked them tenderly, washed them, polished them with the end of his jail jacket, arranged them artistically on a tray of woven bamboo and carried them in ceremoniously to the Superintendent, a lover of good food wherever it came from." If this was prison life, he reflected, "why didn't more people take to it? .. I felt amused at the thought of the ignorant folk who were horrified at the thought of a jail. May be a man about to be hanged might not have the same view ; nor one who had been insubordinate or violent, but short of these, all others could be happy here. I felt choked with tears when I had to go out a fater two years, and I

wished that we had not wasted all that money on our lawyer. I'd have been happy to stay in this prison permanently."

**As a Spiritual Guide :** On coming out of jail, Raju is soon called upon to play the role of a saint. Some are born saints, others become saints, but sainthood was thrust upon Raju. "As a matter of fact, there is an unbroken connection between Raju, the guide, who lived for others, whose character and activity were a reflection of otherness, and Raju (ex-jailbird, ex-lover of Rosie the dancer) the prophet surrounded by devout villagers waiting for a message or a miracle. In each case he is a projection of what people need. He is there to be used, tractable form prompt to assume any shape that may be required. So extreme a degree of accommodation means that Raju's Sincerity consists in being false, and his positive existence in being a vacancy filled by others. The events leading from the beginning to the conclusion of Raju's career, the links between the guide on the railway station and the Swami in the temple, make up a natural, realistic sequence."

Out of jail he takes shelter in a deserted temple on the banks of the river Saryu, near the village called Mangal. "There he is found by the pious peasant, Velan. Velan's attitude of submissive respect towards Raju, prompted in part by the temple itself, in part by his own traditional expectations, in part by Raju's bearing and appearance, is to someone of Raju's character pretty well an explicit (and irresistible) invitation to assume a manner appropriate to the context, the guise of the holy man. And since this is a role which in its public features corresponds closely to the bias of Raju's nature, he instinctively puts himself into the correct posture and slides smoothly, almost helplessly, into the part." He decides to play the role of the Mahatma as is expected from him. "He decided to look as brilliant as he could manage, let drop gems of thought from his lips, assume all the radiance available and afford them all the guidance they required without stint. He decided to arrange the stage to display (his gifts) with more thoroughness. With this view he transferred his seat to the inner hall of the temple. It gave one a better background. He sat there at about the time he expected Velan and others to arrive. He anticipated their arrival with a certain excitement. He composed his gestures to receive them. He had called the village teacher and cowed him by uttering brilliant sayings and dialect.

**His Fatigue and Boredom :** Comparison with Rosie: Raju felt cornered every time he wanted to come out of the net he had himself cast about himself. He says, "I have to play the part expected of me, there is no escape." There was a time when he had consciously and knowingly acted as helper and ever smiling lover to Rosie, after surrendering himself to the will of the people of Mangal he seemed to belong to the world now. He could hardly afford a private life now. Raju, the actor-Swami was as tired of his role as was Rosie, the dancer-actress. Their experiences may be compared. Rosie didn't see any difference between the one place and the other for performance. When, once, Raju told her "We'll go and enjoy ourselves on our own, without any engagement, she replied bitterly 'I don't think it's going to be possible until I fall sick or break thigh-bone, she said and giggled viciously. "Do you know the bulls yoked to an oil-crusher keep going round and round, in a circle, without a beginning or an end," she asked, and remarked she was such a bull. And after attaining the stature of a saint there came a stage when Raju had to be busy the whole day advising ignorant villagers and blessing the diseased. 'It was a strain. He wanted to take a deep

sigh of relief and tried to be himself, eat like an ordinary human being, shout and sleep like a normal man, after the voices on the river had ceased for the night.'

**His Predicament :** The climax of the novel, and of Raju's life, begins in the middle of a drought when he finds himself accidentally involved, through the misunderstanding of an idiot boy, in undertaking a total fast as an act of intercession to the gods for rain. "Perhaps 'accidentally' is not the right word, for his own nature is the most positive of the several influences—the drought, the plight of the people, the context of tradition and religion—which force him into his predicament. Raju is horrified at the fix he is in." He hoards his remaining scraps of food, but there isn't enough for more than a day or two. He tells Velan the candid story of his life in a desperate effort to explode the legend about himself. But Velan, who is very much of the stuff that disciples are made of, takes the confession simply as a piece of singular arrogance on Raju's part. That he should address Velan at such length is only one more proof of Raju's goodness and humility.

**Spiritual Regeneration :** Raju finds that he can do nothing but go through with the ritual which also requires him to stand for several hours a day up to his waist in the stream while he prays for rain. Now at last his will matches his receptivity. The inner pattern and the outer events flow together. "If by avoiding food I should help the trees bloom, and the grass grow, why not do it thoroughly? .. For the first time in his life he was making a personal effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and lover." In this way, spiritual regeneration takes place, and Raju becomes a martyr for the good of others. It is now that he rises above his narrow, selfish individualism and identifies himself with the people of Mangal, and with humanity as a whole. A Rogue, a picador, is thus transformed or metamorphosed into a saint or saviour. He may or may not have died, but he is certainly regenerate.

## Rosie

**A Fascinating Personality :** Rose is one of those butterfly-type of women who frequently appear in the novels of Narayan. She is the heroine of the novel. She has a charming and fascinating-personality. Raju falls in love with her at first sight and says. "She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect, but she did have a figure, a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned, eyes that sparkled, a complexion, not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice." Her arrival at Malgudi, with her husband Marco, plays havoc with the life and career of Raju, the popular Railway guide'.

**As a Wife :** Born in a family of dancing girls, she knew who her mother was but not her father. She is given a college education and is an M.A. in Economics. She is flattered that a man like Marco should wish to marry her, and is devoted to him in spite of his impotence and priggishness. But her inherited feeling for dance cannot be suppressed, and when she gets a chance to perfect the art, she seizes it. Her giving way to Raju is understandable. She might have resisted the physical urge if her husband had been the least kind and considerate: but his inhuman coldness, Raju's evident admiration and the opportunity so conveniently provided by her husband, result in what seems a foregone conclusion. But basically Rosie is a 'good' girl. She is amazed that her husband does not throttle her for her infidelity, and is deeply grateful to him for it.

**Her Passion for Dancing :** When that husband throws her out and she has no other place to go to, she comes to Raju. More than the attraction of sex is the desire to perfect her art and realise herself fully in her God-given gift. She does not take long to achieve eminence. When Raju wants her to give performances she is not unwilling. But with fame come unceasing demands on her time and energy. She has to fall into a routine and go round and round like a bull yoked to an oil-crusher. Her weariness of it all is like that of any film star. She is being exploited but sticks it out.

When she finds that her husband has produced a masterpiece, she cuts out his picture from The Illustrated Weekly and puts it on her dressing mirror. She is surprised by Raju's behaviour in the matter of the book, and later by the forgery. But she does not walk out on him. To get him out of the mess into which he has got, she dances day and night and is willing to go round like a parrot in a cage, or a performing monkey.

**Her Extraordinary Vitality:** Raju exploits Rosie for his own advantage and narrow, selfish ends. He says, "I had monopoly of her and nobody had anything to do with her...She was my property." And a little later,.... "I did not like to see her enjoy other people's company. I liked to keep her in a citadel." Raju takes the credit for her success, and is of the view that she would not be able to do without him. But he is soon disillusioned. She rises to new heights of popularity and stardom without him. He is amazed at her extraordinary vitality. He realises that neither he nor her husband matters at all to her. The fact is that she lives entirely for her art, and those who enter her life must either become the willing instruments of her passion or suffer rejection. She leaves her husband because he takes no interest in her art, but is contemptuous of it. He regards it as 'monkey tricks' or 'street acrobats'. She falls for Raju because he appreciates and admires her art and helps her in her single-minded pursuit of it.

**Her Essential Sanity and Wisdom :** According to Narasimhaiah, she is the only character in the novel who changes and grows and recovers from folly as the novel progresses. To quote his own words, "It is strange that Rosie is completely free from Narayan's ironic handling. Considering she was a highly educated woman—a Master of Arts—and a married woman at that, and in the Hindu society, too, and considering, above all, that Narayan is operating within the framework of traditional Hindu society whose code of conduct he largely endorses, it is curious that Rosie's departure from that code invites no adverse comment from the novelist, no, not so much as an insinuating or ironic gesture. It is not that Rosie could not have provided opportunities for the exercise of Narayan's comic gifts but he leaves her alone as outside their orbit. For one who doesn't make his sympathies for any of his characters so obvious Narayan stands steadfastly by Rosie. In fact, she is the one character in the novel that seems to offer a singular example of recovering from folly as the novel progresses. In fact she has always been dignified, noble and the very picture of ideal womanhood in spite of her loss of chastity—there is enough atonement, this has been achieved by as serious a treatment of the character as any novelist in the tragic mode may have done. This seems to be true of almost all the women characters of Narayan—they are not many, though, all his novels taken together. But especially in the way he takes care to preserve Rosie from inner taint Narayan seems to be affirming what has been hailed in the Indian tradition as the Feminine Principle in life."

**Marco : Character and Role :** An Odd Character: Marco is one of those densely enigmatic characters, who frequently appear in Narayan's novels and are assigned minor roles. They are odd, eccentric characters, like knots in wood, who keep away from the mainstream of human life. Marco comes to Malgudi with his wife Rosie, and with his "water-diviner's" instinct, Raju at once realises that he is his permanent customer. He is dressed like a spaceman. We don't know his real name, but Raju calls him Marco, for he looks like an 'eternal tourist'.

**A Devoted archaeologist :** Marco and Rosie are not able to pull on together, for in his zeal for, and devotion to, his archaeological studies, he takes no interest in his young and fascinating wife. Raju thinks of Marco in relation to Rosie as 'a monkey' picking up a rose garland'. He is unable to understand Marco's obsessive interest in ancient relics, and says, "Dead and decaying things seemed to unloosen his tongue and fire his imagination, rather than things that lived and moved and swung their limbs". He is bored with Marco's "ruin-collecting activities". Rosie, too, doesn't like to see the "cold, old stone walls". She finds that her wealthy husband is more interested in books, papers, paintings and old art than in being a "real, live husband". When Marco decides to stay on to explore the cave painting more fully, Raju takes charge of Rosie and soon becomes her ardent lover. analysing the causes of Marco's failure with Rosie, Raju says : "Marco was just unpractical, an absolutely helpless man. All that he could do was to copy ancient things and write about them... Perhaps he married out of a desire to have someone to care for his practical life, but unfortunately his choice was wrong—this girl herself was a dreamer if ever there was one."

**His Neglect of Rosie :** She would have greatly benefited by a husband who could care for her career. But it was not so. Indeed, as Prof Narasimahiah points out, "Raju-Rosie relationship becomes credible and acceptable only because of the neglect, Rosie suffers at the hands of her husband... The husband was interested in sculptured figures on walls and stones in caves but not in his wife who as dancer was the living embodiment of those images. She had intellectual interests too ; she looked for ideas in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and remarked to her husband enthusiastically : 'I have so many ideas I'd like to try just as you are trying to...' He would brush it aside with, 'I doubt if you can. It's more difficult than you imagine.' And yet this was the man who insisted on marrying a graduate wife. But Raju the ignoramus wished he could keep pace with her idiom and learn. He claimed when she indicated the lotus with her fingers, "I could almost hear the ripple of water around it" while to Marco it was all a wide period-difference since he knew it to be fifth century. And so what interested her seemed to irritate him. It is this that made her confess to Raju : 'I could have preferred any kind of mother-in-law, if it has meant one real, live husband'.

**His Eccentricity :** Marco is an eccentric, and his eccentricity has been brought out in various ways. For example, he would not part with an "aana" without a voucher, whereas if you give him a slip of paper you could probably get him to write off his entire fortune. Stern, self-centred and self-righteous he thinks he has acquired his wife body and soul, and thinks his rights over his property are unlimited. Dancing is to him, as to many orthodox men and women of the old school, another name for prostitution. Once she talks about it, he thinks she has gone back on the condition on which he had entered into his contract of marriage and he feels free to repudiate her.



**His Harshness to Rosie :** Her confession of her infidelity comes to him as a shock. He cannot understand how a wife can be unfaithful to her husband even once and can still be involved with him.

**Parallelism and Contrasts :**

**(a) Raja and Marco :** The action of the novel flows out in two streams or currents and these two threads have been knit into a single whole by the presence of Raju in both of them, and by an intricate pattern of parallelism and contrast. One stream flows in the legendary Malgudi with its rich tradition of classical dances offered by Rosie-Nalini and the breath-taking cave-paintings that Marco uses in his book *The Cultural History of South India*. Another stream flows in the neighbouring town of Mangal, when the spiritual aspect of Indian culture is presented through Raju's growth into a Swami. Raju's presence in both these streams indicates the close affinity between art and spirituality in India. Thus Raju, Rosie and Marco become symbols of India's culture. While Marco's aspirations seek their fulfilment in unearthing the buried treasures of India's rich cultural past, Rosie's seeks satisfaction in the creative channels of classical dancing in the midst of an ever-present live audience. Raju all the time dreams of an elusive future, till a tune comes when he is committed to a definite future by undertaking a fast in the hope of bringing down Iain. While Marco is a cultural historian of the past Rosie is a cultural ambassador of the present, and Raju is a cultural prophet of the future. Before reaching the supreme excellence in their respective fields, however, they are debased and corrupted by the exclusiveness of their passions. Marco's obsessive devotion to the pursuit of India's cultural heritage keeps him tied down to a sterile, dry intellectualism. Similarly, Rosie compromises with the purity of her art, and this result in her submission to mixed dance-forms like the cobra dance. Raju is able to achieve a new spiritual status only when the dross of his unholy desires is burnt away in the fire of self-purification.

**(b) Raju and Malgudi :** Growth and maturity of Raju is paralleled in the growth of Malgudi from a small town to a big city. There are no railways and no railway station in the beginning, but as Raju grows Malgudi also grows. Raju plays on sand and gravel heaped for the construction of the station, and learns vulgar abuses from the labourers. The rails are laid and the station is built, and Malgudi is connected with the outside world. Raju also grows from a schoolboy into a railway stall-keeper, and acquires bits of knowledge by reading old magazines, newspapers and books which he stocks. As Malgudi theme. According to Indian belief if custom, convention and traditional modes, are violated there is disorder and chaos. Any deviation from the traditional norms results in disorder, and order and normalcy are restored only when there is a return to the normal, which is also the traditional. *The story of (the novel is used to illustrate the rhythm of order-disorder-order.*

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❖ **2.6 VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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**Q. 1. When was 'Guide' published ?**

**Ans.** In 1958.

**Q. 2. Which award was given to Narayan for the novel 'Guide' ?**

**Ans.** The Sahitya Academy Award.

**Q. 3. What is the meaning of picturesque novel ?**

**Ans.** A picturesque novel is a novel which deals with the adventures of rogues and villains.

**Q. 4. Where this novel has been settled?**

**Ans.** Malgudi.

**Q. 5. In Regionalism which English author has similarity with R.K. Narayan?**

**Ans.** Thomas Hardy.

**Q. 6. What is the name of the female protagonist in the novel?**

**Ans.** Rosie and Nalini.

**Q. 7. When the novel opens, where was Raju sitting?**

**Ans.** He was sitting on a granite slab on the bank of the river Saryu.

**Q. 8. Why did Velan seek advice from Raju ?**

**Ans.** Because he was quiet impressed by his saintly appearance.

**Q. 9. Raju was sent to which school ?**

**Ans.** The pyol shcool.

**Q. 10. What did Raju say to Velan's sister and what was its impact-upon her ?**

**Ans.** Raju said to the girl what must happen must happen. No power on earth or in heaven can change its course. Just as no one can change the course of that river. The words had their due effect on the difficult sister, and she went from there a changed girl.

**Q. 11. When Raju refused to go to Velan's sister marriage then what happened ?**

**Ans.** The wedding came to him in the form of the bride, the bride groom and large number of guests.

**Q. 12. Why did Raju start feeling uncomfortable ?**

**Ans.** Because he was treated like saint.

**Q. 13. Why could he not go back to his hometown Malgudi ?**

**Ans.** Because he had mortgaged his home and had no place to live in.

**Q. 14. What was the turning point in Raju's career ?**

**Ans.** The coming of the railway train to Malgudi.

**Q. 15. Where were the classes of the village boys commenced ?**

**Ans.** In the temple hall.

**Q. 16. How did Raju become so wise ?**

**Ans.** By reading lot of reading material viz articles, magazines etc and by talking to different people.

**Q. 17. Who were the tourists who changed the entire life of Raju ?**

**Ans.** Marco and Rosie.

**Q. 18. Why did he name the tourist 'Marco' ?**

**Ans.** Because he was dressed as if he was an eternal tourist.

**Q. 19. How did Raju describe Rosie when he first saw her at the station ?**

**Ans.** She was not very glamorous, if that is what you expect but she did have a figure a slight and slender one, beautifully fashioned eyes that sparkled, a complexion not white, but dusky which made her only half visible—as if you saw her through a film a tender coconut juice.

**Q. 20. When Rosie reached at Malgudi what was the first thing she wished to see ?**

**Ans.** King cobra.

**Q. 21. To what class did Rosie belong ?**

**Ans.** She belonged to a family traditionally dedicated to the temples as dancers.

**Q. 22. What was the name of the village where Raju was staying as a saint.**

**Ans.** Mangla.

**Q. 23. What triggered the tragedy for Raju at Mangla.**

**Ans.** The drought and Famine.

**Q. 24. What did the people of Mangla village expect him to do ?**

**Ans.** To stand in knee deep water, look to the skies, and utter the prayer for two weeks and completely fasting during the period.

**Q. 25. Where did Rosie make her debut ?**

**Ans.** In the Albert college.

**Q. 26. Why was Raju sent to jail ?**

**Ans.** Because he forged signature of Rosie to take some jewel box.

**Q. 27. For how many years was Raju sentenced to imprisonment?**

**Ans.** For two yers.

**Q. 28. Why did Raju tell every detail of his past to Velan?**

**Ans.** To escape from martyrdom.

**Q. 29. What happened when the news of swami's fast spread all over ?**

**Ans.** The small town of Mangla shot into fame. People came to it in large numbers to have darshan of the swami who was sacrificing himself for the sake of others.

**Q. 30. What were Raju's last words to Velan ?**

**Ans.** Velan. it's raining in the hills. I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs.

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## ❖ 2.7 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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### Q.1 The Technique of Narration.

**Ans. Indian Tradition of Story-telling :** R.K Narayan is a story-teller in the Indian tradition of story-telling. The narration moves forward chronologically, each succeeding event being linked causally with the previous one. There is no looking backward or forward, no probing of the sub-conscious or even the unconscious as is the case with novelists like Virginia Wolf, James Joyce and others. As Paul Verghese points out, " Narayan's is the most simple form of prose fiction—the story which records a discussion of events. There is no hiatus between character and plot: both are inseparably knit together. The qualities the novelist attributes to these characters determine the action, and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end. In other words, as a good story-teller, Narayan sees to it that his story has a beginning, a middle and an end. The end of his novel is a solution of the problem which sets the events moving: the end achieves that completeness towards which the action has been moving

and beyond which the action cannot progress. This end very often consists either in a balance of forces and counter-forces or in death or both." However, *The Guide* is an exception in this respect. The narrative technique Narayan has followed in this novel is different from that of the other novels.

**'The Guide' : Use of Flashback :** In all his novels except *The English Teacher*, *The Guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* Narayan is the omniscient author writing in the third person and thus following the traditional and conventional mode of narration. In *The Guide* Narayan deviates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself. This is certainly an improvement in Narayan's narrative technique: here however it is necessitated by the nature of the story. The novel begins with the release of Raju from prison. Whatever happens to Raju after his release is told by the narrator—the novelist: whereas whatever had happened to Raju before he was imprisoned is told in bits of flashbacks in Raju's own words, in the form of a confession to Velan who has come to think of him as a saint.

**Its Advantages :** The effect of this technique is to make the figure of the hero more sharp and real than the other characters. Also, Raju in making the confession characterizes himself by what he reports and how he reports it. The impression that the reader gets is that Raju's character develops because of certain events and the events in turn change his character till he finds himself a saint, fasting to induce rain for the drought-affected village in response to the expectations of a crowd of admirers and worshippers. In other words, character and action develop simultaneously and both influence each other. It is in this way that the complex personality of Raju is built up and made convincing and credible.

The interesting technique of narration Narayan has used in this novel keeps the curiosity of the readers alive, regarding both the past and the present of Raju. It makes the narrative, fresh, vigorous and interesting. As the past and present are cunningly jumbled there is a constant *impression of suspense and anticipation*. The zig-zag narration gives a cutting edge to the novel without, in any way, confusing the reader. In this way Raju becomes his own critic and we are enabled, "to see the action as Raju sees it, and as the later Raju Sober sees the earlier Raju Drunk". In this way, the past and the present are juxtaposed, and each illuminates the other.

#### **Q.2. Discuss what you think "The Turning Point" of the novel.**

On coming out of jail, Raju sets up as a Swami, a Mahatma. He exploits fully the credulity and ignorance of the simple villagers of Mangal, and lives in luxury as a parasite on their offerings. But there is failure of rains, and consequent draught and famine. Raju is called upon to undertake a fast to bring down the rains. He tries to escape the ordeal but in vain. He, therefore, decides to face the situation, to go through the fast to the best of his ability. In other words, he accepts the traditional norms, and decides to act in the way society expects him to act. This resolution is the turning point in Raju's career. He undertakes the fast, not because he believes that it would cause rainfall, but as a concession to popular belief and as an act of self-discipline and self-purification. "For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application, outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which

he was not personally interested.” Rising above a narrow, selfish individualism, Raju seeks to discover his true human identity through the identification of his fate with that of the whole humanity. Thus Raju rises, for the first time, above narrow individualism and self-seeking, and achieves spiritual regeneration by identifying himself with the life of the community. This is an act of supreme self-sacrifice in the noblest Hindu traditions of social and individual morality. The rain which Raju sees falling on the distant hills may be taken to symbolise the “spiritual bliss which follows such an act of self-effacement. He dies but his death is his spiritual rebirth.

**Q.3. Discuss about Raju’s nature as he seeks pleasure in violating the norms and living his life in a state of continuous disorder.**

**Ans. Raju’s Violation of the Norm :** Raju, a romantic individualist and self-seeker, creates disorder by violating traditional norms and morality; He seduces the wife (Rosie) of another (Marco). The result is the husband goes away leaving the wife behind. Thus he ruins the domestic life of an innocent, confiding and generous man. Rosie, the seduced wife, comes to live with him. This creates disorder in the family; It is against traditional norms to have one’s mistress in the home, it is a flagrant violation of the accepted order of things. The neighbours are annoyed as she practises dancing, and his mother is compelled to leave the home of her husband and go to her brother’s home in the village. This she does with a heavy heart. Raju’s violation of accepted norms results in great misery and suffering for all concerned. There is disorder and chaos all around.

#### **Consequent Disorder**

Raju wastes his money on Rosie, and soon he faces financial ruin. He has to give up the railway stall, and he finds no time to take up his old work as a tourist guide. Whatever money his father had left is soon gone, and he is unable to pay his debts. There is some Satan within him, he laughs at the Seth when he comes to him to demand his money. The result is the Seth goes away in great anger and Raju has to face prosecution in the lawcourts. Not only that. Later on, when Rosie is launched as a dancer, he earns a lot of money. But he wastes it all in drinking and gambling with his friends. He keeps up a lavish way of living, much beyond his means. Then he conceals the book of Marco, meant for Rosie, and thus is guilty of misappropriation. Soon after, he commits forgery which lands him in jail. Rosie does her best to defend him and when he is Jailed, she leaves him and returns to Madras. The disorder represented by Raju causes suffering to himself and to all those who enter his life.

**Q. 4. Study of Life’s Little Ironies as mentioned in the novel by Naryan.**

**Ans. Irony of Life : Defined and Explained :** Like Hardy’s Wessex novels. Narayan’s Malgudi novels are also so many studies in life’s little ironies. The irony of life may be defined as the happening of the undesired and the unexpected. In life we expect one thing and get its exact opposite, and what we get is not only unexpected, it is also the undesired. Life’s little ironies make Narayan’s novels, tragic-comedies of mischance and misdirection, and The Guide is no exception to this general rule. It is also study of life’s little ironies enacted against the back-drop of Malgudi.

**Raju as a Victim of Life’s Irony :** The operation of life’s little ironies is best seen in the life and career of Raju. In his life the unexpected and the undesired always happens, and his

discomfiture is sometimes comic, and sometimes more serious. As a tourist guide, he is very popular, and Marco treats him almost as a family member. But he seduces his wife Rosie and has a goodtime with her. He takes great pains to dress himself properly so that he may be able to impress her as a well to-do Youngman of taste and culture. But one day, when he least expects it, she arrives at his house, and sees him in all his poverty and stark nakedness. We enjoy the uncase of Raju from whose face the mask of gentility is now taken off. Later he has to give up his stall on the station and is prevented from being beaten and thrown out, by the timely arrival of his mother. Rosie looks at the entire scene from the doorway to his great discomfiture.

At every turn of the road we find that Raju is a victim of the irony of life or circumstance. He forges Rosie's signatures to get the box of jewellery lying with Marco, and everyday waits for the arrival of the box and makes eager inquiries. But the unexpected and the undesired happens. Instead of the box of jewellery, the warrant for his arrest arrives, and he is arrested in the midst of a show before a packed house. He had tried to conceal the facts from Rosie, but now she, as well as others, know about the generosity of Marco, as well as about his own villainy and depravity. He had always believed that Marco was interested only in dead and decaying objects, but now, contrary to his expectation, he finds that he is quite capable of laying a trap and out-witting him. He had always been of the view that Rosie would never be able to pull on without him. But, quite to the contrary, she does well without him and so convincingly establishes that Raju is a mere parasite who had all along been living a life of luxury on her earnings.

Raju continues to be a victim of the irony of life up to the very end. On his release from jail he takes shelter in ruined temple, hoping that there none would notice him, but soon he becomes the object of worship of the people of Mangal. The unexpected happens, and the fraud is now called upon to play the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He lives comfortably in the temple, grows a beard, light of wisdom shines from his eyes, and wisdom flows out of his lips. He talks big and looks big, the people are impressed, and he is supposed to have magical powers and the ability to cure and heal.

It is he who tells the simple credulous villagers that rains can be brought down if someone fasts for twelve days, and stands in water for a few hours everyday. He had never expected that soon he himself would have to undergo this ordeal. But soon there is drought and famine, and he is called upon to undertake the fast. Ironically enough, this suffering and ultimate death, is brought about by an idiot. He had told this idiot brother of Velan to tell his brother that the swami will not eat, unless they end their quarrel. But he told them that the Swami will not eat till the rains come. While he had been expecting food stuff for preparing binda, his favourite dish, the unexpected and the undesired happens. The people come to him with no food at all, for they believe that the swami is on fast, and so does not need any food. He is thus compelled to undertake the fast. In a desperate bid to save himself he narrates the story of his past to Velan. In this way he expected to make him realise that he is no Swami, no Mahatma, but a fraud, and no useful purpose can be served by his fasting. He expected that the people will call him a villain, stone him and turn him out. Thus his life would be saved. But the contrary happens. The narration of his past, further confirms Velan's faith in his goodness and nobility; he promises not to disclose his history to any body, and contrary to his expectations, poor Raju has to go on with the fast

**Q. 1. Discuss about the "The Picaresque Element"**

Or

**Raju as a Rogue and Fraud**

**Ans. Picaresque Novel—Its Nature**

The word *picaresque* comes from the Spanish word *Picaro* meaning a rogue or a villain. A *picaresque novel* is a novel which deals with the adventures of rogues and villains. The rogue or *picaro* is the central figure, and in the novel, he plays many roles and wears many masks.

**As a Boy : A Loafer and Vagabond**

In *The Guide*, Raju is the central figure, and he is a rogue and fraud who plays different roles. till, finally, he comes to be regarded as a Mahatma, and falls a martyr to his own ingenuity. As a boy he is good for nothing. He plays with the village boys and acquires dirty habits of all sorts. He swears horribly and uses the most vulgar abuses. He does not like to go to school, wastes his time there when he is forced to go, and learns almost nothing. His father has a poor opinion of him, and his mother regards him as a loafer. When the railways come to Malgudi, his father takes a stall on the station and leaves it in his charge. The father soon dies leaving Raju to look after the stall, the house, as well as his mother. The disciplining influence of the father is thus removed early in his life and Raju is left free to sow his wild oats.

**As a Tourist Guide : His Crooked Ways**

From a stall-keeper, Raju soon turns into a tourist guide. He is shrewd, intelligent and observant, and he soon acquires little bits of knowledge by reading the old magazines and books which he stocks, and by talking to the passengers who came to his stall. He helps the tourists in various ways, tells them as much about Malgudi as he can, and he also learns as he earns. He is a fraud who does not know much about Malgudi and its environs, but he pretends to know everything. He never says 'no' to any customer. He has a 'water-diviners' instinct, is able to size up his clients at first sight, and modifies his talk accordingly. He freely changes and distorts facts to please the tourists. The result is that his fame spreads and he comes to be known as 'Railway Raju'. His self-confidence and non-chalance pay him rich dividends, and he never worries about the many distortions in which he has indulged and the untruths he has told. He deceives, lies and adopts crooked ways to fleece the unknowing tourists.

**His Treachery and Betrayal**

Raju is a typical confidence man of Indian tales; he betrays those who confide in him. Thus, he seduces Rosie, the wife of Marco who has great faith in him, is kind and generous to him, and leaves him to look after his wife as he pursues his archeological studies. He does not hesitate to ruin the domestic life and happiness of a man who has confided in him, paid him handsomely and has treated him as a family member. He is a lady-killer who takes Rosie by storm. It is his confidence, his non-chalance which enables him to win Rosie so very easily. When Marco permits him to go and persuade Rosie to come out and go with them to Mempi Hills "he has the audacity to tell her to come out as she was, without changing her dress. And added, 'who would decorate a rainbow?' Her reluctance gave him another opportunity to whisper, 'because life is so blank

*without your presence*. Later, he makes further advances to her, continues to play bold and flattering compliments, and so is able to seduce her.

#### **Selfish and Unprincipled**

Raju is thoroughly unprincipled and immoral. He is a self-seeker who seeks to achieve his goal by hook or by crook. When Rosie comes to live with him in his house he takes her in without caring for the sentiments of his mother. Rosie practises in their home, the environment echoes with the sound of her dancing. The neighbours and the poor old widowed mother are annoyed, but lost in the pleasures of sex. Raju has no thought or care for any one else. He wastes his time and money on Rosie. The stall is neglected, and soon he has to give it up. His debts continue to mount, and ultimately the *Sath* comes to him to demand his money. Some *Salan* is within him and he laughs and treats *the Sath* insolently. He goes away in great anger and as a consequence Raju is involved in endless litigation. By his insolence and arrogance, he even drives his mother out of the home. She leaves him and goes away with his maternal uncle.

#### **A Parasite : His Luxurious Living**

Next Raju turns theatre-manager or impresario. No doubt, it is owing to his effort and enterprise that Rosie is launched as a dancer and within no time they are able to earn fabulous amounts of money. But Raju squanders away all this wealth. Like the picaro, he indulges in gambling and drinking, and lives in a lavish, extra-vagant style. Again like the picaro, he tours through South India and visits many places. He is too possessive, regards Rosie as his 'property', keeps her in a citadel, so to say, and sees to it that none encroaches upon it. He keeps Rosie under his thumb, and does not allow anyone to meet her directly. He keeps from her the book sent by her husband. He conceals it in his wine-cellar, so that she may not know about it. Later, he forges her signatures to get a box of jewellery lying with Marco. It is a criminal act, and it ultimately lands him in jail. His friends desert him, his wealth is already gone, and Rosie goes to Madras where she is able to do without him and where she rises even to greater heights of name and fame. *He is thus proved to be a parasite who had been living on her earning, and exploiting her both sexually and economically.*

#### **A Fake Swami**

When out of jail, we find him playing the role of a Swami or Mahatma. He plays this role to perfection, for basically there is not much difference between the role of a railway guide and that of a spiritual guide. The same gift of eloquence, the same ability to make grand, make grand, mistifying statements, the same air of knowingness, enable him to play his new role with such success. He is a fraud and a rogue in reality, but he appears every inch a Mahatma. He sits on a slab of stone as if it were a throne, and when Velan comes to him and consults him about his sister, the old habit of affording guidance asserts itself, and when Velan prostrates before him he can speak pontifically : *"I do not permit anyone to do this, God alone is entitled to such a prostration. He will destroy us if we attempt to usurp his rights."* Raju felt he was attaining the stature of a saint, and later he felt he was growing wings.

#### **Feels Big and Sounds Big**

When Raju is left alone, such is his make-up that he turns to attempt the impossible : he starts counting the stars. This is a daring undertaking and even if one does suspend judgment of its



foolish implications, the motivation surely is impure. For he reflects : People will say "He will be our night guide for the skies". And as though he should deserve their gratefulness if he makes an original approach too : 'The thing to do is to start from a corner and go on patch by patch. Never work from the top to the horizon, but always the other way.'

And the same attempt to sound big, not merely feel big, is to be noticed when he talks to children in the manner of big men he had seen in cities and to a group of admiring villagers. "What can a crocodile do, if your mind is clear and your conscience is untroubled?" Raju said grandly and was himself surprised at the amount of wisdom welling from the depths of his being; he is hypnotized by his own voice. His doom was gathering round him steadily. That is also how one can account for his decision to grow a beard—" 'A clean-shaven close-haired saint,' he thinks was an anomaly. As days went by, he seemed to belong to the world. He not only chanted holy verses and discoursed on philosophy ; he even came to the stage of prescribing medicines to children and telling mothers : "If he still gets no relief bring him again to me'."

He can say what he does because he has all the external trappings of a saint: "His beard now caressed his chest, he wore a necklace of prayer-beads round his neck; his eyes shone with softness and compassion ; the light of wisdom emanated from them."

### **The Punishment**

However, the very ingenuity of the rogue turned a swamy, lands Raju in trouble. As a Mahatma, he is called upon to undertake a twelve-day fast so that there may be rain, and the starving villagers of Mangal may be saved. Raju thinks of running away, but soon realises that he cannot do so, for he has himself closed all avenues of escape. As a last resort, he narrates the story of his past, the whole story of his villainy, to Velan. He had hoped that they would realise that he is no Swami but a common criminal and fraud, but quite to the contrary, the relation further confirms Velan's faith in his sainthood,

### **Spiritual Regeneration**

Raju is thus compelled to undertake the fast. When he finds there is no escape, he decides to do it thoroughly. Says the novelist, "*for the first time in his life he was making a personal effort; for the first time; he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested. He felt a new strength to go through the ordeal.*" In other words, Raju is spiritually regenerated. He is changed man by the end of the novel. The fraud is thus metamorphosed into a saint or Mahatma.

### **Conclusion**

The novel traces the career of a rogue who, despite all his self-seeking and self-indulgence, has some good in him, and who is ultimately regenerated. *The Guide* has an element of the picaresque, but it is not a picaresque novel in which there is no such transformation and spiritual re-birth. Raju is redeemed by falling a martyr for the sake of others ; there is, no such redemption in the case of the picaro in a picaresque novel. "Moreover, the plot of a picaresque novel is loose and episodic, that of the Guide is well-knit and compact."

### **Q. 2. Discuss about the passive nature of Raju's Character**

Or

**“Raju never did anything : things always happened to him”**

**Ans.** Raju's career from a railway guide to a Mahatma brings out the truth of the statement that, "Raju never did anything : things always happened to him- His entire career illustrates the drift of a passive character from one role to another."

Raju becomes a tourist-guide not as a result of his choice, planning or intention, but almost casually, almost by chance and accident. When tourists happened to ask him about the spots worth visiting around Malgudi, Raju, who was then only the owner of a petty railway stall, exaggerated the beauty and importance of these spots even when he knew nothing about them. I never said "I don't know, Not in my nature, I suppose...I am sorry I said it, an utter piece of falsehood. It was not because I wanted to utter a falsehood, but only because I wanted to be pleasant." Soon he found himself escorting the tourists to these beauty spots, giving them historical and geographic information, and before he knew it he had become a full-fledged guide, and consequently the stall on the railway station was passed over to another boy.

Raju's second role as the manager of a dancer also came upon him quite by accident. After his earlier affair with Rosie, he had settled down again to his old way of life. He would have got over his disappointment, if Rosie herself had not come again into his life. He found himself acting as Rosie's business manager and publicity agent without making any conscious plans about it. *Rosie more or less willed him into accepting this role. Once cast in a particular part, it was Raju's nature to perform it with relish and perfection, and he excelled as an impresario and manager.*

In the third stage of his career he became a convict, and even this role he performs with enthusiasm, becoming an ideal prisoner. "Raju did not drift into jail of course; he was taken there for a deliberate act of forgery. Tins was the one act that Raju did voluntarily and deliberately, it did not happen to him. But Raju was bewildered that such a trivial action should bring down such frightful consequences on his head."

"Once out of jail Raju finds himself drifting into the role of a sadhu. Not once does he deliberately try to pass himself off for a holy man, but when he finds that people want to believe in his spiritual power, he cannot disappoint them." He wants to tell the villagers of his shady past, of his stay in the jail, but he cannot : *It looked as though he would be hurling the other's deepest sentiment, if he so much as whispered the word.* Once he is accepted as a sadhu, Raju, with the characteristic thoroughness, pays attention to details like his appearance, his beard, his fluency in uttering mystifying statements. "As in his earlier roles, he learns his trade while practising it" As a guide Raju had learnt through some practical lessons in popular psychology what kind of sentiment went down well with the tourists. He had also learned to modify the historical statistics of a place according to the quality and temperament of the tourists he was accompanying.

"Raju's entire life is a series of improvisations. His quick adjustment to the part of a sadhu falls in line with similar improvisation done throughout his life. Living for the moment, and postponing the crisis indefinitely, these seem to be the principles that guide his action, and the live-rupee adjournment lawyer merely projects an aspect of Raju's own personality. During the court case between Raju and *the Seth*, the businessman whom Raju has not paid for months, there

are moments when Raju finds the whole business very tiresome, and refuses to think about it. 'By not talking about money, I felt I had dismissed the subject.' This hints at his habitual refusal to look beyond the present moment."

The act that confirms Raju's career as a sadhu is his establishment of a night school in the temple. "This school becomes the centre around which the village people gather every evening to listen to Raju's discourses and story tellings. These evening sessions grow in popularity until Raju becomes a public figure. But the idea of the school originates entirely by accident. During his early days as a sadhu when Raju is not very sure of the manner he should adopt, he tries to make conversation with the children in "the and the *Mahabharata* and remarked to her husband enthusiastically: 'I have so many ideas I'd like to try just as you are trying to...', but he brushes her aside with 'I doubt if you can. It's more difficult than you imagine.' But Raju the ignoramus, wished he could keep pace with her idiom and learn. He claims when she indicates the lotus with her fingers, "I could almost hear the ripple of water around it", while to Marco it was alia monkey-trick.

What bothered Marco was not the present realization of these musical notations but, "how there could be such a wide period-difference since he knew it to be fifth century". And so what interested her seemed to irritate him. It is this that made her confess to Raju : 'I would have preferred any kind of mother-in-law, if it had meant one real, live husband'. The result is that, "Raju came to symbolize for her the warm flow of life that ministered to the vital human needs which had been starved. For a moment she felt he gave her a new lease of life. And even in the matter of more cultivated things her art was such that the unsuspected Raju could register the right response, however unsophisticated : 'I could honestly declare, he says, that while I watched her perform, my mind was free, for once, from all carnal thought. I viewed her as pure abstraction." Such is Narayan's recognition of the uplifting quality of art and such are the means he employs to win our sympathy for both Raju and Rosie and counteract any attempt on our part at castigation of either, as violating the social code. Out of his slender meany Raju offered to provide her with all the facilities to practise her dance and supplemented them with his own personal involvement by sharing her concerns and her enthusiasms. But the husband would be most happy without her. "Oh, perfect, perfect" he cried 'That Joseph (the butler) is a wonderful man. I don't see him. I don't hear him, but he does everything for me at the right time. That's how I want things to be, you know.' But here is Rosie who has realized she had committed an enormous sin and didn't want anything more in life than to make peace with him. She didn't want to dance. She went and apologized to him, he gave her a cold look but she followed him day after day like a dog waiting on his grace. His last words were 'Don't talk to me. You can go where you will or do what you please. A remark which enlists the reader's sympathy for Rosie and places us in a position antagonistic to Marco, her husband.'" (Narasimhaiah)

"Even so, the novelist has a very delicate and difficult task of making the Raju-Rosie relationship acceptable. authentic in the Indian context, even though the husband had spurned her and sent her away. And so he builds up his defences. He makes Rosie say again and again 'After all he is my husband and it's better to die on his doorstep.' When his book is published and a review of it appears with his photograph, she frames the cutting and place it on the table. She loses

interest in dancing and Raju puts it more and more to commercial use and decides not to have anything to do with him, as he forges her signature on a voucher and shows 'lack of ordinary character' in many other matters.'

### **Test Yourself**

- Q. 1. Write a critical appreciation of the novel in about 200 words.
- Q. 2. Write a brief note on Raju Rosie relationship, what impact does it have on the plot and Raju's life?
- Q. 3. Naryan always brings in a transition from tradition to modernity in his novels. Discuss this element of transition in the novel "Guide".
- Q. 4. Describe in not more than 200 words different phases of Raju's life: as a guide; as a business secretary; as a swami.
- Q. 5. Villagers somehow developed blind faith on Raju. Write a brief on villagers as the true followers of Raju and the incidents which made them do so.

□

## UNIT

### 3

# COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL DISCOURSE

#### STRUCTURE

- ▶ Introduction and Meaning
- ▶ The Transition : Colonial to Post Colonial
- ✧ Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- ▶ What is colonial and post colonial discourse
- ▶ How the transformation came and its impact

#### ✧ 3.1 INTRODUCTION AND MEANING

Postcolonial literature (or Post-colonial literature, sometimes called New English literature(s)), is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule. It is also a literary critique to texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Postcolonial literature, finally in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary postcolonial discourse that has been shaped over recent times.

The beginning of Indian literature in English, with relation to colonialism can very much be traced in the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, during which English education was more or less steadfastly grounded in the three major centres of British power in India—Calcutta(now Kolkata), Madras and Bombay. However, the changes came in the pattern of Indian English literature during the post-colonial era.

Post-colonial literature is a body of literary writings that thoroughly 'opposes' to the preaching of colonisation. Ideally, therefore, the post colonial English literature in India, often involves writings, which deal with consequences of de-colonisation on the political and cultural independence of people once quashed to colonial rule. It is also a literary analysis to texts that carry racist or colonial undercurrents. It endeavours to re-read this very emergence of post-colonialism and its literary formulation itself.

Post-colonialism in Indian English literature can be termed as the continual shaking of the old skin of western thought and the emergence of new consciousness and cognisance, critique and celebration. And with this new awareness comes the concept of self expression. In a country like India, prior to 1947, most people branded and recognised themselves as 'Indians' against the identity of their British tyrants and tormentors. There could be perceived a potential feeling of communal national identity, nurtured by a shared antipathy and bitterness of the British colonial iron-ness. The indefinite and confusing and variable nature of 'national identity' is thus vital and central to a discussion of post colonial Indian English literary theories, as identification with one group without doubt will lead to *desertation and segregation with others*.

Colonialism usually performed its work through the use of 'brutal force' exerted by one country to exploit another community and gain economic affluence. Colonialism most frequently was the ill treatment and cruelty of the native people. The post colonial perspective in Indian English literature had emerged as a challenge to this tradition and legacy and endeavours to outlaw the idea of grounding power through conquest. Indian literature in English which is accessible to readers in the west, still owns its post-colonial literature and the tensions rising between East and West. It was in the later part of the 1960 'S that post colonial Indian English literature had begun to portray its full bloom.

Post-colonial English literature in India works through the process of 'writing back', 'rewrite' and 're-reading'. This delineates the rendering of well known literature from the point of view of the formerly colonised. Indian English literature, pertains to that body of work by writers in India, who pen in the English language and whose members of the Indian diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie. This body of Indian English literature is commonly referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. As a category this production comes under the broader realm of post-colonial English literature in India.

Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children*, in this extremely complex context of post-colonial Indian English literature, can be viewed as the quintessential fictional novel in illustrating the near overwhelming and implausible difficulties, innate in creating a national identity among a 'highly heterogeneous post colonial society. Novelists like Kamla Markanday, Manan Malgaonkar, Sujata Desai could subtly capture the spirit of an independent India, struggling to break away from the British and traditional Indian cultures and establish a distinct identity, thus beginning to usher in the tremendous era of post-colonial Indian English literature.

During the 1980's and 90's, India emerged as a significant and decisive literary nation, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* turned into a passionate object around the world. The world-wide accomplishment of Vikram Seth's 'The Golden Gate' made him the first writer of the Indian Diaspora to enter the field of international viewers and leave an unforgettable mark on the global literature panorama.

The latest Indian writer who lifted up the world by a storm was Arundhati Roy, whose *The God of Small Things* earned the 1997 Booker prize and became an international best seller overnight. Rohinton Mistry, Thumpa Nahiri are some other renowned writers of Indian origin penning for post colonial Indian English literature.

The mid-20th century once more witnessed the emergence of poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Keki Darawally Gieve Patel, who were profoundly influenced by literary movements taking place in the west, such as symbolism surrealism, existentialism. Absurdism (related to absurd) and confessional poetry. These authors as such, made use of Indian phrases together with English words and tried to reflect a blend of the Indian and western cultures, still turning out to be the most promising under the post colonial Indian English literary genes.

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### ◆ 3.2 THE TRANSITION : COLONIAL TO POST COLONIAL

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Colonies go through many changes throughout their existence. When looking at pre-colonialism, you see the area's original culture. Their beliefs and customs run smoothly and they are a functioning society. Colonialism changes everything. In almost all cases of colonialism, the norms, beliefs and cultural values of the larger power are forced upon all of the colonies natives. This is because the colonizer believes that the natives are "savages" and they need to be civilized.

The natives have no choice but to accept these new ways of life. The settlers' technology is more advanced and they could easily wipe out all natives who refuse to conform to the new culture.

This is where the depletion of their own culture begins. Natives stop practicing their religion. In most cases they convert to Christianity, mainly because it is forced onto them. In order to communicate with the colonizers/ settlers, they start speaking the settlers language. Soon enough their own is lost.

After so many years of colonialism, the natives become similar to their colonizers. The colonizers control education, therefore they control the thoughts and ideas absorbed by the youth. Natives' children absorb the new culture and ideas at a young age. Because of this, the original culture is lost in new generations. The colonizer is a brute force which oppresses the natives. In the fight of this oppression, independence is fought for and a culture that has almost been forgotten is once again sought after. Finally, an independence day comes. The larger power no longer has control of the colony, or rather, former colony. Now post colonialism takes place. Now that the larger power is gone, what is left of the original culture, the pre-colonial culture of the native people? The subject of culture is deeply explored in postcolonial literature.

Post colonialism deals with the aftermath of colonialism. It's about the struggle of being independent. One main concern in a post colonial nation is its government. After being controlled by the large power for such a long time, they need to establish their own way of running things. It's difficult because their cultural identity is in question. Governments are supposed to act in the best interest of the people, but what do the people want? The society is no longer being oppressed as they have become an independent nation, free of oppression. However they've changed, their culture has changed now and they need to figure out who they really are.

Postcolonial literature can be identified by its discussion of cultural identity. The piece of literature, be it a novel, poem, short story etc. may be about the change that has taken place or question the current change. Postcolonial literature tends to ask the question: Now that they've

finally achieved independence, what can they do? After so much change has taken place, their culture cannot return to its original state.

### **Test Yourself**

- Q. 1. Write in your words what you understand by the colonial and post colonial discourse.
- Q. 2. Classify the literary works in your text book in colonial and post colonial literature citing reasons for each.
- Q. 3. Explain the transition from colonial to post colonial and now where do see this transition moving on?
- Q. 4. Write a short note on the works of famous Indian authors : Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie. How do you see them as the bearers of the post colonial Indian literature.

□



## UNIT

### 4

# PROBLEMS OF CREATIVE WRITING IN ENGLISH

#### STRUCTURE

- Summary
- Problems of Creative Writing in English
- Ways to Overcome the Problems
- Overlapping Your Writing Style
- ✿ Test Yourself

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- Creative writing in detail including its elements and forms
- The problems we face while doing creative writing in english and the ways to overcome the problems

#### ❖ 4.1 SUMMARY

Creative writing is considered to be any writing, fiction, poetry, or non-fiction that goes outside the bounds of normal professional, journalistic, academic and technical forms of literature. Works which fall into this category include novels, epics, short stories and poems. Writing for the screen and stage, screen Writing and playwriting respectively: typically have their own programmes of study, but come under the creative Writing category as well.

#### Elements of creative writing

- Character
- Point of view
- Plot
- Setting
- Dialogue
- Style
- Theme and Motif

#### Forms of Creative Writing

- Autobiography/Memoir
- Collaborative writing

- Creative non-fiction
- Epic
- Flash fiction
- Novel
- Novella
- Play writing/Dramatic writing
- Poetry
- Short story
- Song writing
- Bibliography
- Stream of consciousness

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#### ❖ 4.2 PROBLEMS OF CREATIVE WRITING IN ENGLISH

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**Vocabulary and the diversities of the word meaning :** The great amount of vocabulary of English really makes me suffer when you read something written by a native speaker. A lot of words are unknown and the confusion arises when the meaning is known but the whole sentence is not understandable because an English word gives different impressions in different situations. This makes things so confusing.

**Sentence pattern :** Simple sentences are not always able to express the complete meaning and making complex sentences especially for second language writing is not so easy particularly in terms of apply periods and the perfect periods in it.

**Usage of preposition :** Prepositions are the most confusing part of English language, very hard to memorize and very wide to capture. A single word takes different prepositions and acts completely different. Then there are no fixed rules for most of them.

**Huge number of exceptions:** There are so many exceptions to rules in English language. Sometimes the writer gets confused whether to learn the exceptions or the rules.

**Perplexities with linking words :** It is another challenge to master the application of linking words like though as, since, when, while, as if and much more.

**Idiomatic expressions :** Generally people get confused with the idiomatic expressions.

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#### ❖ 4.3 WAYS TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS

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Writing is not easy whether it is a product review or a poem no matter writing needs real efforts more or less depending on the type of writing. It's comparatively easy to write informative things that need better research and good knowledge rather than good language skill. Writing on social or sensitive issue or creative sector is quite difficult without having better skill and knowledge about the culture of the language. But it does not mean one should cease writing rather the more a person writes the more consistent he becomes gradually. Below are some steps to overcome the language problems :

**Read a lot :** There are plenty of books available. The more a person reads, the more he understands the way the writers rope their content. Gradually the person subconsciously develops his own writing steps. Reading enhances knowledge, writing skill, vocabulary syntax. Reading leads to perfection.

**Listen :** Active listening is must for creative writing. English News, English movies, Commentary in English all meet the listener's recreational needs as well as English quest. Listening improves accents, intonation

**Write yourself :** A person should not be hesitant about being amateur writer. One should express his thoughts freely without caring about the feedback because every fall gives a chance to rise again. Capitalize on people's criticism and imprudent in sure to come. Never be demotivated, give the eggs time to be heated.

**Communicate :** Communicative with people. Whenever you get an opportunity try to speak with a native speaker. It is a very well and perhaps the best way to learn.

**Ask for help :** People don't have all the time of the world to find out who are willing to learn. So speak out. Don't try to hide your limitation. Seek for help and get every opportunity to learn. Remember nobody will ever come to teach but you can always go to learn. As long as you are humble and modest you will always get somebody to help you.

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#### ❖ 4.4 DEVELOPING YOUR WRITING STYLE

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To be a good creative writer, it's not necessary to have a vivid imagination, though that helps a lot. Many great writers of the English Language weren't particularly creative, instead, they honed down their technique and style to garner interest in their stories. The greatest thing about creative writing is that it's all yours (unless of course, you decide to plagiarize, which would completely defeat the purpose). But to be a good creative writer, the most important thing is practice.

Developing one's writing style takes time, patience, and constant practice. Attempting too much, or writing too consciously may hamper your prose, not improve them. Here are a few ways you can improve your writing style and add colour to your work.

**(1) Read :** Reading can help improve your writing style immensely. There's nothing wrong with being influenced by a certain author's writing technique, in fact, you can even take a certain style a few steps further.

**(2) Write :** Without constant writing practice you can't expect you creative writing skills to improve. Write constantly, even if you think your work is awful. It's not necessary to stick to one genre even; experiment and innovate. There is a great possibility you'll latch on to your individual style soon enough.

**(3) Be natural :** Use the language and words that come naturally to you. Opening a thesaurus and taking our difficult words will not make your writing better; in fact it makes it pedantic and pretentious.

**(4) Be concise and clear :** Nobody knows what you want to say better than you do, and most of the time simple, clear sentences make more of an impact than heavy longwinded phraseology.

**(5) Avoid being clichéd :** Try to craft original new sentences. Steer clear from done-to-death wordings and metaphors. You can create interest in your writing by being spunky, creative, and bold in your word choice.

**Creating Realistic Characters :** You can create complex well rounded characters easily by asking yourself questions about what type of person you wish to create. For example, where is your character from? What does he/she do for a living? How old is your character and what family

background is he/she coming from? Etc. Following is a list of questions you could ask yourself about your character.

- (1) What does he/she look like?
- (2) What is your character called?
- (3) How does your character deal with conflict and trouble?
- (4) Are there other people in your characters live? How does he/she relate to them?
- (5) What is the purpose of your character in this story?

Once you've got your characters figured out, you can turn to dialogue, and how you can create realistic, and interesting conversations between your characters.

**Writing convincing dialogue :** Writing good dialogue takes practice and observation. People tend to over dramatize, or understate, in either case leaving the reader with a sense of disbelief. Dialogues play a great role in bringing fiction to life, and if handled properly can help create a wonderful piece of art.

So how can you make sure your dialogue writing seems genuine and colorful?

By following these tips :

**(1) Listen to how people talk :** You'll rarely find a priest swearing, or an English Professor using slang. Observe the way people speak, and note down any interesting figure of speeches they might use. Good writers are often good eavesdroppers too.

**(2) Cut down on extraneous words and phrases :** Real speech doesn't flow as smoothly as it seems to on paper, but most readers don't care to read unnecessary words like "err..." "uh..." and "oh." between dialogues.

**(3) Use action to highlight your dialogues :** Remind the reader that the characters they are reading about are as physical (theoretically) as they are. 'He said', 'she said dialogues get monotonous if they aren't broken up with movement.

**(4) Don't stuff in too much information :** It should not be obvious that you are using dialogue to communicate information. In general, apply the three-sentence rule: give no character more than three uninterrupted sentences at once. Let the story unfold naturally.

**Avoid stereotyping your characters through dialect :** Not only is this offensive, it also challenges the reader's intelligence.

### **Test Yourself**

Q. 1. What do you think are the Do's and Don'ts for good creative writing in English. Write a short note.

Q. 2. A normal person can become a good creative or fiction writer by practice, discuss?

Q. 3. Write some of the basic problems that a person face while coming up with some good piece of literary work.

Q. 4. There are some important elements which should always be included in your creative writing to make it a good piece of work. Discuss those elements in detail.

Q. 5. Keeping in mind the important points of creative writing writes a brief essay (in not more than 250 words) on the "Modern Indian society".

## UNIT

### 5

## NECTAR IN A SIEVE

—Kamala Markandaya

### STRUCTURE

- ▶ Summary
- ▶ Chapter wise Summary
- ▶ Kamala Markandaya : Life and Career
- ▶ Characters
- ▶ Very Short Answer Type Questions
- ▶ Short Answer Type Questions
- ✦ Test Yourself

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will learn :

- ▶ "Nectar in a Sieve" a novel by Kamala Markandaya in detail
- ▶ Life and career of Kamal Markandaya and how she portrays India in her novels

### ✦ 5.1 SUMMARY

The story begins with the introduction of the narrator Rukmani as an elderly woman, looking back over the events of her life. At the very onset Ruku (a nickname for Rukinani) launches into her life-story, describing what it means to be desperate and poverty stricken in rural 20th century India.

Rukmani begins her flashback reflecting on her marriage to Nathan. Ruku was the fourth daughter of an once-important village headman. As their wealth and status dwindled, it was hard to scrape together a dowry for Ruku. As a result this fourth daughter was married to Nathan, a poor tenant farmer with no land, but a noble man nonetheless with heart of gold. Ruku settles into a simple farming life very happily, as Nathan is kind and loving with her. The main problem, though, is that she has had only one child, a daughter named Ira, after six years of marriage.

Ruku desperately wants sons, because giving birth to boys is a point of pride in Indian culture. So she pours her heart out to Kenny, a white doctor whom our protagonist first met when he was helping her dying mother. Ruku undergoes fertility treatment despite the fact that she never mentions it to her husband, Nathan. It must've been pretty potent medicine, as Ruku has five sons in the next few years. The family is happy enough, but with all these new mouths to feed, money is tight.

Big changes arrive with the construction of a tannery, where animal skins are cured. The noisy process disturbs Ruku, as she watches her home transformed from a quiet village to a dirty town. Other big changes come as Ira grows older and turns fourteen, the traditional age of marriage. A friendly member of the village, Old Granny, finds Ira a nice match through the common practice of arranged marriage. Ira's groom is the sole inheritor of some land, and many members of the village turn out for the joyful but modest celebration.

Ira leaves for her husband's home, and immediately thereafter, a terrible monsoon strikes. It seems as if the heavens are crying out in agony at the departure of the only daughter. The family faces near-starvation for the first time, but gets to eat again when the rains end. Nathan and the sons harvest rice and hunt fish living in the wet fields.

However, it's not long before disaster strikes again. Ira's husband delivers Ira back to her parents' home because she has failed to conceive a child. The family's thin resources become stretched again, and Ruku's two eldest sons go to work in the tannery to make extra money. Their decision to seek work outside of the land dashes Nathan's hopes that his sons will take after him. The tannery jobs are good for a while though, and bring in some much-needed money. As a result the relative financial security the family experiences, they decide to celebrate the Festival of Lights, Deepavali. On that joyous night, Ruku conceives her last baby.

Buoyed by the improving situation, Ruku seeks help from Kenny for Ira's infertility (still keeping these treatments a secret from Nathan). One evening she is caught on a late night visit to Kenny by Kunthi, her old neighbor. In a scramble, Kunthi threatens to reveal what she knows about Ruku's illicit visits to Kenny, and implies not-so-subtly that Ruku is having an affair. During their brief conversation Ruku realizes that Kunthi has turned to prostitution.

Ruku then makes another visit, this time to Ira's former husband. Unfortunately, he has already married a new woman and won't take Ira back (in spite of the recent fertility treatments). Ruku begins to realize that Ira may never leave home.

She encounters more grief when her educated sons start a strike at the tannery, petitioning for better wages. Ira is moody, the boys (now out of work because of scabs at the tannery) have grown sullen and distant, and Ruku feels like she no longer knows her children. Eventually, Arjun and Thambi, Ruku's two eldest sons, answer a call for work at a tea plantation in Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka). She and Nathan let them go hesitantly, believing that they'll never see the boys again. Ruku has "lost" another son too, as Kenny has found her third boy, Murugan, work as a servant in a distant city.

More ills befall the family. There's a drought that season, which means no harvest. They sell off all their goods (but save their seed), hoping to make up half the rent for the land. Rukmani has saved up a little food to get them through, but Kunthi blackmails Rukmani to give up half of what she's saved. Right after, she realizes the other half of food that remained is gone too. In an emotional exchange, Nathan reveals Kunthi extorted the rest of the rice from him. Kunthi threatened to reveal the fact that two of her sons were fathered by Nathan. Ruku and Nathan forgive each other, the air is clear between them, and yet they still face starvation.

In the meantime, Raja, Ruku's fourth son, is killed at the tannery. His body is brought home. Soon after, tannery men visit to explain the death. Apparently Raja was trying to steal a calfskin

and was so weak from hunger, that he fell dead when they beat him in punishment. They insist the tannery has no responsibility.

Things only worsen for Ruku and her family as they continue face starvation. The youngest child, Kuti, is taking it particularly hard. He's weak and whimpering, but suddenly seems to start to get better.

One night, Ruku has a fight with a woman who is sneaking into their house late at night, thinking it's Kunthi. It turns out to be Ira, who has turned to prostitution to bring money in to feed Kuti. Ruku doesn't understand Ira's decision, but she can't stop her daughter, and besides, Kuti needs the food. In spite of the fact that the family does everything they can to feed the young boy, Kuti dies. In an ironic turn of events, the family has a rich harvest immediately after Kuti's death.

Selvam, Ruku's last remaining son, decides to leave the land and instead become Kenny's assistant at the hospital. In the mean time Kenny had started building a hospital with funding from India and abroad. Ruku accepts this piece of news, and then turns her attention to Ira, who is now pregnant with the child of one of her clients.

In another blow, the family's embarrassment is augmented when they learn that Ira's baby has a rare skin pigment disease known as albinism. Though the village is curious, Selvam chides everybody for being foolish: a baby is a baby and deserves love and attention. Eventually, everyone learns to accept the baby in spite of the fact that he looks different.

The family, as usual, is cobbling a life together, when the worst news of all comes. Sivaji, the man who collects dues for the landowner, arrives to announce to Nathan that the land he (Nathan) has rented for thirty years has been bought by the tannery. The family must leave their home in two weeks.

Nathan and Ruku are distraught and shocked. Nathan is too old to work on the land, and he can't imagine setting up a new place. The whole family must make new plans. Nathan and Ruku will have to move in with Murugan, their son in the city whom they haven't heard from in years. Ira and her baby, Sacrabani, will stay behind and live with Selvam.

Ruku and Nathan make the long journey to the unnamed city, only to discover that their son Murugan has deserted his wife and is no where to be found. Murugan's wife has turned the prostitution, so their first meeting with her is somewhat less than joyful. Simply put, there's no way she'll be able to keep them. The old couple is basically out on their own; all their goods and their money were stolen earlier on the journey, and they have nowhere to stay.

They end up taking refuge in a temple where the city's destitute are fed dinner and given shelter. All they can think of is returning home. Ruku decides to make a little money by setting up as a letter-writer and reader in the market. Business isn't great, but every little bit helps.

Things take a turn for the better when Puli, a street orphan whom Ruku and Nathan met on the way to find Murugan's house, shows up again in their life. Puli is fiercely independent, but he has leprosy, a serious illness that has taken his fingers. He unofficially adopts Nathan and Ruku, and he comes up with the plan of working at a stone quarry, gathering rocks for pay. With this job, Ruku, Nathan, and Puli establish something of a family routine, and begin saving up money to return to their village.

Just as they begin to have enough money, Nathan becomes ill. In spite of his illness, Nathan insists on working at the quarry. One day as Ruku is following behind him home, she finds he has

collapsed into a ditch in convulsions. Helpful onlookers carry Nathan back to the temple, and Ruku holds him in her arms through the night, ministering to him as he dies.

Ruku and Puli return to the village, where Selvam, Ira, and Sacrabani greet them. Ira immediately warmly welcomes Puli, while Selvam and Ruku walk a little behind them, addressing the conspicuous absence of Nathan. Selvam assures his mother they will find some way to manage.

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## ➔ 5.2 CHAPTER WISE SUMMARY

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### Chapter 1

The central character of the story 'Rukmani' begins her narration in the present, though her story will be about the past. She begins by talking wistfully about her husband, who is no longer with her, except in her dreams.

Her waking life, we learn, is peopled with loved ones: her daughter, a little boy named Puli and her son Selvam, who works with a man called Kenny in a hospital.

The narrator explains she is an old woman now. She begins to tell us her story.

Her father was a "headman" in her village. Rukmani is the youngest of four daughters, due to some changed circumstances Her parents could not afford a grand dowry (money given to the groom's family by the bride's family), and the best they can do was marry her to a poor tenant farmer. But Rukmani was still happy with the marriage The woman describes her simple union to her husband, Nathan. We learn that Nathan is gentle and caring. On the six-mile ride to her new home, she cries and gets sick. Nathan does his best to comfort her.

She arrives at her new "home," which is really a two-room mud hut complete with thatched roof beside a rice paddy field. In her new village rukmani meets some of the local women Kali, Janaki, and Kunthi. In their talk with our narrator, we finally learn her name is Rukmani.

From the women's friendly gossip, Rukmani learns that Nathan was unbelievably excited about his marriage to Rukmani, and that he built their home with his own two hands, sometimes even neglecting his work in the field to provide the best home he could.

It is learnt that Nathan doesn't own the land he works, there is still a chance that he might one day have enough money to buy it. In the meantime, Rukmani delights in trips to the market, meeting the local characters: a jovial old woman who sells guava and peanuts (named, fittingly, Old Granny), a shady moneylender, and Kunthi, her neighbor who is not particularly warm or friendly.

Rukmani then describes the things she learned from the friendly neighborhood women: milking the goat, planting seed, churning butter, and mulling rice.

Rukmani's first pumpkin plant is a particularly memorable victory: it yields generously, and when she brings a pumpkin in to Nathan, he's tremendously proud of her.

Flush with success and a bit of pride at her growing achievement, Rukmani grows different kinds of plants, and the eating is good.

### Chapter 2

Ruku helps Kunthi give birth to her child: Rukmani is the lone helper as the midwife is nowhere to be found.



When Rukmani finally returns home to Nathan after a long day's birthing, Nathan is very upset since his wife is pregnant herself and shouldn't put herself or her baby in danger.

Since she is pregnant, Rukmani now has time to do non-work activities. So she starts reading and writing. Reactions to Rukmani's literacy vary, Kali (the gossiping village lady) scorns Rukmani's writing as something she'll have to give up once she's busy with real women's work.

Nathan's reaction is best though Rukmani notes that his reaction demonstrates his maturity – though he is illiterate, he can be comfortable with his wife's strengths

Rukmani then gives birth to a baby girl and then cries over her misfortune.

The couple names the little girl Irawaddy, after one of Asia's great rivers, the rationale being that water was the most precious thing in the world. Though Nathan, too, would have preferred a boy to be his heir and namesake, he grows to love Ira as soon as she learns to say "Apa," meaning father.

As a child, Ira is a marvelous beauty, which is a bit puzzling for her ordinary-looking parents. She is energetic and good-natured, too, and entertains herself while her parents go about their domestic and rural duties.

Ira is actually such a joy that Rukmani's mother often endures the long ride to come and see her. Rukmani notes that she unfortunately does not go to see her mother that often, because she's busy at home. Her mother, far from being angry, understands.

### **Chapter 3**

Ira is now approaching her sixth birthday, and she is still an only child. Rukmani quietly worries that she and Nathan will only have one child, and a girl at that.

The village starts gossiping about Ruku's inability to give birth to a second child. Ruku's mother gives her some stone for good luck but nothing seems to work. Ruku's mother has started falling in health. Then there comes Kenny, the village doctor. Kenny is the first white person Rukmani has ever seen, so she stares at him. Ruku appreciates Kenny's efforts, but believes that he's powerless to actually do anything useful.

Rukmani's mother passes away peacefully, and Rukmani goes to thank the doctor. Kenny somehow understands that Rukmani is having fertility issues."

After her confession, and slight convincing from Kenny Ruku eventually comes back to seek treatment.

Soon after, Rukmani has her first child in seven years and it's a boy. Even though he is quite advanced in age, Rukmani's father journeys six miles in a bullock cart just to see his grandson. Nathan is overjoyed and organizes a big feast so that the whole village can meet the new son. Everybody attends the feast besides Kenny.

Till this time Rukmani hasn't told Nathan about the medical help she has received from Nathan in giving birth to her second child. Rukmani decides to maintain silence

Rukmani proceeds to have five sons in a row. Thambi, Murugan, Raja, and Selvam follow Arjun. With six kids to feed, things really begin to change around Ruku's house. Rukmani begins to sell the best vegetables she grows, keeping only the bruised and spoiled ones to feed her family. The old lady in the market is Rukmani's chief buyer, and she's always full of praise for Rukmani's healthy vegetables.

Rukmani is happy to do business with Old Granny too, until the day when she is stopped by Biswas, the crude moneylender. For her vegetables, he offers her nearly twice what Old Granny pays. Though Rukmani is reluctant to change her allegiance, money talks. Rukmani begins to sell nearly everything to Biswas, leaving only a little for the old woman out of kindness. Old Granny never complains.

Recently, they've been cutting down on nicer things, like milk (except for the baby) and butter (except on special occasions). Still, unlike many other families, they've never gone hungry. They grow their own plantains and coconuts, and they always manage to put aside a little rice from the harvests. There's even fish to be had from the rice paddy fields. Rukmani seems especially grateful that every month, she can even save a rupee or two for Ira's dowry.

#### Chapter 4

Construction begins on a tannery (where animal hides are cured for other uses) in Rukmani's village. The building of the tannery is quite a spectacle. The tannery changes how people work in the village: the building workmen are paid well, and the village people are occupied in supplying their mounting needs, from rope and bricks to fruit and sweetmeats. The workmen bring in their families and live in little huts with them, mostly isolated from villagers.

In two months, the tannery is completed, and the workmen suddenly disappear. Everything is quiet in the village for a while, which gives people time to reflect on the influence of the workmen. Rukmani regrets that the tannery has come to her village. Nathan assures her that they will be back, and there's nothing that can be done about it. Sure enough, Nathan is right: new men replace the men who left. They bring their wives and families, but they also bring pollution, the stink of liquor brewing, their noisy habits, and all-around calamity.

The tannery also results in new parental restrictions for Ira. Up until this time, Ira had been allowed to roam freely, but neighbors notice that suddenly the men are paying attention to the young girl. She is beautiful, if only thirteen. Rukmani and Nathan suddenly curtail her freedom to protect her from the workmen, and to protect the family from gossip. Though Ira resents the new limitations, she is obedient.

#### Chapter 5

Rukmani and Nathan live as tenants on the land that belongs to a Zamindar, (landowner). Still, the couple has never actually met the Zemindar, because a messenger named Sivaji acts on his behalf. Sivaji is kind and judicious and treats the tenants fairly. He doesn't demand bribes or steal from the fields.

Rukmani one day spots Kenny, whom she hasn't seen in a long time. She and Kenny have a characteristic exchange – sharp but still light. Kenny then visits Rukmani's modest home. He's gracious, especially with Nathan, and compliments him for having a household rich in good women and many sons. Rukmani hears this and panics, because she still hasn't told Nathan about the fertility treatments. To date, Rukmani has only spoken of Kenny as a great help to her parents.

Kenny quickly becomes a friend of the house. He would seldom visit Ruku and her family even bring gifts, such as coconut. Kenny also learns that things are getting harder for Ruku's

family. They've had to sell the goat and cannot otherwise afford to buy milk. As a result, Ruku is still breast-feeding her three-year-old son. Kenny does not pity them openly, but he then brings milk for the baby when he can.

For all this new friendship, Kenny remains mysterious. As far as Rukmani knows, he works for the tannery on occasion and spends his long days tending to the sick, only to go return to his empty house. Kenny also has a penchant for disappearing without explanation. No one knows where he goes, but it's clear that he returns in a worse mood every time.

### **Chapter 6**

Irawaddy is fourteen, two years older than Rukmani was when she married. Rukmani can no longer put off the girl's wedding, and begins to look for a suitable matchmaker. She chooses Old Granny, who is old and experienced in such matters and the old woman is happy to help.

Because Rukmani's family is not well-off, Ruku worries they'll not be able to find a suitable match for Ira. They can only afford a dowry of 100 rupees. Their daughter is beautiful, though, and this is worth a lot. Old Granny is able to find a handsome young man who is sole heir to his father's generous portion of land.

Ira agrees to the marriage, but she is clearly wistful. Though Ruku is happy that she's found a good match, she can't help but reflect on her own marriage as a young girl. Ruku knows that Ira will have to bear the pain of separation, and the jolt of a new place. Still, Ruku promises to visit her daughter two or three times a year.

The wedding is a joyous celebration of food and music, though Nathan insists on having nothing they can't afford easily, as he hates the idea of debts. Rukmani has put aside a fair share of delicacies she's been saving up month by month for the occasion. Still, there's a reminder of hard times when she sees her son Arjun with a little bundle. He's not eating heartily at the feast itself, he seems to look dull and pale.

Ira looks younger than her years in her makeup and her mother's red wedding sari. She looks frightened by the whole affair, especially when the time comes for her to depart with her new husband. A happy crowd lifts her and her husband into the air, decking them with flower garlands and good wishes.

After Ira leaves, the crowd melts and the glamour dies down. Ruku returns to her home with the thought that there is lot of work to be done tomorrow, mending and cleaning, but as Ruku returns to her husband's side for the night, she lays awake, thinking. It is the first night her daughter has not slept under their roof.

### **Chapter 7**

With all the preparation for Ira's marriage, Nathan did little to weatherproof their house and prepare for the coming monsoon season.

The rain is constant and fierce, and the hut itself (made of mud walls) would have been washed away had Nathan not built it on high ground. The house is filled with vessels to catch the rainwater, but soon leaks outnumber pots in the house. The family tries to make do with a little firewood left over from Ira's wedding, but their problems do not end.

As the rain worsens, the paddy fields drown and the crops get destroyed. Nathan, characteristically lean of words, simply declares that there will be little eating this year leaving the family with wet eyes.

The storm gives way to lightning on the eighth night. The paddy fields are already ruined, and now the coconut tree, which fed the family often, is struck by lightning. Yet another food source is lost.

After the fiery night, the world seems to have calmed, and Rukmani and Nathan come out to survey the damage. The garden, the cornfield, and the rice paddy are now gone.

Many neighbors lost even more: six men died and Kali's hut is completely destroyed. Kali even seeks Rukmani's help, to which Rukmani had to deny with displeasure. Nathan and Rukmani prepare to go to the market to get rice and palm leaves from the village.

Nathan inspects their bundle of money buried in the granary amounting to only twelve rupees. They plan to use no more than two rupees for the repairs.

The couple set off to market. As Nathan and Rukmani come across signs of the disaster that has fiercely struck the village, they decide to return home, as it's likely no one will yet have anything to sell.

At home, they meet their hopeful children empty-handed, and again the children weep from despair and hunger. With nothing to tell the little ones, Rukmani simply lays awake and listens to the drums of calamity beating doom over the whole land.

The couple set out again the next day, and find Hanuman the rice merchant. They try to negotiate a fair price for the rice. Food is in short supply, though, and everyone is seeking it: their two precious rupees must be spent on a mere two pounds of rice.

On the way home, Nathan and Rukmani run into Kenny, who looks a straight mess. Kenny is all outrageous and in a state of disarray.

Things start to look better at home though: there is ample fish in the drowned paddy and some of the grain has survived. Still, there is not much available food.

The family stays up late cleaning the fish and separating the rice grains from the husk. When they eat, it is with a pleasant surprising feeling that they have enough food for now. Rukmani dreams of what their food stores, and the new vegetables she'll grow. She falls into a deep peaceful sleep.

### **Chapter 8**

Kunthi's two eldest sons have begun working at the tannery, and the woman insists that this business is a great boon, though Rukmani still does not feel very good about the tannery.

The other major incident that took place is Kunthi losing her character and getting into body business.

*In the mean time even the condition of Janki's family has worsened.*

Villagers come to know that tannery has Muslims beside the white men and they inhabit a separate portion in the tannery.

Rukmani notes that the Muslim men are hard workers, but the women are more mysterious creatures. These women employ servants to do their errands outside of the house, and when they travel they do so in the head-to-toe veil of the burka.

Rukmani feels sorry for these women, who are kept shuttered in their houses away from the sunlight and green fields that she so loves. Still, Kali points out, they live lavishly, and without need. Kali's husband notes that it's a trade-off.

Rukmani meets a Muslim woman when she makes a visit to the tannery in order to sell vegetables. In order to do the buying, the muslim woman removes her veil.

Unlike the other women of the village, this woman is pale and dainty. On the Muslim woman's hands are rings that could easily feed Ruku's family for years.

Still, Rukmani is disturbed by the quiet sadness that pervades the shuttered house, and never goes there again.

### **Chapter 9**

One morning while pounding chillies when she spots Ira and her son-in-law approaching. She's ready to greet them joyfully, but soon realizes that they are not on a happy errand.

Ira's husband is courteous but cool. He explains that it has been five years, and Ira has not given him a child, let alone a son. Her husband claims that since she cannot fulfil basic duties of a wife so she does not deserve to be his wife.. Her husband leaves her behind.

Nathan takes this rejection of his daughter in stride, saying her husband cannot be blamed because he's already been patient. Rukmani now remembers the grief of her past sufferings and relates it to her daughter's pain.

Two more blows fall on Rukmani's family. Much to Ruku's dismay, her two eldest sons, Arjun and Thambi, decide to work at the tannery. Arjun is firm on his decision and justifies it by saying that there is always a shortage of food in the family. He has inherited his mother's qualities of reading and writing.

A second injury comes from Arjun's announcement that he is getting this job with the assistance of Kunthi's son

Rukmani once again decides to seek Kenny's help to overcome her daughter's problem..

Thambi, Rukmani's second son, has always been very close to Arjun, so his decision to follow Arjun to work at the tannery is no surprise.

Thambi launches a further insult at Nathan. Nathan says he's always wanted sons because they could work beside him on the land, but Thambi cruelly points out that the land is the Zamindar's, so anyone working on it only helps to fill the Zamindar's pockets.

Nathan is crushed and his long standing dream of owning the land is also thrashed. Despite the terrible circumstances under which the two boys gain their employment, the family still benefits from the money they earn. Once again the family can eat properly, and Rukmani can even keep a little food on the side. She is able to keep some chillies, which offset the plainness of their rice diet. Also, she can finally fix the thatch of the roof.

She's even able to buy new clothes, including garments for the children, a sari for herself, and a dhoti for Nathan, who badly needed one. She notes that she and Nathan still had the nice clothes they wore at Ira's wedding, but they are preserving those for the happy days of their sons' weddings.

In spite of everything, Rukmani looks hopefully to the future.

### **Chapter 10**

It is time for Deepawali, the Festival of Lights, and the entire village is in a mood of celebration.

Flush with the new wealth of her sons' work in the tannery, They celebrate at home, eating well and playing with sparklers and fireworks. Soon their celebration moves to the town.

Seivam, Ruku's youngest, is the most serious and stubborn of the boys. Frightened by the noise of the celebration, he stays behind at the house with Ira. Rukmani describes the joy of the town's bonfire. Their seems to be an overall mood of joy and celebration in the village. People of the village and tannery come together to celebrate the festival. Rukmani is captivated by the fiery crackle of the bonfire, and she loses herself in the crowd.

When she finally finds Nathan, he is prancing about joyously, carrying his sons on his shoulders and hips.

Ruku teases him that he's mad with drink. Nathan insists that he hasn't had a drop of alcohol, and hoists her joyously in the air, much to her embarrassment and amusement. Nathan embraces the celebratory spirit and rejoices over his simple life, obedient children, and amazing wife.

That night, once they return to the calm of home, Nathan's joy spills out into bed, and the two conceive their last child.

### Chapter 11

Nathan leaves the village to attend a male relative's funeral, and Rukmani finally gets the chance to seek fertility treatment for Ira from Kenny. Kenny though exasperated still shares their usual warmth with Ruku. but with an edge. Kenny says he will try and help Ira, but makes no promises. As Ruku is leaving Kenny, she hears someone from the shadows whisper her name.

To her surprise, she finds Kunthi, who taunts Rukmani cruelly about her whereabouts. She suggests that Rukmani is a passionate woman and implies that she has been unfaithful to Nathan. When Kunthi hints that she might confess all to Nathan, Ruku loses control of herself, and claws at her neighbor.

During the slight scuffle Kunthi's sari slips and Ruku is shocked to see she bears the mark of a prostitute.

Kunthi slyly replies that she now has a powerful secret that could ruin Ruku and her husband. Kunthi then slinks back into the night.

Ruku, back in the happy fold of a home, goes to Ira's husband to see if he'll take her back now that the infertility problem has been treated but only to learn that he has already remarried. The possibility that her husband might take her back only temporarily lightened her mood but now she was completely shattered.

We learn that Ruku is pregnant again. Ira only grows more foreign to her mother as Ruku blossoms in pregnancy. Ruku finally delivers the baby, and as he is tiny, he gets nicknamed "Kuti." *The birth of Kuti brings out Ira's maternal instincts—she treats him as if he were her own.*

Old Granny is upset about Ira's situation and tries to the distraught mother. She notes that she herself is an older woman living alone, and that she is doing fine. Ruku is not pleased at the prospect of Ira ending up the same way. Still, Old Granny insists she is fine. Ruku slowly stops grieving about Ira's future, though it occasionally torments her in her sleep.

### Chapter 12

Things seem to be going well at home. The family is able to live: Rukmani's sons dutifully bring her home their rupee per day, and Nathan continues to work the land. Ruku is able to put

food aside for her family. She does, however, finally resign herself to the fact that she cannot save up for another dowry for Ira. In the tannery Arjun and Thambi along with the others have broken out on the grounds of increase in salary. Arjun and Thambi are out of work for a week and troubles again begin to loom on Ruku's family. Kali's sons have also been caught up in the strike. Ruku and Natan have lost control on Arjun and Thambi. Once again a requirement of workers is raised in the village but this time to the far off land Ceylon. Arjun and Thambi decide to go and assure their mother they will be back. Now even Ruku's third son has also left for the city. Nathan does his best to comfort Rukmani, who is near despair.

Kenny later meets Rukmani and brings good news that Murugan's employer is happy with him. In the closeness of the moment, Ruku inquires if Kenny does not have his own family he should be tending to. She momentarily seizes in a panic about being so forward, but Kenny responds. He wonders why it's taken her so long to ask.

Kenny reveals that he has a wife and children back home. They wish he were not abroad, but has resisted their attempt to constrain him. He comes and goes as he pleases and is free to pursue his interests abroad. Still, he says he can only handle all the travelling in small doses.

### **Chapter 13**

This time the family hits yet another crisis, as the rains fail and the crops dry out. The time for harvesting arrives, but there is nothing to show for it. Sivaji, the man who collects dues for the Zamindar, arrives promptly to ask for Nathan's rent. Of course, there is nothing to give him.

Hearing that Nathan has nothing to offer, Sivaji threatens that the land will be rented to another tenant who can pay.

Nathan and Rukmani plead and argue, and finally Sivaji relents deciding that they can pay half now and the other half later.

As Sivaji leaves, Nathan has a rare moment of angry despair. With this small hope of making half the rent to keep their land, Nathan and Rukmani count up all of the things they have to sell: pots, vessels, the eldest boys' shirts left behind, the bullocks that plowed the land, the new clothes bought for Deepavali, the last of their reserves of food, and even their wedding clothes, which they were saving for the boys' weddings.

Basically, everything they had, except the land, is to be sold. The land, they hope, will eventually provide enough for them to recover.

Rukmani bundles up all the goods and takes her bundle to Biswas, the cruel moneylender, to see what she can get. He delights in how far she's fallen, and he has little sympathy for her since everyone is in a similar condition of desperation.

Rukmani is not to be out-smarted though, and when he undervalues her goods at 30 rupees, she demands 75, saying she knows a Muslim woman that will pay that much for them (which she doesn't). Ruku nearly walks out after she's made the bluff, but Biswas takes the bait and begrudgingly pays what she asks.

When Rukmani sums up what she and Nathan have sold they count out 125 rupees, less of half of what is owed. Rukmani and Nathan then have a rare fight: Nathan would sell the seed they have left for a few rupees, while Rukmani says that would mean they would have nothing to harvest. It would be sacrificing the future for an uncertain present. Nathan finally comes down on Rukmani's side, and in the morning they face Sivaji with less than half of their promised sum.

Again, there's a bit of a tiff with Sivaji. The collector eventually agrees that next time Nathan will pay what's owed and then some. As he is leaving, Sivaji has a moment of pause, and apologizes for his harshness. He explains gently that he only does what he must to feed his own family. He wishes them the best, and Rukmani, humbled by his humility, returns his warm wishes in hard times.

The rains finally come, but everything in the fields has already died. It is too late.

#### **Chapter 14**

With the rains back, the family plants the little seed they have, and waits. There is nothing left to sell, nothing has grown to eat immediately, and Rukmani is forced to pull out the little reserve they have left.

*In the granary, she has buried about ten pounds of rice. Measuring it out day by day, she worriedly realizes they have enough food to eat for only 24 days. She hopes God will provide after that.*

Rukmani and Nathan are plagued with worry about what will come. Rukmani thinks of going to Kenny for help, but he has disappeared again. They're on their own.

One day Kunthi shows up and demands food from Rukmani. Ruku's neighbor is utterly delusional: her husband has left her, and it's clear she's delved deeper into prostitution. Kunthi declares she will be well once she is restored by the food that Rukmani must give her.

*Ruku explains that Kunthi's sons should take care of her, as Ruku has her own family to worry about.*

Kunthi cryptically says "My sons are not mine alone." and then begins to make bold threats against Ruku. Kunthi implies that Rukmani has had an affair with Kenny. Rukmani firmly believes her honesty will defend her.

Rukmani then remembers, though, her son's strange suggestion that white men have power over women and Ira's strange looks whenever Ruku was so eager to visit Kenny. Ruku also recognizes that she has deceived Nathan already about her infidelity treatment. *Once Nathan learns of one lie, he can rightfully imagine many more.*

Finally Rukmani gives up seven days of rations to Kunthi and is made miserable by the thought that not much food remains. Haunted by the thought, she goes to the grain's hiding place to count the remaining rice. To her surprise she finds just one day's worth of rice is left in the granary.

Rukmani is distraught, and immediately realizes that it has to be someone from the family who has done this crime. She crouches over the empty spot until dawn, when she goes in to her house accuse her own children.

*She takes the littlest one, Kuti, outside, and returns to begin screaming at the other three, Ira, Raja and Selvam. Nathan comes in from the fields, drawn in by Kuti's crying outside and the shouting within the house. Rukmani is cruel with madness, and Nathan intervenes.*

To Rukmani's shock, Nathan breaks down. He admits that he is the one who took the rice, and sobs that it was not for himself. He confesses that he had no choice to give it to someone else. Immediately, Rukmani goes to him to comfort him, but he pours out his heart, which is heavy with guilt.



Nathan admits that he's the father of Kunthi's two sons. He gave all the rice to Kunthi, who blackmailed him into giving it away.

Rukmani goes through a series of feelings, "disbelief, disillusionment, anger, reproach, pain." She calms herself by remembering that Kunthi is capable of evil. She then takes this as an opportunity to come clean about her own lies. Rukmani tells Nathan the truth about Kenny's help with her infertility, and of Kunthi's extortion.

With the truth out, the air is now clear. Rukmani notes that Kunthi has been robbed of her power over them. More importantly, with the rice gone, there can be no more obsession and worrying of how to stretch it out over days. There's a freedom in this certainty.

The family turns to desperate measures to eat – roaming the countryside for dropped fruits, catching crabs and even going through the gutters for food. Rukmani notes they were not alone in this desperation; hunger has turned neighbors and friends into competitors.

Rukmani watches the people around her literally become skin and bones, and imagines she must look the same. The entire family, the village, everyone it seems, is suffering, but Kuti, the tiny baby, takes it hardest of all. He weakens to frailty, no longer asking for food, but simply weeping.

Ira offers her paltry breast in solace – only that can silence the starving child.

### **Chapter 15**

The family's crisis doesn't seem to get over, they again face the situation of profound grief. All of a sudden one day Raja doesn't come home as usual. Eventually he's brought home dead. The two men who carried Raja home mutter an unsatisfying explanation about something having to do with money, and the fact that Raja fell as soon as they laid hands on him, as he was weak from hunger. Rukmani is too shocked by this point to hear their explanation, and Ira has begun to cry.

Ruku at first chastises Ira, saying she should save her strength for more than tears. Soon, though, Ira's grief pools and flows in Rukmani.

Rukmani is matter-of-fact about the washing and bandaging of Raja, because the thing that matters is the spirit. The spirit of her son is gone, and it is for his spirit that the mother grieves.

Nathan with a heavy heart prepares the funeral bier to carry the body, and the funeral drums summon neighbors and friends to the service. At sunrise, the men leave with the body to burn it, and the women stay behind.

Less than three days later, two men from the tannery come to see Rukmani and Nathan. They excuse that the tannery's no role in Raja's death. One man says the watchmen were only doing their duty to protect their property. Raja had stolen a calfskin, and only the necessary amount of violence was used against him.

Rukmani notes her son would've had no use for a calfskin, but she does concede that it might have brought some money. She admits they themselves have no wealth.

The real truth of the men's visit comes out finally as they batter Rukmani with reason: her sons were known troublemakers. Raja shouldn't have stolen anything, but he was caught and had to pay the consequences.

Ultimately, the tannery is worried that Rukmani will bring some legal claim against them, perhaps seeking compensation. They came to make it perfectly clear that Raja's death was his own fault, and that they can be blamed for nothing.

Rukmani is confused, as there is no compensation possible for death. The more timid of the two watchmen speaks up finally. He says very gently that Raja wasn't brutally treated; he was just tapped with a bamboo stick, and he fell, likely from hunger and weakness combined. He tries with quiet desperation to show sympathy and sorrow for Rukmani.

Things seem to calm down once Rukmani, still in shock, agrees with the aggressive man that the tannery is not to blame.

As the men ready to leave, Rukmani does the comforting work. The smaller man is clearly uneasy about the sleazy work they've just done. Ruku assures him that it does not matter, but the man quietly replies that he is terribly sorry for her. He leaves, visibly clouded by shame and misery.

### **Chapter 16**

As usual, life is difficult. Rukmani in particular worries how they'll be able to harvest this season's rice, as they're significantly weakened by starvation. The real concern, though, is that the paddy won't be ready for harvest for another three weeks.

Ruku is concerned that Kuti who is not yet five might die at any time.

Suddenly, Kuti seems to be getting better. He stops whimpering and even sleeps. Rukmani is certain that the gods have answered their prayers for Kuti, and she goes to sleep peacefully. One day early morning Ruku hears footsteps approach the hut she thinks of Kunthi and panicking she quickly gets out of the hut and starts beating the woman she sees approaching. She's shaken from the sudden and shrieking voice as her pummelled victim cries, "Mother! Mother!" Nathan has rushed out to pull Rukmani from their daughter, Ira.

Ira is badly beaten, and Nathan is furious at Rukmani for not recognizing their own daughter. Rukmani muttered in her defence that she thought it was Kunthi.

The biggest surprise of the evening came when Ruku learnt that many of Ira's wounds and gashes came from the breaking of the glass she was wearing. Where she managed to get glass bangles, and why she's walking around with them at night only has one possible explanation: Ira has turned to prostitution.

As Rukmani takes Ira's sari to the river to wash off the blood from the squabble, she sees a shining rupee drop from the folds of the garment into the water. Rukmani is now of the belief that her daughter has been dancing in the street for money.

Rukmani wrestles over her concern for Ira, never speaking of it explicitly, but quite obviously pained. Ira has made up her mind to sell her body, however, and will not be deterred.

Nathan is harsh with his daughter. He runs into Ira as he comes home from the fields at sunset. The girl is dressed and ready for the night shift. Ira's parents have done their best to forbid her work, but she has decided to be disobedient. Rukmani resigns herself to the fact that there is nothing else to be done. With Ira's money, they can afford to eat again. Still, Nathan is too angry to not touch any of the food bought from the girl's work.

The baby Kuti, though, is less discerning about where food comes from. He seems to get better in the first few days of Ira's patronage, but he begins to weaken again. One evening, he cries out to his mother weakly that he has lost his sight. Ruku is frightened but tries to calm him.

All of a sudden one evening Ruku discovers, Kuti after sighing in pain has left this world. Though she thinks it was only better for Kuti because this has relieved him of his sufferings.

### **Chapter 17**

Kuti is gone, and in a cruel twist of fate, the harvest is splendid that season. Their bounty is unexpected: it's the second time the field has been planted that year, and the family anticipated meagre returns because the land had had no time to rest.

The family spends days preparing the rice. One episode leaves them in tears of laughter: they're standing amidst all the food that will feed them, with enough left over to sell, and observe each other, emaciated and sallow. Their appearance, and the promise that this starvation is in the past, is enough to break them into cathartic fits of laughter.

Ruku and Nathan happily plan for the future, thinking of the crops they'll sell and vegetables they'll grow. Rukmani notes that nothing compares to standing before a good, gathered harvest, especially after so much strife. Far from resenting everything that befell them before the harvest came, the family is full of prayers of gratitude.

### **Chapter 18**

One day while coming back from the market Rukmani encounters Biswa. Rukmani has not done business with Biswas in a long time, as other shopkeepers pay better price

Biswas gives her the news that Kenny has returned. He tries his best to push hard that Ruku had an affair with Kenny, saying he has heard proof of it from Kunthi though Ruku hardly pays any heed to it. Then, Ruku goes to Kenny, bearing a welcoming garland and a lime for good luck. At Kenny's cottage Ruku suddenly feels embarrassed about her little gifts. Kenny's reception is cool, but the two soon fall into easy talk, punctuated with laughter and the occasional dark moment.

Rukmani narrates him the sad tale of her hardships and the deaths of her family members, and Kenny informs Ruku that his wife has left him, and his sons have been taught to forget him. Apparently, everyone has troubles. The two then have a loaded symbolic talk about colonialism: India is Kenny's home, but not his home at all. Kenny is also confused about which is his country.

Talk then turns to Ira, and we get the happy news that she's pregnant, but doesn't know who the father is. Kenny is unsurprised by the news of Ira's chosen career of streetwalking.

Rukmani though defends her daughter's decision by mixing words and telling him only the part of story.. She implies Ira's prostitution was only for the purpose of feeding Kuti. Furthermore, the girl was inexperienced in sexual matters, and got pregnant not knowing what she needed to do to guard against it.

Kenny is philosophical about the matter: any baby, once it is born, must be loved, no matter what. Kenny insists that Ruku's shame about what people will say is foolish. On the walk home, Ruku deeply thinks on what Kenny says, as it is fairly similar to what Nathan thinks. A baby is a baby.

### **Chapter 19**

Selvam, the last son with the family, suddenly one day announces that working in the land is not for him. He has been patient with it, but the land doesn't take to him, nor he to the land. Rukmani is naturally worried about what Selvam will do once his parents leave him.

Then comes news in the form of a blessing. Kenny is building a hospital, and he's invited Selvam to be his assistant. Selvam took to the little education he got from Ruku, and surpassed her learning through his own effort, will power and determination. He tries to convince everyone that he'll be a good assistant, and anything he doesn't know, Kenny will teach him.

Mother and son then have a frank conversation. Selvam has already gotten his dad's good wishes to proceed with Kenny, but he hesitantly prods the question of whether his decision displeases his mother.

She admits she's a bit disappointed, as his decision means none of their sons will go to the land that has been the mainstay of their parents' lives. Still, Rukmani assures Selvam she knows that this is the best thing for him.

Rukmani though in her mind is worried about the villager's gossip but she keeps selvam unheard of it.

Selvam, though, is aware of all this, he assures his mother that he knows what gossip he might face, and he doesn't care. He insists that everything will be fine, so long as Rukmani keeps the strength to ignore such talk. Most importantly, Selvam says he trusts his mom. The two share a silent smile of understanding and relief that the topic has been addressed.

Ruku then visits Kenny and thanks him for the favor to Selvam. Kenny shows her the plans for the new building—a big hospital, fit for the needs of the growing town. Rukmani doesn't quite grasp the details, but she gets that this is a big deal.

She wonders where the money will come from to finance the thing, and Kenny announces that he has thousands of rupees. Rukmani is reasonably surprised, as Kenny has been living in poverty like the rest of the village people, but Kenny explains that the money isn't his. He's been raising funds from abroad and from within India.

Though she doesn't speak a word of this, Kenny seems to sense that she's thinking it. He becomes irate as usual at the self-imposed suffering that he never can seem to understand. He argues that he doesn't grasp why the people around him seem to think of suffering as noble.

Ruku counters that the people learn to bear suffering, as the priests have taught them to, and all of the suffering is central to cleansing the spirit.

Kenny then proverbially throws up his hands, essentially admitting that he'll never understand the ways of the people around him.

### **Chapter 20**

It is time for Ira to give birth, and Rukmani prepares the house. She puts bamboo outside of the hut (a traditional warning to her husband and son that a birth is occurring in their one-room home). She cleans the house, puts down wet dung, and takes out the straw pallet women lie on to give birth, the same one she had used to give birth to Ira and all of her children.

Rukmani notes that Ira seems unperturbed of her deeds and the unknown father of the child by such concerns, and concludes that if she ever does worry, she wouldn't do it in front of her mother.

Rukmani delivers Ira's baby. Ira's baby is an albino, with white skin and pink eyes. She hands the baby to Ira and is shocked when Ira seems completely unfazed by the baby's oddity.

But Ira reacted as though the baby was completely were perfect.

Nathan is particularly perturbed by the whole affair, and he blames himself for letting this happen. To him, the baby is wrong, in fact for him the overall situation is wrong.

Rukmani knew that the baby, with his sensitive albino eyes and skin, shrinks from the sunlight. The same happy sunlight that reared her children is a bane to this baby.

The town gets news quickly of Ira's strange baby, and people come flooding in to see him as if he is a local curiosity. Nathan finally can't take it anymore, and he declares they should have the traditional ceremony to name the child. On the tenth day after the birth, Old Granny arrives.

The older woman gives a rupee to the baby, and Rukmani later learns it was her last. Old Granny blames herself for Ira's misfortune, because Ira's failed match was her doing.

It is when Kali finally comes to visit the baby that all of the concerns are blown open and put to rest. As Rukmani's most garrulous neighbor comes in to peer at the curiosity, Kali says what everyone has been thinking – the baby is simply not normal. Nathan is sour, Ira looks hurt, and everyone is silent and uncomfortable until Selvam puts them all to shame.

Selvam is not even sixteen, but he is sensible. He declares that a pink-eyed baby is just as much a baby as a brown-eyed one. He chides Kali harshly, saying her own maternal instinct should have told her this.

With this declaration made, he comforts the baby, who smiles at him. Kali, meanwhile, goes away, appropriately shamed by her own insensitivity.

## **Chapter 21**

Selvam becomes increasingly occupied with the building of the hospital, and Rukmani wistfully notes in retrospect that the hospital would take seven years to build, though none of them knew it at the time. Kenny and Selvam have poured their hearts into the project, and the delays leave them frustrated, though they plow on.

In the mean time old granny closes her eyes forever. She had lived on the street and died on the street, without relatives or anyone to care for her. Old Granny's body had been found outside, on a path near a well. She had died of starvation.

Many from the town and village attended the cremation. Rukmani wryly notes that even if no one is there to take care of you in life, many show up for your death. Death removes the frightening responsibility that anyone might have had to take on for your ailing life.

Rukmani takes Old Granny's death especially hard, as she knows now that the rupee Old Granny gave to Ira's baby, Sacrabani, was her last one. Nathan scolds her for being foolish, as that one rupee wouldn't have held her long.

Rukmani sadly wishes Old Granny could've gone to the hospital, but Nathan cuts her off sharply – hospitals are for the sick. For the old, there is nothing.

The hospital carries other troubles besides building delays. Even as it is only being built, people begin to harass Kenny, Selvam, and even Ruku, trying to secure a spot once the facility opened. Rukmani is pained by the fact that not even a tenth of those seeking help can get it – there is just too much need. These fears go unspoken, and Ruku does the best she can.

The building process is plagued by various hiccups. Kenny and Selvam are increasingly frustrated, and Ruku doesn't seem to know how to talk to either of them about what's going on.

Finally, Ruku talks to Selvam and learns that when Kenny goes away, he's still collecting money for the project.

Rukmani again marvels at what she sees as foolishness. There is no purse big enough, not enough compassion in the world, to help all those who are in need. She concludes *Kenny is wrong* for his optimism in people. She doesn't understand how Kenny and Selvam manage to fund the project, but the work always seems to crawl on anyway.

Ultimately, Selvam begins his actual training with Kenny in Kenny's whitewashed little cottage. Selvam picks up quickly, and by his second year he's able to treat less complicated cases *himself*. *Kenny begins to pay Selvam a small wage when he can*. Rukmani one day questions Kenny about how he will manage to pay a full staff, but Kenny is brash and darkly hopeful. He is certain he will find ways and means.

### **Chapter 22**

The family operates in strange ways. Rukmani notes that Ira and Selvam have always been close, though the children have gotten older, they have become distant from their parents, but never from each other. Kali, ever helpful, suggests that it is because the children are better educated than their parents, but it seems to really be something deeper than that.

It's particularly notable that Selvam has always loved Ira's baby, whom he treats as totally normal. Nonetheless, Rukmani describes how such a charade is doomed to failure. Sacrabani does not play with the other children, because their games are in the sun, which hurts him. He looks strange and so does his reactions. Finally, one day Sacrabani confronts Ira with the inevitable question about what it means to be a bastard. Ira is blind-sided, she can only imagine how much he *knows, or what inspired him to ask this question*. She flounders before explaining that bastards are children who are unwanted, and his mother loves him dearly. Still, Ruku notes Ira's voice is pained, as she tells us Ira had indeed sought an abortion early in her pregnancy.

Ira is again discomfited when later, Sacrabani asks if he has a father. Ira is startled, but quickly says of course he has a father, but his father is away, and will visit when he can. Ira delivers the standard "you'll understand when you're older," and shoos Sacrabani out to play.

Left alone with their daughter, Ruku helpfully offers that she would've said Sacrabani's father was dead, so as to end all the questionings. Nathan is gentler, saying it is for Ira to deal with the matter as she sees fit. *Ira is clearly hurt, though, and counters that the boy is only a baby*. She thinks he wouldn't understand such complicated matters as death. It's clear these questions are being fed to him from the outside.

Ira wanders outside of the hut, and they decide it's best to let her do her own thing for a while. Eventually, though, Nathan goes to his daughter. Moved by his gentleness, it seems Ira is finally comfortable enough to cry. Ruku hears her weep for a long time.

### **Chapter 23**

The chapter opens with a news that Murugan, the son who had gone away to a city to work as a servant, has married. Ruku and Nathan could not afford to attend the wedding, but more importantly, Nathan was too sick to make the trip.

Nathan is approaching 50, and is plagued by rheumatism and fevers that leave him increasingly weak. As a result, Nathan is unable to work the land. Though Ira and Rukmani try as they can to tend to the earth, they cannot make as much of an impact as Nathan did.

Kenny cares for Nathan, and tells Ruku that the man hasn't been eating well enough and he also worries a lot. Rukmani points out that they eat as well as they can.

The discussion then turns to whether Ruku's many sons can support the family. Rukmani notes that her sons have made their lives elsewhere, and almost instantly, Kenny crumbles. He knows he has taken the last of Rukmani's sons from her, and he is stricken by it. Still, Rukmani assures him that she wants for Selvam what Selvam wants for himself.

Before long, Nathan begins to get better, almost miraculously.

Then, everything takes a turn for the worse.

Rukmani comes home one day to find Sacrabani cowering in a corner, looking with terror and curiosity at his grandfather, who is sitting on the floor gazing into nothingness. Rukmani thinks Nathan has just had one of his attacks again, and she gives him water to drink, tending to him gently.

Nathan then announces the worst news of all: Sivaji has paid a surprise visit, and their land is to be sold to the tannery. The thirty years they've spent on the land doesn't matter because the tannery will pay more. What's more: the deal has already been completed and the family only has two weeks left.

Rukmani is naturally in shock, and wonders where they'll go, and what they'll do. She finally admits that they are surrounded by mad chaos.

Rukmani and Nathan are both in shock, and they distractedly discuss what on earth the tannery will do with this little land that is only good for rice growing. Rukmani helpfully the fact that at least they won't have to carry much, in consolation.

Rukmani then wanders into her own thoughts about the tannery, declaring that she always knew it would be their ruin. Some have benefited from it, no doubt, but many more have suffered, it seems. Her family once had prosperity from the tannery, but those days seem to have long since passed.

Rukmani then pauses in her reflection to admit that the tannery is not entirely to blame. The land is a fickle thing, and people who make their living on it must live with the uncertainty that there will be times of plenty, and times of nothingness, glut and dearth in equal parts, both equally impossible to anticipate.

With the land gone, Rukmani knows they have nothing. She walks into the hut, and surveys the long history of what has happened there.

Selvam comes home later that night, and when Nathan breaks the news to him, he is thoughtfully silent. Rukmani has a moment of weakness and wonders whether Selvam's silence is because he does not care. She immediately remembers Selvam is a quiet, thoughtful man and quickly is ashamed of herself.

When Selvam finally speaks, he is furious. Like his brothers before him, he has an acute sense of justice, and he declares that it is simply not right that the tannery should do this.

His parents are more pliable to bad fates, choosing not to shake their fists at heaven in futility. Nathan declares they will go to Murugan in the city. He's too old now to be able to guarantee hard work and profit – no one would sell land to him under that kind of uncertainty. Rukmani's optimism rails against Nathan's harsh words, but he insists that they are true, and must be said.

Nathan comforts Rukmani, and in a tender moment, he lays his hands on her temples. It becomes clear to her that they suffer for each other more than for themselves. It might be easier to not have to worry about each other, but they couldn't bear their other worries if they didn't have each other.

Rukmani's head is unclear, and she leaves the practical arrangements of their future to her husband and son.

Rukmani breaks out of her blurred thinking when she hears Selvam speak. In a profound moment of self-sacrifice, Selvam offers to return to the land. He and his father can work it together, and perhaps they might live as they once did. Nathan brightens for a moment at the prospect, but his generosity matches his son's. He knows what he would be taking away from Selvam by putting him back on the land, and Nathan's final verdict is that Selvam should pursue his hospital work.

Then there is the question of Ira and Sacrabani. Though Nathan and Rukmani are sure they must go, Ira declares she and her son have a home here, as uncomfortable as it may be. People are used to her and her strange son, and she does not want to start a new life somewhere else.

Selvam vows to care for Ira and Sacrabani, though it pains him that he has nothing to give his parents. Taking care of his sister and nephew is the best gesture he can offer.

It is settled that Selvam will take care of her and her son. In the end, it is decided that only Nathan and Rukmani will go, leaving behind what's left of their family.

#### **Chapter 24**

Faced with leaving, Rukmani begins to collect the few belongings they plan to take with them. She packs their sleeping mats, a little food, and two bowls. Then she begins to survey the implements of the kitchen that she cannot bring.

Wistfully, she notes that her cooking days are over, and she thinks fondly of the daily rituals of food preparation in which she will no longer participate. The journey to Murugan and his wife will take two days, so she takes the proper supplies: bellows for the fire and six dung cakes, (for cooking fuel on the journey).

Rukmani goes to the granary and digs up the bundle of money that is left. It's sixteen rupees total, three of their own, three from Selvam, and a ten-rupee note sent from Kenny.

The bullock cart arrives in the morning (already packed with skins from the tannery), and Nathan and Rukmani climb in. Selvam, Ira, and Sacrabani see the cart off. Nathan and Rukmani look back at all they're leaving behind. The journey is long and dusty, and Nathan and Rukmani are comforted by each other.

Finally, on the second day, the driver of the cart announces he has taken them as far as he can. Rukmani and Nathan are a little daunted: they are faced with three roads and have no idea how to find their son. They choose a road at random and trust they'll find their son with the kindness of strangers' directions.



When they finally run into somebody who can direct them, they hear the bad news that the street they're looking for, Koil street, is some fifteen miles away. They are crest-fallen, but they have no choice except to continue. While they walk, many carts pass them. No one offers them a ride, though, because the carts are already full.

Nathan and Rukmani are growing weary of their bundles, which seem to get heavier. They stop frequently to marvel at how busy and bustling the city is. There are people and traffic far greater than they'd ever seen.

Finally, they reach the city center, and, knowing Koil Street is still some six miles away, they stop to rest. After a light meal of plantains, darkness falls around them, and they know they have stayed too long. A man they saw sleeping in a doorway earlier tells them that they can go to a nearby temple for food and a place to sleep. Rukmani and Nathan are buoyed by the prospect of some proper rest.

The temple complex is bustling, and it seems the temple is a familiar place to many others who are also heading there for food and shelter. The atmosphere is jovial and familiar enough for the people who are used to it. Nathan and Rukmani chat with the other pilgrims, eagerly talking of visiting their son, though no one has heard of him.

The couple arrives at the inner part of the temple, and they stop to pray in a service led by two priests. During the service, Rukmani is distracted. As she tries to focus on her prayers, all she can see are the images of her past: her children, her hut, Old Granny, Kenny, Sacrabani. Finally, her mind calms, and she prays amid the reverent silence.

The atmosphere of the place entirely changes once the prayers are over. The people for whom this is a nightly routine know that the food offerings placed before the gods and goddesses in the temple are given to the poor after the food is blessed. There is a throng of people who push and jostle for a place in the line for handouts.

Rukmani makes it into the crush, but Nathan, who has never been one for crowds, stands to the side with the old and crippled. She thinks she can ask for her husband's portion to be given to her, but when she finally makes it to the front of the line, she is sharply rebuked for asking for a second portion. The people who hand out food chastise her for "making capital of charity," and in the end Rukmani walks away with only one portion to share between her and Nathan.

Still, it's good to have food. After she and Nathan have eaten, they contentedly feed the temple goats the banana leaf plates and cups that held their evening's meal. Only then do they remember their bundles, which they've forgotten in the temple.

Along with a small party of helpers, they search for the bundles in vain. They know it was foolish to leave the bundles unattended, but they aren't accustomed to the city, where nothing is safe.

Though they resign themselves to their loss, Rukmani is terribly uneasy—she will go to her daughter-in-law like a beggar without so much as a cooking pot. She decides she will spend a little of their money on wares to bring to her daughter-in-law, and she settles into an uneasy sleep. While sleeping, she's awakened twice by the feeling that fingers are tugging at her arms and face. The first time, she thinks it's only Nathan, but the second time, she finds she cannot go back to sleep.

Awake in the dark, she marvels at the statues in the temples. They almost seem to move, and only with the falling light of the dawn does it seem that the figures return to their carved stillness.

### Chapter 25

Nathan awakes from a good sleep. He notes how it seems Rukmani has had a harder time getting rest. They set off, but it's not long before Nathan is eyeing up all the savory food being sold from the stalls. They know it's a splurge, but Nathan thinks they should spend a little money on food.

Rukmani resolves to buy something to eat, and only when she reaches for the pouch tied into her waistband does she realize the money is gone.

They return to the temple to look for the money on the floor where they slept, but it is not there. A few people in the temple recognize them from the last night and cruelly tease them that free food is only given in the evening, not the morning too. When they hear of the stolen money, they soften a little, but the general consensus is that this is the usual stuff that happens in the city. Their money is definitely gone, and they have only the clothes on their back.

Nathan and Rukmani steel themselves from hunger enough to continue their journey. Since the city is a big and confusing place, they feel utterly lost and are constantly misdirected.

Finally, they stop to rest at a roadside, where they watch about a dozen street children at play. The children are merry in spite of their apparent malnourishment.

Though they play enough like children, they turn into animals when a scrap of bread is dropped, snarling and scrapping amongst each other for the smallest morsel. When they see rich men, they become beggars, knowing the wiles of what the street requires.

Rukmani can't help but compare these street urchins to her children. Though she knows that her own children have been this hungry, she feels comfort that her children acted quite like this.

After watching a while, Nathan suggests they ask one of the street-smart kids for directions. They find one who explains that there are actually three or four Koil Streets (hence all the confusion). The little boy is able to work off of the detail that Murugan works for a well-known man named Birla. Though he doesn't know Murugan, he says he'll take Nathan and Rukmani to Birla. If they prosper there, they can pay him for his trouble.

The little boy announces that he is called Puli ("lion"), after the king of the animals. He says he is well known, and from the way he deals with the other children, it's clear that he's the leader of the pack. For all his confidence and impudence, Nathan and Ruku find something really appealing about this clever boy, who could well be one of their own grand-children.

Only then do they notice that the boy has stumps where his fingers should be. He is diseased leprosy, which will continue to eat away at his body. Puli leads them to a street with a whitewashed house and church, and he tells them that this is the end of their journey.

Some servant men come to shoo away Nathan and Rukmani, whom they take for beggars. Nathan explains that he's looking for his son Murugan, only to learn that no one living there has that name. With no further information, the servants try to rush away the couple, especially as the doctor is just arriving back to the house.

Nathan has not come so far to turn back now, and he insists he'll speak to the doctor. To Nathan and Rukmani's surprise, the doctor is a woman. She remembers Murugan, and asks for news of their village hospital and Kenny (who sent Murugan to her in the first place).

Sadly, though, she tells them that Murugan hasn't worked for her for two years. She senses their desperation and says that he was a good worker, but that he went to seek higher wages working for the well-known Collector, who lives on Chamundi Hill. She promises anyone can direct them there.

Rukmani and Nathan are at the gate, about to continue on this harrowing journey, when the doctor calls them back. She can tell they look hungry, and she invites them to have a meal. They are taken to the servants' quarters by a manservant, named Das, and he brings them to a woman (presumably his wife) who is busy preparing a meal.

The young woman is nursing a chubby baby, and she warms immediately to Nathan and Rukmani, hearing that they are the parents of the one whom her husband replaced. For Rukmani, the woman's kindness is a breath of fresh air, and the old couple is comforted for the first time in a long while.

They wash up, and Ruku fills us on in the filthiness of the latrine (a thing she has never used before). This bathroom doesn't provide the cleanliness of nature alone. Nathan tells her she'll have to get used to things being like this in city life.

Back at the cooking pot, the rosy young woman holds the baby on her hip, and she introduces three more babies. Ruku holds the baby, a little girl, as the woman scoops out generous portions of rice for her guests.

The woman informs the couple that they are given free rice and dhal from the doctor, and the doctor has sent her extra on account of the unexpected company. Ruku eats happily, especially once she knows she's not taking food from a family that already had so many little mouths to feed. Das's wife is so kind that she convinces Nathan and Ruku to spend the night, and sleeping mats are soon spread out for them.

They leave in the morning after thanking the lady doctor, as well as Das and his wife. Ruku says when she thinks of Das's wife now, she sees her just as then, surrounded by her children, sunny and warm, a bit of comfort in an unfamiliar world.

## **Chapter 26**

Nathan and Rukmani go to the Collector's house on Chamundi Hill in search of their son. It's a fine and beautiful house, but as the old couple approach, a man immediately runs out to shoo them away, taking them for beggars.

They announce they are not beggars, but have come to look for their son, Murugan. Hearing this, the man immediately softens, and brusquely delivers them to Murugan's wife's godown before rushing off. (A "godown" is a tiny section of a warehouse that can be used as a home.)

Murugan's wife's dwelling (one small square room set in a long row of similar rooms) is not too different from the one Das and his family kept.

At the threshold, Rukmani and Nathan hesitate, overcome with excitement and a kind of shyness. They think about being reunited with their son, whom they haven't seen for so long, and finally meeting his wife, whom they've never known. They can't quite bring themselves to step into the door, so they call for Murugan's wife from the threshold.

A thin girl with "untidy hair" answers them at the door, and their reception is shockingly cold. She wants to know who they are and what they want. Once more, Ruku is embarrassed that she and

Nathan must look like beggars. Nathan explains that they aren't beggars at all, but Murugan's parents.

Hearing this, the woman, (we find out that her name is "Ammu"), lets them in, but she looks strangely uncertain about what to do with them. It turns out her discomfort stems from the fact that Murugan has left her. He's been gone two years, and she safely assumes that he isn't coming back.

Of course, Nathan and Rukmani are shocked – they've come *this far for nothing*. It's clear the girl is struggling on her own just to feed the two babies she has. There's no way she'll be able to take care of them too.

Her demeanor with them is cold, likely because she understands that they came to get help. Ammu seems accusatory of the old couple. Ruku understands this coldness because the blame is partly theirs: had they raised him better, he would not have deserted *this woman and his child*.

Ammu announces that she'll be going off to do her work (cleaning houses) but Nathan and Rukmani can stay until she gets back to reach the children. The baby she has on her hip begins to cry as soon as she puts him down. Ruku wants to hold him to see if he'll quiet down.

Ammu is fine with that, but she adds sharply that Rukmani should know the child is not her grandchild. She defensively says "One must live," expecting Ruku to have some scolding for her, but of course Ruku doesn't. (It seems Ammu, driven by hunger like Ira, turned to giving away her body for money. The baby must be less than two years old, and was thus conceived after Murugan left.)

Ammu returns from cleaning houses (where she earns fifteen rupees a month and gets free housing) at midday, and Rukmani can tell that she and Nathan were not really supposed to take up Ammu's invitation that they stay for a meal.

*Their meal is made with half-hostility*. It's clear the girl has some concern for what will happen to these old people, and where they'll go, but she can't take on their burden in addition to her own. The sooner they leave her, the better.

As Nathan explains that they'll be on their way back to the village, he qualifies that they only came to the city for their son. There's added awkwardness as Rukmani tries weakly to defend *Murugan's desertion*, saying he must have had some reason. Ammu is infuriated by this, and says Murugan only left to chase women and gambling.

Nathan diffuses the tension a little by assuring Ammu that they'll go back to their son and daughter in the village. He worries for her though: she will face one challenge after another as a young woman fending for herself and two babies. Ammu is cold in her replies – she's sure she can *take care of herself and her children just fine*. Rukmani can tell the girl has been hardened, and can anticipate that Ammu will only receive more challenges.

There's only so long one can hang around in awkwardness and hostility, even when one has no place to go, so soon enough Nathan and Rukmani leave.

Rukmani notes that the parting is sad, even though the meeting was a bit weird. She's saddened by the prospect that she'll *likely never see this daughter-in-law and these children again*.

Lost in their thoughts, Rukmani and Nathan wander to the wrong exit. One of the servants screams behind them that they're supposed to use the servant's exit, and they should remember that for next time. Nathan (who still has his usual gracious dignity) replies that they are not servants, and there will be no next time.

## Chapter 27

*Nectar in A Sieve :  
Summary*

After their disappointing encounter with Ammu, Nathan and Rukmani return to the temple. The regulars among the destitute have mixed reactions, grumbling that the city temple should feed its own poor without having to cater to all of India's poor. The harsh reality is that each new arrival means a little less food for the others.

Soon enough, Nathan and Rukmani become regulars themselves. They grow accustomed to the cruelties that make the temple-goers competitors: crippled people have their crutches kicked from under them, and the weak are separated from their supporters so there's more food to go around for those who can stand the crush of the line.

In all of this, Rukmani often has to get a single portion and share it with Nathan, as he does not adapt well to the temple crowds.

As each night descends, Nathan and Ruku plan their journey back to their village. If they're going to live in destitution, it might as well be in the place they call home. Still, they have no money to make the journey.

Rukmani then has the idea that she can make a little money using her education as a reader and writer of letters. This opportunity gives the old couple some hope.

Still, Rukmani is a woman, and people in the city often stop to marvel at her as she sets up shop in the market. A literate woman is an unusual thing. Business isn't terribly good, but Ruku earns enough for them to eat rice cakes in the mornings.

It's a new year, and Nathan and Ruku find themselves still living in homeless poverty in the city. Nathan's rheumatism has begun to act up again, and they become increasingly desperate to return home.

One day, as Rukmani returns to the temple from the marketplace, a little boy calls after her. It's none other than Puli, the street child who gave helped them find Murugan. Puli speaks like a man, and Ruku still finds him charming. He demands payment for his past service to Rukmani, and to show him that she has nothing she takes him to the temple with her.

There, Puli shares the single portion of dinner with Rukmani and Nathan, and to Ruku's surprise, he also nestles next to them to sleep. Ruku worries that he should go home to his mother, but he tells her he has no home, and no mother to worry about him.

Rukmani knows this street-smart boy is perfectly fine on his own. She worries for him, though she lacks the resources to take care of him herself. Still, Nathan echoes her practical concern when he chides Ruku that they can't add the boy to their burden, whether he is "whole" of body or not.

In the morning, though, Puli shows he can earn his keep. He tells them about a nearby stone quarry where anyone can work. They can break small rocks off the big stones, and will be paid by the sack, earning much more than Ruku is currently making as a letter writer. Puli can't do it himself because he can't hold a hammer. (he has lost fingers as a result of his leprosy). Still, he'll direct their work.

Puli leads Nathan and Ruku to the quarry. It's hard work, and noisy, especially when the sheet rock is exploded into smaller bits by gunpowder, as is often done. Nathan and Rukmani don't have hammers, and are not as experienced as the other workers at using stones to chip off other stones.

Puli sits and watches them, but he comes in handy when he rescues them from their own distraction. The hoisting of a red flag signals impending explosions at the quarry, and Puli once

pulls Nathan and Ruku to safety away from the blast when they don't notice the flag. This ragged threesome has become something of a team.

After their first day's work, Rukmani has a bit of difficulty figuring out exactly how the payment process works. As she's in line waiting to present her stones, she sees that Puli has brought out a begging bowl, and changed his voice, asking onlookers to take pity on this orphaned leper.

When she finally presents her and Nathan's basket of stones to the overseer, she gets eight annas, which amounts to four times what she made in a day at the market. Suddenly, going home to the village seems something of a possibility.

Puli, Nathan, and Ruku set up a routine of sorts: working at the quarry and sleeping at the temple. Though Puli is wily, Ruku entrusts their money to him, as he's far more able to take care of it than either of them are. Calculating what they might make at the quarry, they figure that they could return home within two months.

In this excited planning, Nathan asks Puli if he'll come with them to the village. Puli reminds them that the city is his home – he knows the place like the back of his hand, and has made a name for himself here.

Besides, Puli chides, if Nathan and Ruku are returning to poverty in their village, he might as well enjoy the poverty he already knows in the city. He's happy to live just as he did before the old couple arrived.

Still, Rukmani begins to worry about what will happen to Puli when the leprosy that took his fingers begins to claim other parts of his body, making him increasingly disabled. She respects Puli's independence, and appreciates that he puts up with their dependence on him. Still, she knows there are limitations as to what one can do under miserable circumstances.

### **Chapter 28**

It was a particularly good day at the quarry, and Nathan and Ruku managed to earn one whole rupee. Rukmani is elated, they've already earned six, and their journey back to their village seems to be closer than ever.

There is a pleasant drizzle as the three walk back from the quarry. Nathan says he is tired, so he'll go ahead to the temple, but Rukmani and Puli go to the bazaar to buy the usual rice cakes.

The vendor Rukmani usually buys rice cakes from is kind to her (even though she can't buy much) and he sometimes even gives her a little butter for the cakes. He's happy for Ruku's little extra earnings when she announces today she might be able to buy some more than usual.

Ruku and Puli eye all of the delicacies they usually avoid looking at, and they finally settle on buying fried pancakes, spending ten annas (more than a usual day's earning) on pancakes and rice cakes.

On the walk home, Ruku and Puli spot a hawker selling little pull carts carrying drums. Puli is enamored of the toys, and he begs Ruku to stop and watch them for a bit.

The hawker is smooth-tongued, and Puli is desperate, so before long he's convinced Rukmani to spend two annas on the cart for him.

Rukmani softens when she remembers he is only a little boy, and he's had a hard life. As thoughts of home have been on her mind, she adds one more extravagance, deciding to buy a cart for her grandson, Sacrabani too. She thinks of how it will excite him, and make Ira smile.

In the end, Ruku is left with two pull-carts, pancakes, rice cakes, and only two annas for the day's work. She's panicking in her mind over how to explain this wastefulness to Nathan, but when she sees him she realizes there are bigger problems to address.

Rukmani tries to present the pancakes to Nathan with fake cheer, but already he's looking ill. When he returns from vomiting, Nathan says seeing the food made his stomach turn. He admits he's been sick and feverish since the morning.

They eat the rice cakes in silence. As the rain gets heavier and Nathan's chill worsens, Rukmani tries to convince him to stay out of the rain at the temple. Nathan refuses to stay behind, because the rain is likely to go on for days and he doesn't want to miss work. In the end, he goes to the quarry with them, still sick.

The quarry is a big muddy wet mess. While the wealthier people could afford slickers to cover themselves, Nathan and Ruku are exposed to the downpour. It's been seven days of continuous rain. Even when Puli decides he won't go to the quarry, Nathan insists on going to work in the bare hillside in the pouring rain beside Rukmani.

One rainy day, without Puli, Nathan, and Ruku are at the quarry, and dusk is falling. Nathan tells Ruku she should go collect their day's pay, while he goes home without her. Ruku, left on her own, can't keep thoughts of home out of her head. She wonders whether home will still be there, and wonders wistfully whether Puli will stay behind after all.

Rukmani then stumbles down the wet hillside, and halfway down she notes a small crowd of people. At first she ignores it, until one of the crowd calls out to her that she must come see to her husband, who has fallen.

Rukmani's senses leave her for a moment, but she's soon by Nathan's side. He's been carried to the side of the road, where he's lying in the mud, jerking, twitching, and breathing hoarsely. His body is cold to the touch.

It continues to rain mercilessly, and Ruku tries to pull off some of her sari to cover him, but it gives way to her touch, as it is so old. No others have anything to lend Nathan to cover himself – they are all in equally pitiful circumstances. Finally, two men begin carrying Nathan to the temple, hoisting him by his arms and legs. A knot of women follow behind with Ruku, saying comforting things, but Ruku is so distracted and numb that it's as if nothing is said at all.

Only when Ruku licks her lips from the rainwater does she realize that she's been crying.

### **Chapter 29**

Rukmani makes an unusual switch from the past tense of the narrative here, and recounts her feelings in the present. She remembers this particular night in painfully meticulous detail, and recounts it to her reader.

As the men carried Nathan's shivering body to the temple, Ruku follows behind and notices that the insistent rain has squeaked the flame usually burning on top of the temple. Rukmani remembers crying out repeatedly like a madwoman, "Fire cannot burn in water."

The men lay Nathan down on the pavement of the temple, and Rukmani sinks down at his side. Someone brings them a lamp, someone brings them water, and Ruku wipes down Nathan's mud-caked body. Finally, it's just Nathan and Ruku alone. The helpers all slip away as they begin to see the inevitable.

Nathan lies with his head in Ruku's lap, and he twitches, muttering about his sons. Ruku evaluates the sad state of his feverish, skinny body. His mind is also beginning to slip into delirium.

His senses seem to return to him momentarily at midnight. He reaches out and touches Ruku's face, wiping away her tears with his hand and telling her, "What has to be, has to be."

Rukmani is defiant, and tries to tell Nathan that he'll get better. But Nathan knows it isn't true. He tells her not to force him to stay, now that it's his time. He also tells her not to grieve.

Rukmani points out that she doesn't grieve for him. She fears that she cannot live on after him: *he is her love and her life.*

Nathan tries to comfort her, and says he will live on his children. They share an incredibly poignant moment as Nathan reminds Rukmani that they have been very happy together. With her face laid on his, Rukmani listens to his soft breathing, until he turns his face towards her and dies.

### **Chapter 30**

Without much detail, Rukmani tells us how she strove to pull together the pieces of her life, but Nathan's absence continues to loom.

For comfort from loneliness, she turns to Puli. She makes promises about his health, saying his condition would improve if he returned to her village with her. Puli eases her pain gradually, and eventually he decides to come home with her.

Rukmani glosses over the bullock cart ride home, and she tells us seeing the land is life to her starving spirit. She weeps from happiness, and the hard past begins to drop away from her.

Selvam and Ira both run out to greet her. Puli stands to the side, clutching his pull-cart with the drum. She calls to him, and shows him to Selvam and Ira, announcing that he too is her son, as she and Nathan adopted him.

Ira immediately takes Puli's arm, and tells him to come with her. She says he looks hungry, and tells him he should rest while she prepares some rice.

Ira and Puli walk ahead, while Ruku stays back with Selvam, struggling to say the unutterable. Selvam assures her they'll manage, and sensing her difficulty, he tells his mother she doesn't need to talk about what happened.

Ruku tells her son Nathan's passing was gentle, and that she'll tell him about it later.

And on that look towards the future

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### **+ 5.3 KAMALA MARKANDAYA : LIFE AND CAREER**

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*Kamala Markandaya* was a pseudonym used by Kamala Purnaiya Taylor, an Indian novelist and journalist. Born in Mysore, India, Markandaya was a graduate of Madras University. At the start of her career she published several short stories in Indian newspapers. After India declared its independence, Markandaya moved to Britain, though she still labeled herself an Indian expatriate long afterwards.

*Nectar in a Sieve*, is Markandaya's first published novel. It soon became a bestseller and was named a notable book of 1955 by the American Library Association. Other novels written by Markandaya are *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *The*



Coffer Dams (1969), A Handful of Rice (1966), The Nowhere Man (1972), Two Virgins (1973), The Golden Honeycomb (1977), and Pleasure City (1982/1983).

Kamala Markandaya's strength as a novelist comes from her sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective. Her prose style is sweet, simple and controlled. She was a pioneer member of the Indian Diaspora, and her novel, *The Nowhere Man* (1972) foreshadows many diasporic issues with which we are preoccupied today. Markandaya's novels deal with a wide range of Indian topics from the poverty-stricken peasants of *Nectar in a Sieve* to Indians dealing with issues of racism while living abroad in *The Nowhere Man*. She is regarded as a pioneer for Indian writers writing in English.

Her works have exposed the intrinsic woes of womanhood and feminism in a distinctive and unique style. She also portrayed through her writing that very existence of woman in torturous and the condition is same everywhere. In most of her novels, markandya attempted to project the independent minded women and their traditional bounds. She belonged to the revolutionary group of Indian women who made their mark in the literary field not only through their chosen subject matter but also through their polished presentation style.

Markandaya died in London on May 16, 2004.

**Picture of India in Markandaya's Novels :** Kamala is a popular novelist who presents picture of India in the great novels by her. *Nectar in a Sieve* was published in 1954. It deals with the ill-fate of a poor widow Rukmani. Her great struggle with uncertain destiny exalts her character on the one hand and bring to light miseries of Indian farmers on the other. The novel presents a true picture of rural and urban India. *Some Inner Fury* was published in 1956. The novel is narrated by a lady, Mira, a modern sophisticated westernised lady. The novel exposes the eternal clash between East and West on the one hand and the clash between passion and patriotism on the other. It accounts for a love story too. The novel develops in the background of national movement for freedom. *A Silence of Desire*, published in 1960, deals with spiritual realities. It exposes a clash between the traditional and the modern values in the family. Dandekar is a clerk and has no faith in religious rites. When his wife Sarojini visits a Swami, Dandekar suspects her character. The happiness their life is lost in it. *Possession* (1963) introduces a minor character, Anasua. With Lady Caroline, she visits a village. Caroline likes the art of a boy named Valmiki and asks him to come with her and become an expert artist. When he becomes a popular artist in London, Caroline wishes to marry him but he loves Caroline's maid. Now Caroline conspires against him. *A Handful of Rice* (1966) exposes ill effect of large scale industry on rural economy. The hero, Ravi joins the underworld. His coming back to gentle life and going back to criminal activities is the story of the novel. He starves and with others attacks go downs for a handful of rice. *The Coffer Dams* was published in 1969. Clinton makes the dam for Indians. His wife, Helen looks after starving tribal. *Two Virgins* (1973) shows the impact of blind modernism on rural life. Lalitha and Saroja are two sisters in teen age. Lalitha, being modern decides to elope with a film-maker. When she returns she is pregnant and tries to commit suicide. Saroja inspires her to live. But Lalitha fails in living in a traditional society and leaves it for a big city.

"*Nectar in a Sieve*" was her first published work, and its depiction of rural India and the suffering of farmers made it popular in the West. It was translated into more than a dozen languages

The title "Nectar in a Sieve" comes from the poem "Work Without Hope" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The novel shows that hope or the sweetness in life (nectar) can be difficult to hold on to - almost like trying to carry it in a sieve (strainer). The protagonist, Ruku, demonstrates the need to hold on to hope and the nectar of life even in the face of overwhelming adversity.

**Picture of Rural India in 'Nectar in a Sieve' :** Kamala presents a true picture of rural and urban India in Nectar in a Sieve. Nathan, a poor farmer suffers from irony of fate. Nathan and Rukmani work so hard but live from hand to mouth. They have no artificial means of farming and their fields depend on nature. So often, Nature grows merciless and ruins their hard labour and breaks bright dreams. Having worked hard, they hope for a bumper crop but nature ruins all. On account of the excess of rain the weep seeing how their fields are flooded and crop is rotten. Sometimes, there suffering is caused by want of rains in which their fields grow nothing. They starve and weep seeing their children hungry. Villages are devoid of medical aid. People die in want of medical treatment. It is Rukmani's great fortune than Dr. Kenny helps her from time to time. He builds a hospital in which her son works as an assistant to Dr. Kenny. Money-lenders exploit uneducated villagers of simple nature. Kamala shows how shop-keepers too act as money-lenders. They increase prices of things. They become ready to buy old things of the needy poor at a thrown away price. Rukmani too has to sell her old clothes to the shopkeeper. Growing industrialization is seen when a tannery is opened in the village. It provides employment to some villagers. Rukmani's sons too work there yet the owners do not pay proper wages. When worker demand for justice, the masters grow cruel and dismiss these workers. They blame Rukmani's son for stealing and kill him. Industrialization of the village proves an evil in other ways also. Prices rise and the life of the poor becomes hard. On account of rich out-siders many women and girls become corrupt. Rukmani's daughter Ira is left by her husband under the charge of being barren. She lives at her mother's. She grows corrupt and earns money to run the family. Later on, she gives birth to a child. Kamala does not ignore big cities. In this novel she presents a true picture of urban India. Having sold their land to the tannery, when Nathan and Rukmani go to the city in search of livelihood they suffer bitterly. Nathan and Rukmani have to break stones in old age just to earn living.

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#### ❖ 5.4 CHARACTERS

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### Character sketch of Kenny

Kennington is a white, western doctor (presumably British) who comes in and out of Rukmani's village, helping the people and ultimately building a hospital. Kenny is an interestingly complex character, who is often something of a stereotype symbolizing the difficulty with colonialism. Kenny is committed to helping the people around him, but he views them as different. His aid could be looked at as benevolent charity, but it is also tinged with the fact that Kenny judges the people around him and seems to hold himself to be superior.

Kenny shouldn't be viewed as a villain because he sacrifices himself to help others. Though he is intensely private (another indication that he does not view the Indians as his social peers), Kenny gives up his wife and children, and life, essentially, to be in India. With the coming of the hospital, we see that Kenny lives according to a completely intangible hope. He abstractly

believes he can do something to “save” these people, and while it does come from completely good intentions, we’ve got to question his belief that he’s in any position to save anybody.

Kenny does have several saving graces. In the first place, he is incredibly generous with his time and money. For example, he brings food for Rukmani when he can, and treats her, her mother, and Ira. He even gives Nathan and Rukmani ten rupees for their final journey from the village.

More importantly, though, at the end of the novel Kenny’s last interaction with Rukmani shows that he’s finally starting to understand Indian culture. Kenny started out thinking the people were in need of some philosophical direction and material aid. He judged them as foolish because he didn’t fully understand the depth of their poverty and the strength of their spiritual convictions. In Kenny’s last talk with Rukmani, he comes to accept that the ways of the West are simply not applicable here. As a result of the difficult circumstances that many Indians face, many people turn to their faith and accept their suffering. When Rukmani mentions that they are in God’s hands, we get the sense that Kenny’s finally understood that this is the only way people can deal with their situations.

### **Character sketch of Nathan**

Ruku says she always called her husband “husband,” because calling him by his first name would be inappropriate in her culture. For the purposes of her narrative, though, she calls him Nathan.

Nathan is a tenant farmer who labors his whole life on land he doesn’t own. He’s the loving and wise husband of Rukmani. Nathan begins in the novel as a hopeful young man – he dreams of one day owning his own land, and he constantly points Rukmani towards the rice, which hold the seeds of their hope and future. Like Rukmani, Nathan goes to the earth for replenishment, finding a spiritual anchor there.

Nathan is gentle and loving with his wife and children, but he does go to emotional extremes that Ruku doesn’t often reach. At Deepavali, he is comfortable being simply joyful, without the thought of anything else. On the other-hand, he’s capable of abrupt moments of incredible anger, as when he pulls Rukmani off of Ira, or when he declares that his sons must act for their benefit, or when he curses Sivaji and the Zamindar. Nathan is capable of feeling deeply, whether love or anger. His feelings give him strength and often give Rukmani pause to think.

Rukmani is still in control of the story, so we don’t get Nathan’s personal reflections on his life, but we have a sense of what he believes, and that he holds deeply to those convictions. He is ashamed of his infidelity with Kunthi, he refuses to eat the food brought in by Ira’s prostitution; and when his life is brought to a close, he embraces the notion that happiness has been the most important part of it. In the novel, if Ruku represents thought, then Nathan is feeling. He faces strife constantly, and he endures it with a quiet acceptance, valuing what he’s got over what he’ll never have.

### **Character sketch of Rukmani**

Rukmani is a hard-working and supportive wife, daughter, and mother, who grows and develops over the course of the novel. She is our sole narrator, and as such she exercises tremendous power over the reader. What is perhaps most interesting about her is that in spite of the

fact that she has full control over the narration, she seems to be a fairly honest narrator. She admits her failures and weaknesses.

It is through seeing Rukmani's shortcomings, that we realize her strengths: her honesty gives her a true grace and humility. Ultimately, we realize Rukmani is faced with a world that is beyond her control and understanding. She does her best to endure, for her family and for herself. She provides support to Nathan and cares for her children, but she is also engaged in a project of learning. She breaks caste restrictions when she allows her sons to work at the tannery, and she becomes immune to the realities of poverty when she sees three women around her involved in prostitution. When she returns home to her modest village life at the end of the novel – with one more mouth to feed, but strong as ever in her faith to survive – we see she has come a far way from being the little girl who quaked at the possibility of living in a two-room mud hut.

Throughout the novel Rukmani has learned to be more generous, less judgmental, and to identify the things that really matter to her. Ultimately, she proves the wisdom of the advice Nathan gave her early on – to not break, but to bend like the grass.

As a result of her endurance and faithful commitment to keep going on no matter what, Rukmani is like the character Sita, the wife of Rama in the Indian epic, the Ramayan. Sita was noted for being a faithful and loving wife, and she withstood rumors about her fidelity (as Ruku does) and incredible hardship (as Ruku also does). Ultimately, also like Ruku, Sita returns to the land from whence she came: Sita is swallowed up by the earth, the way Rukmani faces death after returning to the place she most loves.

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#### ❖ 5.5 VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Which genre is used in the novel 'The Nectar in a sieve' ?**

**Ans.** Semi Autobiographical.

**Q. 2. When was this novel published ?**

**Ans.** 1954.

**Q. 3. At what age did Rukmani get married ?**

**Ans.** 12.

**Q. 4. Why did Rukmani want to give birth to boy child ?**

**Ans.** Because giving birth to boy is a point of pride in Indian culture.

**Q. 5. What change did tannery bring in their village ?**

**Ans.** It destroyed the quiet and serene atmosphere of village.

**Q. 6. Why did Ira's Husband leave her ?**

**Ans.** Because she failed to conceive and give birth to child.

**Q. 7. Why did Rukmani's two elder sons go to work in the tannery ?**

**Ans.** To make extra money for meeting the needs of the family.

**Q. 8. Who went to work at a tea plantation in Ceylon ?**

**Ans.** Arjun and Thambi.

**Q. 9. Why did tannery people beat and kill Raju.**

**Ans.** Because he was trying to steal calf skin.

**Q. 10. What is the meaning of tannery ?**

**Ans.** Where animal skins are cured.

**Q. 11. Why did Ira choose prostitution ?**

**Ans.** To bring money to feed Kuti.

**Q. 12. Ira's baby suffered from which disease ?**

**Ans.** Albinism.

**Q. 13. Why did Rukmani and Nathan shift from village to city ?**

**Ans.** Because Sivaji, the man who collects dues for the landowner announced to Nathan that the land he has rented for thirty years has been bought by the tannery. The family had to leave their home within two weeks.

**Q. 14. What does tannery symbolize ?**

**Ans.** Tannery symbolizes modernity. It transforms the village environmentally and economically. It also transforms the relationships between the people within the village.

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#### ✦ 5.6 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. What does 'Nectar in a Sieve' really mean ?**

**Ans.** A sieve is a type of strainer which is used to keep boiled vegetables etc so that the water will run through but if some liquid is put in it most of it will run through. Sieve in literal terms symbolizes a strainer for separating solid particles from a liquid or lumps from powdered material.

This novel is a story of woman's tragic struggles in life. Nectar is sweet, symbolizing the sweetness and goodness of life. Further more it is free to gather as you will, but you are given only a sieve to put it in. If you put your life or fortune in a sieve you are not going to get much good out of life, except for what you can save before it turns out or what traces are left behind. To put it in the poetic terms life sucks and then you die.

**Q. 2. Ruku describes "hope and fear" as the twin forces that rule her life. Is one more important than the other?**

**Ans.** The meaning of life is constantly questioned and probed in this text. Life means different things to different characters: For Rukmani, it is an opportunity for endurance and spiritual cleansing through suffering; for Nathan, life is about finding little joys and simple pleasures. Kenny's life is about helping those who suffer, regardless of the cost to one's self. Life's meaning is a dynamic thing, and it changes with circumstances. When harvests are good, life is not hard, and so it isn't thought about that often. When things are bad though, there is always an opportunity to reckon with the reality that one must go on, and that life must have some innate value that makes it worth living. The characters struggle and find that meaning, each in their own way.

**Q. 3 How is nature tied into one's spiritual, moral, and personal development in the novel?**

**Ans.** Nature is a dual force in the novel. It brings great joy but also great pain. Characters often get angry about other forces beyond their control (the tannery, their children). However, for all the grief they get from nature, they never come to resent this powerful force. One of the greatest philosophical points of the book is that nature reflects the arbitrary beauty and suffering inherent in life. One can only appreciate what there is to appreciate, and endure what must be endured. Though nature often hurts her, in the end it is the thing for which she endures, knowing that it too endures and will last long after her.

**Q. 4. Is the poverty in this novel realistic?**

**Ans.** Poverty is the everyday reality of the characters in the novel. Poverty is not an abstract concept that one can really think about; it's like a wolf at the door that must constantly be forced off. Poverty is so dire in this novel that characters don't have the luxury to deeply think over it. Instead, they build their lives around the knowledge that it will always haunt them, and the best they can do is try to keep afloat. Poverty is definitely always present, but one of the strengths of *Nectar in a Sieve* is that it need not always be the focus. The novel gives us a rare glimpse into the complex lives and emotions people live (even when they are in poverty). Characters are driven by it, but it is not all that shapes them. They cannot financially transcend it, but they learn to define themselves spiritually beyond it.

**Q. 5. What aspects of a woman's life define her within the novel?**

**Ans.** *Nectar in a Sieve* hints at the fact that women did not have as much power in their society as men. The women of this novel, however, exercise tremendous and unusual power in many different ways. Rukmani is educated and savvy; her brave actions to seek fertility treatment allows her and Nathan to have sons, and even though she's technically subservient to Nathan, she's gained power in their relationship by gaining his love. Also, Rukmani exercises power by narrating her own story: she is in control of what we know, and has power over her readers. Ira and Kunthi turn to prostitution to gain economic power. This choice hints at the deeper power that women's sexuality gives them over men. Men may "own" them for a few minutes, but ultimately it's their allure that gives them power over men. Men have no choice but to seek their services, as the need they inspire is so great. Women are definitely restricted in a formal sense, but the women in this novel are constantly breaking and ignoring those restrictions – Ira raises her baby, Rukmani writes letters in the market place, Kenny's woman friend is a doctor – and while they all certainly know that they are women, this isn't the sole defining limitation on who they are or who they can be.

**Test Yourself**

Q. 1. In times of utter desperation Rukmani turns to the gods, to her husband, to Kenny, and to others. How dependent is Ruku on other people and outside forces? On the other hand, what indications do we have about her self-dependence?

Q. 2. What does the title "nectar in a sieve" symbolise about the plot of the story and Ruku's ever changing life?

Q. 3. Describe the element of discrimination in the novel as you see it when Ruku gives birth to her first child.

Q. 4. What is the role of Kunthi in the progress of plot. How does she effect the lives of Nathan and Rukmani?

Q. 5. In the time of extreme conditions you see Kunthi, Ira taking up some unfair means to earn money and earn livelihood. How far do you think it was correct in the context of the plot. Why do you think Ira was unperturbed after giving birth to the strange baby?

UNIT

6

**THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE**

—Raja Rao

**STRUCTURE**

- ▶ Summary
- ▶ Critical Review of the Novel
- ▶ Myth as used in Raja Rao's "The Serpent and the Rope"
- ▶ Quest for Identity
- ▶ Very Short Answer Type Questions
- ▶ Long Answer Type Questions
- ★ Test Yourself

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this unit you will learn :**

- ▶ "The Serpent and The Rope" by Raja Rao in detail
- ▶ Raja Rao's writing style

♦ **6.1 SUMMARY**

The plot is concerned with the life of a South Indian youth by name K. R. Ramaswamy. He goes to France to work on a thesis connected with the Cathar heresy. He is a Smartha and his lineage goes back to Vidyananya and even the Upanishadic Yajnavalkya. He had been initiated into the Upanishads at the age of four and is a master of his mother-tongue and Sanskrit. He quotes from French and Italian too with facility. He is firmly rooted in the Indian Vedantic tradition, but is at once at home in France or England and achieves communion with its living spirit. He is wise in himself and is the cause of wisdom in others, like the Ganges whose waters purify and whose purity does not diminish. He is the modern embodiment of Tristan, Krishna and Satyavan.

It is at the University of Caen that Ramaswamy or Rama comes in contact with Madeline and they marry On 10th February 1949. A child is born who is called Krishna and later Pierre, but the child dies of broncho-pneumonia within a year of Its birth. Hearing of his father's illness, Rama returns to India in 1951. This is the starting point of the story and the happenings till 1954 are included in the novel. Retrospective narration, jottings from diary, descriptions and dialogues, and sheer poetic thapsodies sometimes—all these fill the wide scope of the book and make it difficult to read, though perhaps doubly rewarding.

The action of the novel is the physical basis for the spiritual evolution of Rama. Apparently Rama travels widely in Igdja, France and England. He visits India in 1951 for his father's obsequies, in 1952 for his sister Saroja's marriage, and at the end of 1954, he proposes to return to India and spend his life in Travancore to seek his fulfillment in solitude. Having seen and experienced enough of the world and men at the physical and intellectual levels, he now qualifies for the quest and fulfillment of the spirit. In fact, this urge flows as an undercurrent throughout, because whatever the experience he is able to detach himself from its involvement, and even sensuality is but a necessary passage to the higher realms. Through a long process, he hues his way through the winding paths of Becoming to the goal of Being.

Madeline, his wife, is vividly created and her life too passes through the most breath-taking vicissitudes. From French Catholicism she drifts to Hinduism and from Hinduism finds her way to Buddhism. The process is however convincing and natural. The two children she bears do not survive and she realizes that her life would acquire a meaning and a fullness only if she rises from limited love to unlimited love. Thus she naturally takes to Buddhism after Georges has initiated her into it. Through a process of struggle and hardship, she ascends to the highest spiritual levels and reduces the body to nothingness—a mere assemblage of the eighteen aggregates.

Savitri too—the Cambridge returned Rajput princess—discovers the full meaning of her life through Rama's association. There is mutual attraction between them, and while Rama sees himself in Savitri, Savitri feels he is her Satyavan. He is Tristan and she is Iseult, he is Krishna and she is Radha. Even the toe-rings given by Little Mother, Rama's second step-mother, seem to fit her. They also marry, in a symbolic way, in England, but soon she returns to India to marry the bridegroom of her parents' choice—Pratap, a jagirdar. Both Rama and Savitri realize ultimately that their 'marriage' is only spiritual and should never be corrupted by physical desire. He reveals to her the true nature of love—rejoicing in the rejoicing of the other. He accepts her as his principle, his Queen. Savitri achieves her happiness in life as a true wife.

Rama also plays the peace-giver to Saroja, his step sister and to Little Mother herself. He is the wise Vedantin who is always ready with a treat of wisdom to Georges and Lezo. Even Catherine, the cousin of Madeline and the daughter of uncle Charles, is helped by him to secure her happiness. She even has a feeling that she must have been his wife in the previous birth.

In this way almost all the characters in the truly cosmopolitan gathering share the influence of Rama and work out their realisation of peace and happiness. He himself finds that he is unable to bridge a gap, fill a void. The physical operation of thoracoplasty makes him lighter and takes away his disease and sorrow, and the climatic stage of his evolution starts. As Rama says once to Madeline:

The world is either unreal or real—the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood...And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradise, saints, avatars, gods, heroes, universes. For wherever you go, you see only with the serpent's eyes. Whether you call it duality or modified duality you invent a belvedere to heaven, you look at the rope from the posture of the serpent, you feel you are the serpent—you are—the rope



is. But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent. You gave your own eyes to the falling evening and cried, 'Ayyo!' 'Oh! It's the serpent! You run and roll and lament, and have compassion for fear of pain, others' and your own. You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One—The Guru—brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. 'It is only the rope'. He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent.

Here perhaps is a clue to the crucial philosophical problem of the novel. The Rajju is mistaken for the Sarpa, and the confusion brings about a chain reaction, which only strengthens the initial confusion or illusion and imparts to it the look of reality. All action in terms of duality and relativity seems to be within the purview of the operation of this illusion. But the illusion is itself the inevitable process of reaching the Reality. The forbidden apple has to be eaten and the consequences exceeded. The many have to coalesce into the One and the multiple vision has ultimately to transform into the integral vision.

Rama's quest is thus over and he knows his destiny. As he says, "Man is born in pain. His rebirth is solitude, his song is himself." The key lies in looking within or antardrishti. It is then that Rama says, even like Moorthy in Kanthapura, "Siva am I."

There are, of course, more things in the book. The concept Rajju Sarpa Bhranti or Illusion and Reality needs a scaffolding, even as the spirit needs the sheath of the mind and the mind itself the frame of the body. There are beautiful descriptions of nature and penetrating probes into human nature. The fun and frolic of a Hindu marriage, the pomp and revelry of an English coronation, the campus of Cambridge and the life of Paris—all these and many more perceptions on a global scale are granted flesh and blood in memorable prose. There are philosophical conundrums which can exhaust the most tireless mind and expositions of serious thought which are a source of sweetness and light. One has the feeling, finally, that the novel is perhaps an inverted autobiography of Raja Rao and that Ramaswamy is a projection of the author himself in a large measure.

While Kanthapura is a novel of action, *The Serpent and the Rope* is essentially one of recollection. Both are authentic testaments of Indian life, but, while the one tries to capture the exciting drama on the surface, the other is concerned with the deeper verities comprehended in an epic sweep. While the one, in fine, is an experiment in language, the other is the language of the experiment that is life.

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## ❖ 6.2 CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE NOVEL

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The publication of *The Serpent and the Rope* in 1960 brought world recognition for Raja Rao (a British Professor once mentioned publicly that the novel was even considered for the Nobel Prize) and ensured his place among the masters of Indo-Anglian fiction. Although a contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan and a product of the India of Gandhi and Nehru, Raja Rao is a class by himself in technique and vision. Hailing from Hassan in the Mysore State, he carries in his veins a strong scholarly and spiritual tradition. His work reveals the evolution of a master artist, and *The Serpent and the Rope* can justly be deemed his magnum opus.

*The Serpent and the Rope* came out in 1960 and justified the long incubation. The novel is at once intriguing with its wide canvas and multiple vision of France, England and India. The response was rather one of mingled feelings, and an American reviewer, Charles W. Mann, says

that "the reader must face a flood of learned allusion and often annoying garrulity in this complex, yet poetic work." He further accuses Raja Rao of producing one of the most 'difficult and circuitous' novels of recent years, although he recommends it for all libraries concerned with serious modern fiction! The reviewer finally says that the try of Raja Rao is worthy of respect and much more subtle than can adequately be expressed in a review, and one would agree with Mr. Mann's conclusion. The reviewer of the TLS, however, calls it another 'leisurely novel' and sums up the plot as a series of 'difficulties attendant upon a marriage between a young Indian, Rama, and a French intellectual, Madeline. Naturally considerable adjustment of values and ideals must take place if such a union is to be satisfactory.' Professor K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar says in his book that it is perhaps the most impressive novel yet written by an Indian in English. It might even be said that it is the most inclusive novel to be written in English by an Indian. One might turn to it for the ineluctable 'Englishing' of the Sanskrit verse, or one might witness in it endless debates of teasing philosophical systems, or one might gather from it pithy pronouncements and intriguing epigrams. The total comprehension of the book certainly calls for a variety of insights and hence the despair of the critic. The complexity in structure is the obvious result of Raja Rao's unique personality—his rich and versatile scholarship and the highly metaphysical bent of his mind, which is amazingly mercurial in its movement. He cannot for this reason, conform to any formal ceiling, and this is true of all his work.

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#### ✦ 6.3 MYTH AS USED IN RAJA RAO'S

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##### "THE SERPENT AND THE ROPE"

Of all Indian writers of fiction in English it is Raja Rao whose work is, both in content and form, perhaps the most 'Indian', though he has not hesitated to draw freely upon the west. He has brought to Indian fiction in English many elements in which it has previously been largely deficient: an epic breadth of vision, a metaphysical rigour and depth of thought, a symbolic richness, a lyrical fervor and an essential "Indianness" of style.

Raja Rao is virtually the first major Indian writer in English to realize that the "Indianness" of his writing should make for not only a typically Indian content but a characteristically Indian form as well. As he himself says: "The Indian novel can only be epic in form and metaphysical in nature. It can only have story within story, to show all stories are only parables"1 As a representative of the modern Indian ethos which shows a curious blend of ancient Indian tradition and modern Western attitudes, Raja Rao often makes a unique blend of techniques of modern western fiction and age-old methods of literary expression.

The influence of the Puranic tradition in Raja Rao has been not only decisive and strong but amazingly sustained. Raja Rao's own words give support to this view: "The Serpent and the Rope" is to be taken like all my writing as an attempt at a Puranic recreation of Indian story-telling: that is to say, the story, as a story, is conveyed through a thin thread to which are attached (or which passes through) many other stories, fables and philosophical disquisitions, like a mala (garland)". Thus, M. K. Naik calls it a modern Indian Mahapurana in miniature and both the matter and manner, of the Puranic tradition is a great moral or spiritual conflict involving both

gods and men and *The Serpent and the Rope* sets forth an emotional conflict arising out of the marriage of two minds which are too true to themselves to co-exist in harmony. It can be said that if *Kanthapura* is a Purana meant for an unsophisticated gathering, *The Serpent and the Rope* is a Mahapurana meant for a gathering of more sophisticated and intellectually mature listeners. Here, for the first time, we come into contact with a sensitive intellectual whose narration of the "sad chronicle of his life" includes echoes from an extensive field of scholarship stretching from myths and fables to abstruse philosophical dissertations. The reader, familiar with Eliot and Joyce, will tend to conclude that this is the first Indo-Anglian literary work which may be termed truly modern in its complex artistry which resides in its suggestiveness and implications.

According to Joseph Campbell, myth is a system of metaphysics: it is a "revelation of transcendental mysteries", it is "symbolic of the spiritual norm for Man the Microcosm". Most of the criticism on *The Serpent and the Rope* had been devoted to the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of the novel. It is true that the novel offers rich material for the pursuit of such a study. Campbell has further said that myth is the picture language of metaphysics. But this study limits itself to studying how myth is used as a technique in the novel, and discusses metaphysics only where the mythical form refers to it. Almost the first thing one notices is the repeated and numerous references to myths and legends, Indian as well as Western. The extensive use of myths and legends, is not meant for digression as might appear at a superficial glance, but forms an integral part of the author's technique. Raja Rao himself has said that the discursive passages on myth and metaphysics are interpretations and not deviations.

*The Serpent and the Rope* is largely autobiographical fiction, a dialectical novel which draws many elements from epic, philosophical discourse and folk-narrative, and blends them all into a plastic flowing structure. The narrator is more intelligent and his point of view more sophisticated than in *Kanthapura*. Hence, the mythology here is more esoteric and emblematical. Legends and myths and folk wisdom are so well blended as to reveal a basic unity and organic conception of the novel. The hero Ramaswamy's sensibility absorbs astonishingly the myths and legends of different civilizations and integrates the past and the present into the essential oneness of history. Thus, he sees no difference between the Ganges and the Seine; George VI and the Indian Bharata of the Ramayana, 'for both of them believed in the impersonality of monarchy': "The king can do no wrong" just like Bharata's establishing a duality in himself by apologizing for being a king because after an apology he is no more a king but his agent only. He also equates Gandhi with Bhishma of the Mahabharata while explaining martyrdom. Likewise, he universalises 'matrishakti' by making the 'purush' manifest through 'prakriti' and by showing Queen Elizabeth II as the feminine principle that makes the universe move. "To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha". (pp. 357-365)

The novel centres around Rama who is born a Brahmin, and believes in being a Brahmin. As "the Brahmin is never contemporary" (p.125), one of the main tasks of the author is to take the

novel out of contemporaneity, free it from the bond of immediate time. In trying to achieve this Raja Rao has to face a serious problem by the very choice of his literary genre that is the novel which is always deeply rooted in temporal and spatial reality. It is by this constant and copious use of myths, legends and fables that he attempts to impart timelessness to the characters and their interrelations. The hero is described by his wife Madeleine as "either a thousand years old or three" (p. 140) and is "the wisdom of ages" (p. 233). Immediate present means very little to him, his roots being deeply embedded in timelessness, as he himself says, "I belong to the period of Mahabharatha" (p. 351).

The novel is at once the history of an intellectual's quest for self-knowledge, which takes the form of memory and autobiography, and an affirmation in philosophic terms of universal truths to which the hero is guided by tradition and experience. What happens is a consequence of Rama's decision 'to stop life and look into it'. Rama's vital relationships - those with India, Madeleine and Savithri - are controlled and determined by his Brahmin identity and his conscious quest for self-knowledge. India is one cause of the parting of ways between Rama and Madeleine for, each tried to adopt the other's world-view, too divergent to permit a fruitful sharing of life. But there is also the basic metaphysical difference in their conception of self and Reality. Here we have the famous analogy of the serpent and the rope (pp. 335-336):

*"The world is either unreal or real - the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between - the - two - and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood ..... you see only with the serpent's eyes ..... But in true fact, with whatever eyes you see there is no serpent, there never was a serpent ..... One - the Guru - brings you the lantern; the road is seen ..... 'It's only the rope.' He shows it to you"*

It states the advaita position of Sanskara which is the ultimate truth which denies the world while affirming the underlying reality of Brahma, and emphasises the role of the Guru in removing ignorance (ajnana) of the nature of reality. These passages are, obviously, central to the novel whose main philosophical concern is the nature of Reality but, occurring as they do at the most crucial phase of the relationship between Rama and Madeleine, they are integral also to the novel as history. Rama's denial of the world as real, poses a serious threat to Madeleine's new found identity as a Buddhist. She realises that she can neither be an Ananda or a Beatrice to Rama and her relationship with him comes to a logical end. In Rama's view, Madeleine commits what his creator has called the heresy of the 'modern' woman in trying to reach the ultimate directly, but Savithri is woman par excellence. Rama and Savithri together affirm the central advaitic position that ultimate reality is identical with the individual self and that the duality of I and Thou is false. Her value of him was to wake into the truth of life, to be remembered - unto God:

*Nothing more had happened in fact, than if you look deep and long at silence you perceive an orb of centripetal sound which explains why Parvati is daughter of Himalaya and Sita born to the furrow of the field ..... she became the awareness behind my awareness, the leap of my understanding. I lost the world and she became it. (p. 169).*

Through Savithri Rama is able to achieve the annihilation of the world and attain a full recognition of his true self, but the ego, which the Guru alone can remove, persists and a perfect union, the 00 of Rama's formulation, is not yet possible. In Raja Rao's reworking of the Satyavan Savithri myth of the Mahabharata Satyavan is the symbol of 'the self, the Truth' and Savithri a symbol of Life through which the self knows itself to be deathless and eternal (pp.359-360). Rama had often thought of Kanthaka, the charger who had taken Gautama on his pilgrimage from which there is no returning, but when the time comes it is not Kanthaka but the Guru who takes him where he wants to go, for recognition and not renunciation is the way to freedom.

In *The Serpent and the Rope*, the present becomes a past, almost a continuation, of an old myth. Thus Madeleine is seen associating herself with the legend of Vashita and Buddha. The mythical parallel here extends our understanding of the present situation of Madeleine's loss of her child. Sometimes Raja Rao associates a myth or legend with a particular character to such an extent that the character becomes a part of the myth, and the present is mythologized into timelessness. This is the case with Savithri who is a fact and merges into the myth and becomes a symbol that she has always been in the Indian tradition, the Feminine principle in life, which means she is 'the earth, air, ether, sound' and worshipped as such. Three legends are associated with Savithri: that of 'budumekaye', the legend of Tristran and Isolde and the Radha-Krishna legend. The first tale tells of the 'budumekaye that guided the exiled prince Satyakama of Dharmapuri to a new kingdom, and later reconciled him to his parents and restored to him his original kingdom. Savithri's influence redirected him onto the path of his original pilgrimage. Then again, Savithri is the Isolde of Ireland and Madeleine, the Isolde of the White Hands "lacks the warmth of love which Rama experiences with Savithri in London and Cambridge. The myth of Radha and Krishna and the allegorical representation of their love (the seeker and the sought) is well known, Rama-Savithri relationship is grounded in this myth. The fantastic ritual of Savithri worshipping Rama (pp. 210-212), just another human being, has given offence to many and is misunderstood. Mrs. Mukherjee feels that this appears ritualistic without being sufficiently human and is unnatural to the character of Savithri who has been depicted as a non-conformist. The basic fact is that the peculiar rendering of the Rama-Savithri relationship discourages a full-blooded human approach, and also the episode is mythicized from the start. Thus when Savithri asks to bring some Ganges water for the 'arathi', Rama gives ordinary water. The mythicization is self-conscious too. Savithri admits that she is a Cambridge under-graduate, who smokes too, and says, "I have known my Lord for a thousand years. from janam to janam have I known my Krishna .... "Moreover, this mythicized worship of the husband by the wife has its parallel in an actual ritual still widely practised in India, the Disha-Gauri vrata. The Rama-Savithri type of mythic relationship has its parallels in such pairs like Chandidas and Rami, Jayadeva and Padmavathi, and Rupmati and Baz Bahadur.

There are incidental references to many legends which are related to Mira, Malavika, Shakuntala, the Swastika, Rakhi, Jagannath Bhatt's marriage with Shah Jahan's daughter and the composition of Ganga Lehri, Rama and Ravana in relation to dharma, Sita's exile, Guru Arjun Dev, Rama's story retold every Saturday for some benediction, the origin of Hyderabad, the Holy Grail, and Wang-chu and Cheng-yi. But none of them is recurrent in the novel nor is any of these integral to it. Rama uses these legends successfully to establish a point of view. The digressive

stories of Iswara Bhatta, and Krishna, Radha and Durvasa also are not integral but since Raja Rao is trying to revive the puranic tradition, these apparently unnecessary elements lose their superfluousness. Obviously the puranic narrative has a good deal to do with the tortuously rambling story unfolded by Ramaswamy, but some doubt arises if it is only this influence that underlies the form and style of the novel. Certainly, the style is anecdotal, digressive, self-indulgent; but its rambling qualities generate cross-references as memory catches up with itself, so that the narrative progresses in a series of loops along the path of Rama's life-story. Rama's narrative attempts to create an a-historical, cyclic order which progresses from tradition to family history, and thence to the immediate, personal past. The last stage usually arrives as a rude 'bump' that sends the narrator spinning off into the realms of legend, tradition and myth once more.

The Benares and the Ganga, which are mentioned often in the novel, also have many traditional mythic associations with both life and death. The Ganga is the river of the dead. But its waters also hold rejuvenative myths: "...she represents joy (in this life) and hope (for the life to come). She washes away the sins of him whose ashes or corpse are committed to her waters, and secures for him rebirth among the gods in a realm of celestial bliss."

The author's immense erudition, his restless curiosity, his unorthodox orthodoxy, his flaming Brahminism, his noble conception of India, his mastery of the English language and idiom make *The Serpent and the Rope* a remarkable, even unique book. God, truth, love, nature, beauty, sex, art, music, religion, philosophy, metaphysics, and East-West, encounter are discussed leisurely and with sensitivity. No single theme permeates the book. In the words of K. Natwar Singh, *fantasy piles over fantasy, plot upon subplot*; the work has little structure in the conventional sense. "But if the purists dismiss it as a clever and hectic accumulation of anecdotes by a mysterious, muddled mind, they will have missed the point. The vision may be personal: the ramifications are universal."

Finally, Mrs. Mukherjee feels that the structural unity of the novel is based more on a philosophical concept than on a mythical parallel: Raja Rao unearths metaphysical propositions everywhere. Personal relations do not always count unless they correspond to some archetypal pattern, abstract truth is read into the smallest action; hence the interweaving of myths, instead of steadily illuminating a particular situation merely adds to the flux of general observations about the cosmic truth. The myths and legends are part of the characterization of Ramaswamy, but not integral to the progress of events.

While this is largely true, these legends are interesting in themselves and show some of the aspects of the composite phenomenon called life. What Raja Rao portrays is not faith or freedom in the usual sense but an introspective way of life, a monistic vision anchored in a central mythic structure. To comprehend it fully, one needs to belong, to be part of that evocative tradition. Raja Rao has tried to join myth and metaphysics into a harmonious whole. Raja Rao's greatness lies in the steadiness and fineness of his emotional and technical growth, together with his refusal to dilute the Indian myth. Thus *The Serpent and the Rope* is a classic of Indian fiction.

But critics do not seem to be easy about the use of myth in *The Serpent and the Rope* which is not surprising considering the complexity of its form and its narrator. Mythicizing reality through myths has a purpose if they are fully integrated within the texture of the theme as in *The Waste*

Land. While accusing *The Serpent and the Rope* of different 'kinds of simplification' that an expatriate writer is prone to, Rajeev Taranath says that this 'simplification' spreads into his (Raja Rao's) use of myth and fable and makes them successful usually at the periphery of experience and not at the centre.....Eliot's use of myth is part of the essential structure of his creation. In Raja Rao it is subsidiary." So many legends and myths instead of clarifying the theme, seem to overwhelm the reader with a brilliant display of classical and oriental learning rather than with a sympathetic understanding of their inner meaning. For instance, it is pointed out that Rama's affair with Savithri does not coalesce with Satyavan Savithri legend and Tristan-Isolde romance. But, one should bear in mind here that Raja Rao seems to concentrate more on the emotional emphasis of the legend he uses than on factual parallels. Like the rustic old woman narrator of *Kanthapura*, in *The Serpent and the Rope* too, the language of symbol and myth comes naturally to the narrator, Rama brought up in ancient Brahminic tradition. Like Baudelaire's man, he walks through a forest of symbols. A "huge flat stone at the edge of the garden" in his house in France becomes Shiva's bull, Nandi, for him and 'a huge gently-curved rock' at the top of the hill, an elephant. Rama's life-story can be appropriately summed up, in William York Tindall's words describing Melville's *Billy Budd*, 'a mixture of myth, fact and allusion that have values beyond reference'. Moreover, the importance of metaphysical speculations and conclusions can never be ignored in this book. "India", observes Heinrich Zimmer, "is one of the great homes of the popular fable ....The vividness and simple aptness of the images drive home the points of the teaching; they are like pegs to which can be attached no end of abstract reasoning." It is through fables that Rama's Vedanta is best expressed. The nature of Maya as cosmic illusion which ceases to exist only for the person in a state of illumination is brought out well by the story of Radha, Krishna's beloved, and her crossing the rain-swollen Jamuna river. The actual incidents are so fused with the old myths and legends, and theories of history based on certain metaphysical standpoint that the novel progresses more through digressions - either into myths, or discussions on metaphysical problems, than through actual happenings in the world of phenomenal reality. One may see that Raja Rao is not so much narrating a story as weaving a romantic myth imbued with a variety of intellectual insights and spiritual apprehensions. One may hear discussion on Marxism-Nazism-Vedanta, Masculine-Feminine Principle, history and individual identity; one may have legends and fables of various kinds culled from different cultures, or one may note a variety of objects being processed through the mythical imagination; but the effort is always the same; to convey a special vision of life with the aid of evocative philosophical suggestions and poetic insights. Thus, a pattern is there in the novel beneath its "philosophical garrulousness" as some critics may regard it. "The poetic, dream-like intimations, the view of life offered from a position above the conscious mind, the mythical scaffolding, and, finally, the surrender of a liberal-humanistic emphasis on human reason and personality, are the truly revealing qualities of its Indianness. An unsigned review *Hickory Record* (NC) April 4, (1963) says: "Reflecting the flavour and wholeness of the traditional Indian way of life, where fact and fable, philosophy and the matter-of-fact blend into one, this semiautobiographical novel can be called timeless, just as India herself seems timeless and other-worldly by virtue of her unchanging rituals."

#### ♦ 6.4 QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN

### Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*

The quest for identity has become a universal theme of modern literature. Modern man finds himself trapped in the whirlwind of rapid technological and socio-economic changes, and the result is separation and confusion of values. *Man longs for stability, security and wholeness while impersonal forces tear his private life apart.* In other words, his microcosm (private life) is threatened by powerful operations in the macrocosm (public life). According to Erik H. Erikson *The key problem of identity, then, is (as the term connotes) the capacity of the ego to sustain sameness and continuity in the face of changing fate. But fate always combines changes in inner conditions, which are the result of ongoing life stages, and changes in the milieu, the historical situation. Identity connotes the resiliency of maintaining essential pattern in the processes of change. Thus, strange as it may seem, it takes a well established identity to tolerate radical changes, for the well-established identity has arranged itself around basic values which cultures have in common.*

In Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, Ramaswamy claims: "I am not telling a story here. I am writing the sad and uneven chronicle of a life, my life . . . ." Ramaswamy's story operates at three levels: it relates and registers the changes in his inner conditions which are brought about by his "ongoing life stages"; it takes stock of "the changes in the milieu," the historical and cultural situation of India in the context of East-West confrontation of values; and it explores the possibility of achieving "well-established identity" by building a bridge across common values basic to different cultures. Actually the novel deals with the identity crisis of the hero — Ramaswamy, whose problem is born out of his own personal situation :

"I was born an orphan, and have remained one. I have wandered the world and have sobbed in hotel rooms and in trains, have looked at the cold mountains and sobbed, for I had no mother" (p. 6). His father is also dead now and he tells us that he never loved his father. In terms of the identity-crisis, the failure of the macrocosm in insuring continuity and security to the new generation amounts to the failure of the paternal principle, for in the generational cycle it is father's business to provide economic, social and psychological support to his family — the essential minimum conditions for motherhood to operate. In the microcosm mothers give love and hope to insure healthy psychological growth of the child. But mothers can provide on the basis of their own past experience of being mothered, and the sense of continuity is essential here.

Also, trustworthy contemporary surroundings in the form of social and cultural institutions must share and support a mother's role, which should be reinforced by an all enveloping world-image, a metaphysical concept, which is capable of tying past, present, and future into a convincing pattern of providence. Now, in *The Serpent and the Rope*, it is Raja Rao's article of faith that "an all-enveloping world-image" or "metaphysical concept" can create national identity (in the form of social and cultural institutions), and a national identity can solve the individual's



identity crisis. The two problems (personal and national) are resolved and transcended by the solution of the third, which is only a perspective, a realization. The personal is symbolic of the cultural, and the two can hardly be disentangled in the novel.

The personal problem of Ramaswamy, his own identity crisis is the identity crisis of his ancient nation. His own sickness is symbolic of the discontinuity and attenuation of the whole Indian culture :

"I am a tired man. I am of a tired race which for three (four or five?) thousand years has led such a studious, thin-fed, sedentary existence, that our nose and throat, our ears and tongue and eyes, have lost somewhat in native agility . . . . Oh, this fight against the contingency of modern life, of modern civilization; the battle is lost before it's begun! We've the fibres to know, not the sinews to act: we, the real impotents of the earth." (p. 145)

This applies not only to the Brahmins but to the whole of India. Ramaswamy's identity-crisis, therefore, is not only a quest to seek his own mother, (his father is dead — the paternal principle has failed) but also a search for a definition of the motherland. The crisis in his personal life with Madeleine is precipitated after his visit to India, and after his awareness of the values that Little mother unconsciously embodies. Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly points out that both Ramaswamy and Madeleine are intensely self-conscious about the epistemologies that they represent, in spite of their sharply differentiated attitude towards life.

Rama has had three mothers, two of them being stepmothers — correspondingly, he has three motherlands, one real, India, and two adopted, England and France. And just as a new awareness of ancient values has come to him through young Little mother, similarly, a new definition of his motherland may be achieved by building a bridge across these nations and cultures. The marriage of Rama and Madeleine is, therefore, symbolic of marriage between countries and continents. The motif of building and crossing bridges runs throughout the novel. Rama is trying to build a historical bridge in his thesis by linking the Bogomilites and the Druzes and searching back the Indian background of the Cathars in Jains or Buddhists. Madeleine, also becomes interested in building similar bridges under the influence of Rama. She starts researching on the idea of the Holy Grail. She wants to establish that the cup of Christ was a Buddhist relic. The Holy Grail gives Madeleine's sense of geography a natural movement and she starts loving countries and epochs not her own. We are told that Madeleine, like all melancholic people, loved bridges. So they build another kind of bridge together — a son is born to them. But unfortunately he dies and the bridge is never crossed. Madeleine was afraid of crossing bridges; this is why she changed his name from Krishna to Pierre from the second day of his illness. Now there is no bridge that they could cross together. For Madeleine "all bridges now led to Spain" and Rama knew that he could never go in that direction. Madeleine's faith in Rama is shaken and she never recovers from the shock.

In other words the end has come quite in the beginning and the book is only to construct the process of this end. The bridge is not built by standing on two opposite banks of the river. The two

should have become one in the third, and the duality should have been resolved into oneness. But the death of Krishna forces Madeleine and Rama to find expression for their opposite viewpoints. For Madeleine the birth of a son meant the extension and continuity of her own self and that of the culture to which she belongs, which Rama in his "masculine isolation" and "Indian aloneness" can never understand. For a French mother, "It is the birth of the god in a chalice, the Holy Grail" (p. 36). Madeleine also articulates the cultural dualities in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of her own self:

You people are sentimental about the invisible, we about the visible . . . "The child in the cradle. And the cradle against the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean the cradle of our civilization. I slept, Rama, night after night in the nursing home, not thinking of Pierre or of you but of Demeter and Poseidon and the voyage of Ulysses. In fact at first I thought a second name for Krishna would be Ulysses. How I rounded the names on my tongue: Krishna Ulysses Ramaswamy . . . (p. 37)

Madeline explores the roots of her own culture in order to achieve her identity. She sees a vision of Demeter and sings the beautiful Homeric hymn Demeter Kourotrophos to herself. The conflict starts when she asserts :

"For you it was not a child, a son, your son and my son; but your heir. For me it was just a something — but then suddenly when I took him in my arms and held him against my breast the whole of creation shone in a single second — the nativity, I repeat, the first and only birth, the proud proof of happiness. Yes, for me Pierre was happiness, he did not make me happy. He was proof that man is, and cannot be happy but be happiness itself, (p. 38)

And Rama asserts: "Duality is anti-Indian; the non-dual affirms the Truth" (p. 41). Life has fluidity and continuity like the Ganges, and Himalaya "reveals the background of our unborn, immaculate being" (p. 42). It is awesome, distant and inscrutable. At the top sits Lord Shiva, the Master of life and death and the embodiment of both the sexes — a symbol of oneness.

Raja Rao is endeavouring to sift his own tradition with a view to selecting the best in our ancient thought and culture. He is trying to articulate this selective best to achieve identity in modern terms :

Truth began where sorrow was accepted, and India began where Truth was acknowledged. So sorrow is our river, sorrow our earth, but the green of our trees and the white of our mountains are the affirmation that Truth is possible; that when the cycle of birth and death is over, we can proclaim ourselves the Truth. Truth is the Himalaya, and Ganges Humanity, (p. 35)

Ganges symbolizes humanity, so does the mysterious womanhood — the feminine principle. Raja Rao visualizes this in the person of his own sister :

Saroja was a strange sensation for me. Here was a mystery which I had never observed before: the girl becoming woman . . . Saroja's presence now obsessed me sometimes, like one of those nights with the perfume of magnolia. Rich and green seemed the sap as it rose, and it had a night of its own and a day . . . something primordial was awakening in a creature, and I felt that maturity in a girl was like the new moon or the change of equinox, it had polar affinities. There was something

of the smell of musk . . . I had named something I had not known yet — it was the absence that had become presence again; it was not Saroja I felt and I smelt, but something of the Ganges and the Jumna that rose into my very being. Benares was indeed nowhere but inside oneself: “Kashi Kshetram, shariram tribhuvana jananim.” And I knew: all brides be Benares born. (pp. 49-50)

It marks a stage in Rama’s development. This consciousness is further developed when the crowning of the British queen takes place. Here the Ganges becomes a symbol of the maternal principle, which is considered holy because consciousness of this principle of life is essential to the resolution of the identity crisis. The river as a symbol is made more inclusive and comprehensive when Seine, Thames and Cam are considered sister rivers, and equally holy guardians of the cultures which they have nurtured through centuries. And just as Benares is inside oneself, so is Paris “an area in oneself, a Concorde in one’s being . . . A sort of Benares turned outward” (pp. 51-52). It is a Sanctuary built to the Mother of God. Seine has given birth to such beauty of spirit that, “Everywhere in the South you meet with this civilized attention, which shows how man has been informed of the sainthood of natural living” (p. 53). Similarly Cam is a holy river beyond history it is history itself. “The Cam is a river that lives on giving dreams” so that “a better England, a better India, a better world be circumscribed” (p. 168):

Rama realises the truth about England and feels that England is in his bones and breath. He recognises that “the Londoner is eminently good. He is so warm, he is indeed the first citizen of the world” (p. 199). Besides, “the white man, I felt, did not bear his burden, but the Englishman did.” And, “there would be good government on earth, and decency and a certain nobility of human behaviour, and all because England was. That I, an Indian who disliked British rule, should feel this only revealed how England was recovering her spiritual destiny, how in anointing her Queen she would anoint herself” (p. 200).

This is not only the spiritual recovery of England, this is the spiritual recovery of Rama, and of India, too. This open-hearted acceptance of the best in the countries of his adoption corresponds to his respectful acceptance, and genuine appreciation of Little mother. This makes for wholeness and contributes to the making of his new self. Rama now achieves an “awareness of a new continuity” and his hope of making Madeleine his own is strengthened. Besides, Little mother has sent the family jewels — the toe rings, for her daughter-in-law to insure continuity. This new awareness must help him in establishing deeper relationship with Madeleine. For Rama, his new identity would consist of the best in his own tradition and the best of France and England. In short, the wholeness will be constituted of these diverse elements. Diversity is essential but the essence is unity. If duality persists, the identity crisis will persist also. In order to partake and perpetuate this new self Madeleine should believe in this unity and strengthen it. But Madeleine’s identity crisis is of a different nature. To her, her marriage to Rama is based on duality i.e. an understanding between two individuals. She is extremely sincere in her efforts toward making this marriage successful. Rama’s Indianness is meant to add to her knowledge and awareness to strengthen her own identity. She is proud of Rama’s brilliance and loves his lofty impersonality, but she hates Indian haphazardness and haughtiness. She feels insecure in cutting herself off from her own cultural moorings. She thinks she has failed Indian gods but she is mistaken, for Rama can easily worship her gods, and is actually anxious about his Christian becoming. The failure of their marriage, therefore, is due to a gap in understanding. From now onwards, Madeleine comes under

the influence of Georges, the Christian fanatic, and drifts away from Rama. Rama wants her as his "companion of pilgrimage . . . to lie at the feet of God together and unalone" (p. 99). But unfortunately Madeleine loves him out of pity to redress the wrongs the British have done to India. She also fails to understand that Rama's India has nothing to do with history; it is eternal:

India has no history, for Truth cannot have history. If every battle of France has been fought for humanity, then it would be honest to say no battle in India was ever fought for humanity's sake. Or if fought, it was soon forgotten. Krishna fought against Bhisma by giving Bhisma courage. Mahatma Gandhi fought against the Muslims by fighting for them. He died a Hindu martyr for an Indian cause. He died for Truth, (p. 102) This India, i.e. Truth, is beyond any formulation of conflicting polarities of good and evil: "India is everybody's:

India is in everybody." Rama is a quester after this "India," this eternal Truth. For him this is true joy, true freedom. But for Madeleine India can at best be a paradise. This gap between these two attitudes is never bridged. Rama wants to prove that he is metaphysically right and he defines his identity at this stage in relation to the Absolute. All women are perfect for they have "the feminine principle in them, the yin, the prenti" and all men "are perfect when they turn inward, and know that the ultimate is man's destiny" (p. 311). Madeleine's spiritual satisfaction lies in Buddhistic renunciation, austerity and compassion. To Rama it is self-destructive: "the anthropocentric civilization, whether it be the Purist (or Protestant) or the Buddhist (or Jain), must be self-destructive" (p. 302). Madeleine develops mystic powers through her esoteric practices. But to Rama, "the miraculous itself is the dual made manifest" (p. 335). He emphatically refutes duality in a key passage in the novel:

"The world is either unreal or real — the serpent or the rope. There is no in-between-the-two — and all that's in-between is poetry, is sainthood. You might go on saying all the time, 'No, no, it's the rope,' and stand in the serpent. And looking at the rope from the serpent is to see paradises, saints, avatdras, gods, heroes, universes . . . You see the serpent and in fear you feel you are it, the serpent, the saint. One — the Guru — brings you the lantern; the road is seen, the long, white road, going with the statutory stars. 'It's only the rope.' He shows it to you. And you touch your eyes and know there never was a serpent. Where was it, where, I ask you? The poet who saw the rope as serpent became the serpent, and so a saint. Now, the saint is shown that his sainthood was identification, not realization. The actual, the real has no name. The rope is no rope to itself." (p. 335)

Ultimately it is a question of perception. The reality is only One i.e. one's Self. This realization is made possible only through a personal Guru, for which one has to make a gift of one's ego. Madeleine refuses to accept Rama as her Guru. Her ego becomes more assertive as she advances in her Buddhistic practices, and she challenges her husband to find for himself an "Indian Maitreyi" and leave her alone. The final break has come. She is advancing toward her sainthood, he toward his selfhood. The concept of the personal Guru signifies the rebirth of the paternal principle, the failure of which precipitates the identity crisis. The realization of the primacy of the preceiver in the recognition of the truth — the Absolute, kills duality or multiplicity and reintegrates the psyche. Apart from these two characters, Saroja and Savitri also face identity crises. Both have been exposed to western education and both refuse to accept the traditional roles assigned to Indian women. In the end both accept the traditional destiny. But in

the case of Saroja the conflict is resolved by traditional authority, and her revolt fails for lack of conviction and courage. But Savithri's quest assumes the symbolic and mythical proportion of an epic character. She offers a contrast to Madeleine's development, for we are told that if Madeleine was all explanation, Savithri was all recognition. Like Madeleine, Savithri is also trying to imbibe new values from a distant continent. Emancipated and shockingly unorthodox in her way of life, she refuses to accept the traditional role dictated to her by her parents. Though she has agreed to get engaged to Pratap, she refuses to marry him. She has a Muslim friend in London but on suddenly discovering Rama she falls in love with him. Savithri symbolizes modern India, caught up in the conflict between tradition and modernity. Savithri understands that neither her father nor Pratap can help her in resolving this conflict.

Rama convinces her as no other man has done in her life. The moment of realization is also the moment of surrender for her. But for Rama also this is a moment of recognition — a stage in the development of his own self. It is not that he becomes her Guru — her Krishna: she also becomes the medium of his self-realization, his Radha — the embodiment of the feminine principle, the eternal Truth. She worships him as her Krishna, her Lord. But what is the meaning of this ritual? It is a commitment to the Absolute and a recognition that one belongs only to one's own self. The consummation will take place only when Ramaswamy becomes Krishna, it cannot take place now :

"Because Krishna is not Krishna yet. And when he is Krishna there is no Radha as Radha, but Radha is himself . . ." (p. 363). This is a paradox, the mortal paradox of man; and strange as it may seem, "there where we take there is no love, and there where we love there is no taking" (p. 363). One can resolve this paradox only by "Discipleship of Krishna, of the T r u t h " (p. 363).

Hence, Savithri goes back to Pratap and marries him. She realizes that she is getting married to the eternal in him and there Rama's and Pratap's truth become one "Absolute," and all contradictions are resolved. Rama attains here another dimension in his quest for selfhood. But he realizes he has a long way to go :

"K r i s h n a is not Krishna yet." The horse Kanthaka is waiting for him but he is not taking refuge in renunciation, he is going into battle. The horse symbolizes quest, and as the road is long, Rama's realization makes him humble. Waves are nothing but water. So is the Sea, says the epigraph at the beginning of the novel and its implications are realized by Rama only in the end, when he accepts the discipleship of his Guru. Kanthaka must take him now to Travancore. But that is not the end of the journey, for harnessing one's ego is no easy job. True marriage implies a complete negation of the ego, which is possible only at death. But Rama is now ready to move to the next stage in the journey of his soul. He, himself, has been a Guru to Savithri, but there is no limit to the development of the "self." Rama has recognized this truth and has cultivated the humility to accept discipleship. His commitment to his "India" is abiding and clear :

India is not a country like France is, or like England; India is an idea, a metaphysic. Why go there anyhow. I thought; I was born an exile, and I could continue to be one. My India I carried wheresoever I went. But not to see the Ganges, not to dip into her again and again . . . I would go back to India, for that India was my breath, my only sweetness, gentle and wise; she was my mother. I felt I could still love something: a river, a mountain, the name of a woman . . . (p. 376)

And this is not renunciation. It is onward march to a new dharamkshetra, Travancore this time. Benares has been conquered and the South must yield its spiritual riches in defining an Indian identity. Travancore is the new capital in the symbolic and psychic geography of Rama's self. The quest does not end with the end of the book, the dissolution of Rama's marriage with Madeleine does not signify any shrinking of Rama's spirit. It only signifies that Madeleine's France is not his France, nor Madeleine's India is his India. So this divorce is also a discovery. The obvious tragedy is actually an enrichment and affirmation in the sense that identity crisis has been successfully resolved.

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✦ 6.5 VERY SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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**Q. 1. Who is the protagonist of the novel "The Serpent and the Rope"?**

**Ans.** Ramaswamy.

**Q. 2. When was 'The Serpent and the Rope' Published ?**

**Ans.** In 1960.

**Q. 3. How many 'countries' culture has been depicted in 'The Serpent and the Rope'.**

**Ans.** Three—India, France and England.

**Q. 4. Why did Ramaswamy go to France ?**

**Ans.** Ramaswamy went to France to work on a thesis connected with the Catherheresy.

**Q. 5. Ramaswamy is known as the embodiment of—**

**Ans.** Thufan, Krishna and Satyavan.

**Q. 6. Where did Ramaswamy and Madeline meet.**

**Ans.** At the university of Cach.

**Q. 7. When did Rama and Madeline get married.**

**Ans.** On 10th February 1949.

**Q. 8. What is the name of Rama's son ?**

**Ans.** Krishna and later Pierre.

**Q. 9. What are the three levels on which the novel moves ?**

**Ans.** The three levels are : It relates and registers the changes in Ramaswamy's inner conditions which are brought about by his 'on going life stages. Secondly it takes stock of 'the changes in the Millera the historical and cultural situation of India in the context of East-West confrontation of values, and thirdly it explores the possibility of achieving 'well established identity' by building a bridge across common values basic to different cultures.

**Q. 10. What does Ramaswamy's Sickness symbolize ?**

**Ans.** His sickness symbolizes the discontinuity and attenuation of the whole Indian culture.

**Q. 11. What does Rama and Madeline's marriage symbolize ?**

**Ans.** It is symbolic of marriage between continents and countries.

**Q. 12. Who is Savitri ?**

**Ans.** Savitri is a Rajput Princess and she also Rama's Platonic beloved.

**Q. 13. Who is 'Little Mother' ?**

**Ans.** Little mother is the third step mother of Rama.

**Q. 14. What does Rama realize in the end of the novel ?**

**Ans.** He realizes that the whole European culture and the materialistic civilization is only an illusion like the serpent, while the Indian spiritual advaitic vedant based vision in the reality, the rope.

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**✦ 6.6 SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

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**Q.1. Which is the greater cause of suffering: the things the characters can't control, like the weather and the harvests – or the things they can, like the way they think of themselves and treat each other?**

**Ans.** Suffering is fact of life in Nectar in a Sieve. Characters suffer financially, but they also suffer in deeper and more personal ways. Rukmani watches as her children starve, and her family breaks apart. She even holds her husband as he dies. There's a message that suffering, because it is a natural part of life, must be borne. There's also a lot of interesting discussion between Kenny and Rukmani about whether suffering can be fought. These characters question whether there's any purpose in being angry about the injustice of suffering if there's nothing they can do about it. Ultimately they come down on different sides. Rukmani accepts suffering, while her last son devotes his life to trying to alleviate it. Suffering brings spiritual cleansing, but it also inspires people to hope that there is something beyond suffering.

**Q. 2. Discuss how there is concept of 'in between' in the novel 'The Serpent and the Rope' ?**

**Ans.** The serpent and the rope is an in between. It materializes the neutral position amidst a pauranic tale and a modernist rover, it is the perfect compromise between the West and the East an in-between amidst Buddhism and Christianity, it represents the balance between fictional narration and poetry, spirituality and the domain of the flesh. The particular use of the language, which at the same time is not British English nor Indian English, mirrors that aim.

**Q. 3. The theme of marriage is Raja Rao's 'The Serpent and the Rope'.**

**Ans.** In the serpent and the rope marriage has been presented as a pervasive social institution. The novelist has drawn our attention pointedly to the pervasiveness of this social institution in the manner he presents human relationships. Madelaine marries Ramaswamy because she has a desire to understand India through her identification with the protagonist. Ramaswamy says :

She loved me partly because she felt India had been wronged by the British, and because she would, in.....

She was psychologically and spiritually alienated from Ramaswamy. Such polarisation leads to the failure of her marriage. Hence Rama turns to Savitri for love. She fulfils that which Madeline could ship she at length emerges as the vertiable heroine of the novel. The Saoithri Rama relations for ans the crux of the novel. It is the pivot on which the action of the story rotates. It deals with the faminine principle which is the very ideal and base of a harmonious mantal relationship.

In the novel, we have two wholly western marriages a. "West-East Marriage", symbolised by the Rama Madeline tie and Hindu marriage based on the concept of 'Jati' which says that the individual should marry within his 'Jai a social situation' prevailing in our contemporary society.

In the portrayal of Kshatriya marriages in the novel, Raja Rao maintains strict fidelity to facts of contemporary Indian practice by mirroring the proclivity of the kshatriyas to seek prospective spouses across their caste line. This is exemplified by the marriage of Savitri to Pratap Singh and on the basis of caste considerations, Jagirdars like Pratap's family members can not be equal with the royal family of Raja Rathubir Singh, Savitri's father.

On the other hand we also find that Savitri's sister marries a rich banya a very reputed politician whose prospects and chance of being a minister was the sole stimulus behind this intercaste marriage.

Further, the remarriage of Hindu widows was looked upon with contempt in the pre-independent India. But widower marriages are now a very common practice. This aspect of the marriage institution is reflected in the lives of Rama's father who marries for the third time.

The overall impact that Rao makes on us about the institution of marriage is one of despair and gloom. It is not basically bilateral and there is a lot of deception and discontentment in the marital life of the couples. Raja Rao presents all the married women with all their natural follies and foibles. Hence it would not be erroneous to say that there is hardly a holy and sacred marriage in the serpent and the Rope.

**Q. 4. Discuss how *Serpent the Serpent and the Rope* is a philosophical novel.**

**Ans.** Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is the greatest of Indian English novels. This novel which took ten years in shaping itself is a highly complex and many-sided novel. Being at once the tragic story of a marriage of minds which drift apart; the spiritual autobiography of a learned, sensitive and imaginative modern Indian intellectual. The hero Ramaswami is a young man of great literary cultures. He knows many languages, vastly read and widely travelled man. Being a product of many cultures, Rama's mind is a seething whirlpool of cultural currents and own currents. Unlike the simple story teller in *Kanthapura*, who knew only Indian myths and legends, Rama is familiar with myths and legends of different civilization and he can describe parallels between them and forge a link between the past and the present by comprehending the essential oneness of history.

Raja Rao has used the myths and legends to highlight the situation of characters and the relationship between them and to substantiate and criticize the abstract thought of the hero, Ramaswami. The title '*The Serpent and the Rope*' is symbolical and philosophical as it illustrates the doctrine that just as the rope is often wrongly taken to be the serpent, the limited self is often regarded individual soul, which is only an aspect of God. One realizes that the serpent is really only a rope, when one who knows points this out similarly upon being initiated by the Guru; one realizes that jiva (soul) is one with siva. The serpent and the rope is truly philosophical novel in that in it the philosophy is not in the story the philosophy is the story.

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**❖ 6.7 LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

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**Q. 1. Justify the title of the novel '*The Serpent and the Rope*' ?**

**Ans.** The serpent and the rope begins with Ramaswami's coming back to India after spending some years in France, and his metaphysical definition of the re-discovered country. The



protagonist's awareness of the two cultures intensifies his concern for his own identity. He is in search of true image, torn between the traditional values he has absorbed from childhood and the new values his education has bestowed upon him. Therefore, instead of being a static East West confrontation it becomes a stage in his (Rama's) evolution, an objectification of his restless intellect; "which ultimately ends with the resolution : Fully aware of all that India and Europe stand for, the novelist is in a position to mediate between the two. He brings home not only the points of departure but also the points of contact through an apt fictional presentation. The hero of the novel Ramaswamy met Medelaine, a college teacher of history at the university of the Caeh. She loved Ramawamy because he is an Indian and she loves India. Soon they are married and have a child. After sometime it was discovered that their marriage was not a union of souls but a result of temporary lust for physical pleasure. The initial proximity between the two coming from diverse cultural lands, stalks as they do undergo a serious rift and eventually they part ways.

However, it is essential to note that neither Ramaswamy is an average Indian youth nor is Madelaine an ordinary French girl. Both of them are highly sensitive representatives of their country's cultural and metaphysical approaches to life. Ramaswamy reviews her estimation of own character in the following words :

I knew she would be unhappy first, then angry, knowing that Indians are so undependable. If a European says he comes by such plane he will come by it, if he missed its connection he will sleep in a hotel and come by the next. But this Indian haphazardness, like the towel in the bathroom that lay everywhere about, was exasperating to Medelaina.

Both of them are not satisfied with each other's behaviour and try to find some anomaly in their way of living. What Madelaina says about herself to Ramaswamy is meaningful in view of her class and so with to which she belongs :

You will never understand us the French. There is piety of course and compassion. But Lord, there is so much calculation. I tell your virture is, a part of French bourgeois's economy.

Rama with all his attraction towards Madelaminea is unable to adjust with her. Though Madelainea in spite of cultural difference tries to come closer to him. She becomes conscious in her effort to come closer to him and share his religion and mythology. But Ramaswamy's quest finds fulfilment. Only when he comes in contact with Savithri. An Indian girl whether she stays in Idnia on in the west, is always capable of realizing her feminine virtue. Savitri herself accepts, "This combridge undergraduate, who smokes like a chimney and dances to barbarian jazz. She says into, I've known my lord for thousand live, from janam to janam have I knows my Krishan."

Their personal relationship is no longer stable keeping in view their different cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the role of little Mother is in every way the exact opposite of Madelaine. It has been seen that Madelaine really lacks that 'Feminine Principle' and 'mother principle' so richly and abundantly present in little mother. But a far more, fundamental difference between them is that Madelaine is actually aware of the values she stands for, while ML's total strength lies in her unconscious and unquestioning identification with a set of ancient values.

While comparing and contrasting the culture of two main characters, Raja Rao comes to the conclusion that both are complementary to each other.

Finally Ramaswamy realizes on his return to India that whole European culture and the materialistic civilization is only an illusion like the serpent, while the Indian spiritual and vedant based vision is the reality, the rope.

### **Test yourself**

Q.1. How do you think the novel "Serpent and the Rope" succeeds in finding the spiritual truth it is aimed at?

Q.2. Write a short note on Raja Rao's style of writing and how can he be compared to the likes of Thomas Hardy, R.K.Narayan?

Q.3. Discuss the element of comedy as used by Raja Rao in this novel. What effect does it has on the whole plot?

Q.4. Why do you think Ramaswamy was in search of his true image. How can you relate it to the current cultural shift and so called "westernisation".

Q.5. Briefly describe the relation between the two civilisations and the two symbols as used to denote them i.e the serpent and the rope. How correctly do you think the rope symbolises the true spirit of Indian culture?

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