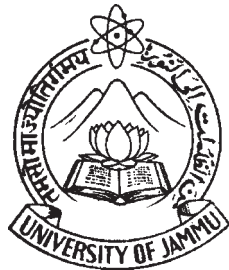


**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE & ONLINE EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU  
JAMMU**



**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL  
M. A. ENGLISH  
SEMESTER-IV**

**TITLE OF THE COURSE :  
COLONIAL & POST COLONIAL LITERATURE**

**COURSE CODE : ENG-414 UNIT I-VI LESSONS :1-23**

**2023**

***Teacher Incharge :*  
Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

***Course Co-ordinator :*  
Prof. Anupama Vohra**

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## M. A. ENGLISH

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## **WELCOME MESSAGE**

Welcome to Semester - IV !

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you to PG English Semester - IV. We started our journey together when you enrolled for PG English Programme. After the semester IV end examination and declaration of result you will earn your M.A. English Degree. Do study hard and prepare well for the semester end examination and put in a little extra effort to prepare the Internal Assessment Assignments.

You are advised to visit DD&OE Library regularly and make the best use of the books available to prepare notes. You can also prepare simultaneously for the NET/SET/SLET examination and the study material of Course Code : ENG-414 has been prepared keeping in view your syllabus and also your preparation for NET/SLET/SET examination. Do work hard.

With best wishes!

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**  
Teacher Incharge

**Prof. Anupama Vohra**  
Course Co-ordinator

## UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

**Course Code : ENG-414**                      **Duration of Examination : 3 hrs.**

**Title : Colonial and Postcolonial Literature**                      **Total Marks : 100**

**Credits : 5**                                      **(a) Semester Examination : 80**

**(b) Sessional Assessment : 20**

Detailed Syllabus for the examination to be held in May 2020, 2021 & 2022

### **OBJECTIVE :**

The objective of the course is to give the learner a broad perspective on colonial and postcolonial writings in English. It will take into account the ideology of the colonizers and its impact on the culture and traditions of the colonized nations and their desire to create new national literatures. This will constitute the focus of the study.

### **Unit - I**

Joseph Conrad                                      *Heart of Darkness*

### **Unit - II**

Bapsi Sidhwa                                      *Ice-Candy Man*

### **Unit - III**

Chinua Achebe                                      *A Man of the People*

### **Unit - IV**

Khalid Hosseini                                      *The Kite Runner*

### **Unit - V**

Salman Rushdie                                      *Midnight's Children*

### **Unit - VI**

Amitav Ghosh                                      *The Shadow Lines*

### **Mode of Examination**

The paper will be divided into sections A, B & C.

**M.M. = 80**

### **SECTION A**

#### **Multiple Choice Questions**

Q. No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives two from each with four options each will be set and candidates will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark (10 x 1 = 10)

### **SECTION B**

#### **Short Answer Questions**

Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in 80 - 100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks (2 x 5 = 10)

### **SECTION C**

#### **Long Answer Questions**

Q. No. 3 comprises long answer type questions the entire syllabus. Six questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt all the questions in 300 - 350 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks. (5 x 12 = 60)

### **SUGGESTED READINGS**

M.M. Mahmood

*The Colonial Encounter*

Bill Ashcroft, ed

*The Empire Writes Back*

- Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*
- ..... *Black Skins, White Masks*
- ..... *Studies in Dying Colonialism*
- Ashcroft Griffiths and Tiffin, eds. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*
- B. Anderson *Imagined Communities*
- Gayatri Chakravorty *The Other Worlds*
- Homi Bhabha *Nation and Narration*
- Pawel, Ernst. *The Nightmare of Reason : A Life of Franz Kafka*. New York: Farrar, Status, Giroux, 1984.
- Wagenbach, Klaus, *Franz Kafka: Pictures of a Life*. Translated by Arthur S. Wensinger New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

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**JOSEPH CONRAD (1857-1924)****STRUCTURE**

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)
- 1.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.4 Suggested Reading

**1.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to introduce to the learner the life and the works of Joseph Conrad to help the learner to prepare for the semester end examination.

**1.2 JOSEPH CONRAD (1857-1924)****Life and Works of Joseph Conrad**

Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, who later on adopted the simpler pen-name Joseph Conrad, was a Pole and was born to aristocratic parents in 1857 at Berdichev, a town in the Polish Ukraine, then a part of Russia. He spent the first thirteen years of his life here. His family was of land owning gentry, various members of which had fought in the long and intermittent struggle with Russia. His father was an exiled Polish patriot who struggled for Polish independence and was imprisoned by the Tsar's officials and sent to a concentration camp in Vologoda, North Russia, for his part in the rising of 1863. His mother, a woman of equally exalted character, was also banished. She



accompanied her husband, but being a person of weak health, died there after three years. Conrad's father was a learned man who was revered by his compatriots for his idealism and devotion and adored by his only son. He translated the works of Victor Hugo and Shakespeare into Polish. After completing his sentence, he returned to Poland. He was already a shattered, weak and bitter man. He could not survive for long and died when Conrad was just eleven years old. Conrad was educated at Cracow and being the child of his father he was a great reader, always dreaming of himself enacting what he read. The incident is well known and it has been recorded by him and all his biographers. The boy of nine or so one day, reading the map of Africa, put his finger on a spot in the middle of the still dark continent and said to himself, "When I grow up I shall go *there*." He intended to join the university but his fate decided things for him differently. As an orphan, he was placed under the care of his uncle for not less than six years where he used to spend time in educating himself reading in French and German. It is a fact that he knew French from his childhood and always spoke it fluently; but of English not a word till he was sixteen. He was specially influenced by his French tutors, from whose Gallic vanity he got the idea that "French is the only modern language fit for literature." His chosen masters were French – Flaubert, Maupassant, Anatole France and Daudet. When he thought of writing the novel of adventure, he combined with it the objective spirit of French naturalism.

It was at the age of nineteen that Conrad decided to become a sailor though he was totally ignorant about the life of the sea as there was no seafaring in the family. Probably its appeal was due to the romantic ideas which he gathered from his reading of French books. It is pertinent to remember that he was Slavic and uncommonly introspective, perhaps being lonely from his childhood. When he spoke of "the loneliness that surrounds every human soul," he unconsciously told what manner of man he was and what he must write. Among other yearnings it was the desire for freedom in the heart of this young boy which prompted him to take this decision to leave for Marseilles in 1874 to become a sailor where he joined the French Mercantile Marine. Conrad's sense of adventure made him

develop another hobby, that is of a gun runner. He took part in several gun-running expeditions on behalf of Don Carlos, a preacher to the Spanish throne. He used his experiences of the adventures as a sailor and gun-runner in his stories and novels, which are largely a reflection of his own personality, which was solitary and shadowy as that of a stranger in a foreign port. It is true also of his character and the human events and the scenes which he describes. Conrad had a background of Slav sensibility and the spirit of Russian novelists, which adds a special quality to his perception of the mysterious and his philosophy of life.

After serving for four years in the French Merchant Navy, he landed at Lowestoft and joined the British merchant service. By 1885 he had his master mariner's certificate. Conrad got a job on a British ship named the *Mavis* in 1878 though he did not know English language then at all. He decided that if he was to remain a sailor, he would be a British sailor. He became a naturalized British citizen and remained a man apart, a fellow separated from his own people. It took eight years for him to obtain a third mate's ticket, then a mate's and finally a master's. He made several voyages to the Far East notably to Singapore, Borneo and the Gulf of Siam, all of which provided the material for his novels. These places are more than the backdrop of his stories; they provide characters and real situations and their attitudes and value patterns affect their course of action. For instance, Conrad's short novel, *Heart of Darkness* is the by - product of his trip to the Congo. The place no doubt stirred his imagination but also affected his health in the form of malarial attacks. He returned to the sea but his ill-health caused him to leave the sea again in 1894. He had spend twenty years roaming the world in sail and steam ships gaining experience which was to prove invaluable. Years after his retirement, he chose to be a writer but could not think of becoming a professional writer till John Galsworthy encouraged him to consider it seriously. As a result, his first novel, *Almayer's Folly* was published in 1895. The novel is distinctly original and powerful and its central idea and ruling motive is very well conceived and carried out. It departs altogether from the conventional happy ending as well as from other

common characteristics of the art of novel. In this sense it can be considered to be a serious and valuable contribution. *An Outcast of the Islands* appeared in the next year, that is, in 1896. Both the novels are based on his experiences of Malaya where some characters got stranded in some forgotten South sea port. These novels received a sympathetic response from the critics and many of them recognized the originality and genius of the novelist though his admirers were “few but select.” In other words, if these novels may not be among his best, they do forecast of his later works in their use of a vivid tropical background, and in their study of a white man whose moral stamina was sapped by the insidious influence of the tropics.

Conrad happened to meet a girl called Jessie George through a friend sometime between 1893 and 1894. She was working as a typist in London where Conrad lived. In 1895 he proposed to the girl making it clear to her that he had not very long to live and that he had no intention of having children. As she was a woman of placid and self-contained temperament she agreed to his terms and they got married in March 1896. Though their life was not altogether easy and comfortable one, she was in some ways an ideal wife for a man of his genius and nature. They spent the first few months of their married life on a rocky and barren island near Lannion, Brittany. However, Conrad’s health started deteriorating due to the bouts of malarial gout and fever, which led to frequent brief visits to the Continent for relief. Fits of depression and financial difficulties added other problems. Despite the ultimatum to have no children, two sons were born, Borys in 1898, and John in 1906. During this period, his literary output included his best novels: *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1887), a moving story of life on board portraying a tremendous voyage around Cape Horn. Here the ship called “Narcissus” takes an uneventful voyage from Bombay to the Thames. An intelligent Negro named James Wait is one of the members of the crew. He lies in his bunk most of the voyage and at last he dies and is buried at sea. The only female in the book is the ship itself which Conrad describes with the great skill like one who has an intimate knowledge of seamanship. The novel, Conrad’s

masterpiece, is remarkable for its powerful atmosphere, its description of the sea and its character study – Donkin is one of the best of his many vividly drawn villains. It is the teller and not the tale as, D.H. Lawrence would put it, which carries the appeal of the novel.

Conrad published five stories in a volume entitled *Tales of Unrest* (1898) and then appeared *Lord Jim : a Tale* (1900), the greatest of his early works, which is based on his studies of men, whose strength fails them in a moment of crisis, and is again a story of the sea which is the ever shifting panorama of the great Pacific Ocean varied by the picturesque islands of the Indian Ocean. No one talks, unless it is to discuss *Lord Jim*. There is no conversation and the novel has the effect of an impassioned monologue delivered against the mighty forces of the sea and sky. Conrad employs his technique of oblique narrative for the first time. Here the story is told through the ironical Marlow, who reappears so frequently in his later novels. *Youth – A Narrative : and Other Two Stories* (1902) and *Typhoon, and Other Stories* (1903) contain seven tales. *Heart of Darkness* in the former collection is remarkable for an overwhelming sense of evil and corruption and for its excellent tropical backgrounds. *Typhoon* is unsurpassed as a book about sea. The stories in both collections are based on his own autobiographical experiences. *Nostromo –A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904) shifts the scene to the coastline of Central America. The scene of this tale is a silver mine, a buried treasure, which was a government concession forced upon an English family living in Costaguana. The book has a gripping story of revolution and is full of vivid descriptions and well-drawn portraits but the construction of the story is topsy-turvy, beginning in the middle and ending at the start. Unfortunately, his health began deteriorating during the writing of *Nostromo* and in January 1904, Jessie injured her knees in a fall and remained a partly crippled person for the rest of her life. Conrad's collection of essays, *The Mirror of the Sea - Memoirs and Impressions* (1906), as is indicated by the title, contains his experiences in the oceans

of the world. It was followed by his popular detective story, *The Secret Agent – A Simple Tale*, which depicts powerfully the atmosphere of the underworld as some of the foreigners, who make London their refuge and play sordid intrigues and commit crimes to serve their ends. It is a revelation of the human life and projects the unfamiliar aspects of London – a place full of foreign anarchists, the average capable but limited police official, the high Russian bureaucrat and the great politician and woman engaged in a shady business. The novel presents the truth about human nature and is the work of a great writer. His collections of stories, *A Set of Six* (1908) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), a tale of Russian revolution, of which the best features are the character of Razumov and the atmosphere of fear are followed by *Twixt Land and Sea - Tales* (1912) which contains three more short stories.

Conrad was constantly adding more works to his output and had won critical recognition but he was depressed by the fact that he was not a “selling” author. He suffered from two important human needs, that is, to make money on the one hand and to preserve his artistic integrity on the other. He wished to be a popular writer but there were two barriers: his oblique method of narration and his use of broken time sequences; he could never win over them as they were the integral part of his personal vision. Under severe mental stress and suffering from malarial gout, Conrad had a furious quarrel with his literary agent and returned home in great stress. It broke down his health and he grew pessimistic. The influence of this pessimism on his work was not conducive to his popularity. However there came a change in his fortune in 1911 when he was given a Civil List Pension of a hundred pounds and in 1912 an American lawyer wrote offering to buy his manuscripts. During these days he was working on a novel, which he had started six years earlier, which was to be his best-seller. It was his most ambitious but confusing novel in oblique method of story-telling entitled *Chance - A Tale in Two Parts* (1914). Here Marlow appears again but the story is told from several points of view. Conrad’s next works are:

*Victory – An Island Tale* (1915) that brought him a thousand pounds for its serialization rights and a further collection of four short stories, *Within the Tides – Tales* (1915)'. they are interesting but add little to his stature. In 1917 Conrad wrote a short novel *The Shadow Line – A Confession*, with a remarkable suggestion of the supernatural. Of his other novels *The Rescue – A Romance of the Shadows* (1920) is full of the moments of excitement, and remains an excellent study of the primitive men. *The Arrow of God: A Story between Two Notes* (1919) and *The Rover* (1923) are both set in a background of European history and are not very successful. In 1920 he began what was to be his last work, *Suspense – A Napoleonic Novel*, a historical novel, which was to remain unfinished at his death. To complete an account of his works, a mention should also be made of the autobiographical novels, *A Personal Record* (1912) and *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921) as they are important, if one wishes to learn in some detail Conrad's views on his own art. His two novels, *The Inheritors – An Extravagant Story* (1901) and *Romance – A Novel* (1903), in which he collaborated with Ford Maddox Hueffer (later Ford Maddox Ford), are important pieces. *Conrad's Tales of Heresy'* (1925), which contained four stories, and *Last Essays* (1926) were posthumously collected.

Joseph Conrad's works indicate that the sea and the human nature stirred his imagination but his health could not withstand the pressures of life, which in his case was never without some sort of anxiety or financial crisis. His domestic life was reasonably good but his wife had a lot of trouble with her knees, for which she underwent several operations. He was comparatively wealthy as the film rights for his books brought him four thousand pounds yet he felt the financial constraints. He wrote to one of his friends, "I am spending more than I ought to". At times he thought of living in France partly to avoid the problem of heavy taxation in England.

In his life time Conrad had become one of the most prestigious writers in Britain and took his first and only trip to America in 1923. When he returned to England in 1924, he was shocked to learn about his son Borys's secret

marriage. Besides he remained upset and distressed because of his wife's sickness and his own deteriorating health. The same year he was offered a knighthood from Ramsay Macdonald but he declined, perhaps believing that such honors were meant for the creative artists.

Conrad suffered a heart attack and on 3rd August 1924 he died leaving behind for the readers a vacantness and a rich treasure of his marvellous and profound books. Baker has aptly summarized about Conrad, the man and the teller of tales that :

Little escaped his observant eye; but the quality of his interest and the mode of his reactions were the result of his innate disposition and peculiar heritage. Though far from being unsociable and lovable by troops of friends, all having something akin to himself, Conrad was a lonely soul. There was something secret and inscrutable about that searching and inexorable thinker, standing apart from the rest of the world, absorbed in watching and unravelling by a process of imaginative self-identification the interplay and conflict of personalities and motives, and arriving at inflexible conclusions. He was an impressionist whose vision had profundity, a penetration that nothing could mislead.

These qualities make his works dramas of mental and moral contention. They are all authentic, "because they are the product of twenty years of his life – my own life".

### **1.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the important features of Conrad's novels.
2. Why was Conrad influenced by sea?

### **1.4 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899.
2. Sarkar, R.N., *A Critical Study of Conrad*, Atlantic Publications, 1993.

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## **JOSEPH CONRAD AS A NOVELIST**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Joseph Conrad as a Novelist
- 2.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 2.4 Suggested Reading

### **2.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to introduce to learner Joseph Conrad as a novelist and help the learner to prepare for the semester end examination.

### **2.2 JOSEPH CONRAD AS A NOVELIST**

Conrad as a novelist had set a clear objective for himself of which he said, as his friend Ford Madox Ford recorded in *Return to Yesterday* (1932), “My task is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel, above all to make you see”. Though usually classed as a writer of the sea being a very faithful chronicler of life in the great world of waters Conrad said :

I have always felt that I had no speciality in that or any other specific subject.... Sea life had been my life. It had been my own self-sufficient, self-satisfying possession. When the change came over the spirit of my dream.... my past had, the very

force of my work became one of sources of what I may call, for want of a better word, my inspiration of the inner force which sets the pen in motion.

That would have made him a realist if Conrad had kept his eye steadily upon an external object, something he rarely did. Rather like Hawthorne, he was keen to portray the effect that an object makes upon him who observes it. So he became the master of impressionism which is diametrically opposite to realism. As a result he is considered alternatively a realist and romantic. He is attributed “incompatible roles” as an impressionist, as a symbolist of sorts, allegories reminding one of the Jungian and Freudian approaches and more recently as a political moralist of revolutionary tendencies. This sort of diversity can not come solely from life itself, for example, take *The Nigger of the Narcissus* where Conrad looks within to portray the effect of the lonely sea on his characters. It confirms that his works are devoted to an effort of self discovery. He rightly assessed in his autobiography, *A Personal Record* written in 1908, at the age of fifty one that in “this spectacular universe, the only task man has, is to make his experience of it real to himself”. In Conrad there is a rejection of the ethical universe in favour of the spectacular universe which offers itself to our senses. It is moral in terms of imaginative understanding. It is pertinent to note here that imagination cannot, by definition, merely express the self-born fantasies of mind; it has to do justice to the reality of a world that exists beyond the self. In his autobiography Conrad writes, “Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life”. It was his ruling perception. Every patch of the earth’s surface had its story attached in Conrad’s recollection. He further adds, “I know that a novelist lives among imaginary things, happenings and people... Writing about them, he is only writing about himself”. Many of Conrad’s works are based on his own experiences in life. His novel *Heart of Darkness*, which is a record of Conrad’s experiences of his visit to the Congo in 1890, definitely belongs to his category of autobiographical works. Conrad had a fascination for the continent of Africa as he described in *A Personal Record* from his childhood.

In the novel *Heart of Darkness* Charles Marlow also tells his friends on the deck of a steamboat that in his boyhood he was greatly attracted by the African country known as the Congo and especially by its river Congo, which flows through the country. It is his reading of Henry Morton Stanley's discoveries that gave him the account of the exploration and exploitation of the Congo. In one of his essays, Conrad described this exploitation as the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploitation.

Another important quality of Conrad's fiction is the ideal of self-respect and personal honour which each one of his major characters cherishes. When he pits a man against the hostile influences of the outer world as in *Under Western Eyes*, or against the hostility of the unquiet sea as in *Lord Jim*, one acid test, which proves his mettle and by which the man stands or falls, is loyalty to his fellow men. In this sense Conrad is a profound moralist who lets his character speak for himself through his actions. It is his own choice to save his soul or to lose it by adhering or neglecting a moral norm. These overlapping notions make Conrad a difficult novelist. Conrad's cosmopolitan awareness was the result of his seamanship as he had learnt to know men of many nations in Asia as well as in Europe. As a writer he was a European rather than Pole or an Englishman, but as an artist he was devoted to English traditions to which he gave his loyalties.

Conrad was a romantic novelist with a strange appeal for the exotic and an unusual sense of adventure. Almost all of his experiences of the sea, specially of Malayan waters were of immense value to him as a writer. He was an excellent story-teller whose major preoccupation was to build a contrast between the harrowing effect of loneliness and the urgent need for community. Under the influence of experiences, he presents a new moral rhythm where the regret is mingled with a joy of discovery. In other words, it is a recognition at once of the strange and familiar. It creates a state of mind, which can be called to be an awakening which leads to a revival of subconscious personality spontaneously.

Questioning the relationship of life and art, as the former gives the material or themes the latter adds aestheticism necessary for the art of writing, Conrad said, "the nature of my writing runs the risk of being obscured by the

nature of my material.” No wonder in *Heart of Darkness* the tale unfolds itself in layers through various characters first with anonymous “I” who serves as a narrator aboard a ship in the Thames, in company of the same group, which formed the cast of “*Youth*” – the Lawyer, the Accountant, the Director and Marlow. Conrad has given his deep thought to his technique of presentation; his prime interest is in character. Inside this outer frame is Charles Marlow himself, telling another of his “inconclusive” stories within Marlow’s tale too, there are several recognizable layers of personal and social context. The novel has profuse imagery and philosophical and psychological suggestiveness. The literary sources of its imagery are the classics like the *Bible* and the *Upanishads* and writers like Dante and Milton. Its philosophical position is argued to be Schopenhauerian, Nietzschean, Nihilist, Existentialist and Christianity. Its psychology is Freudian, Jungian and more recently Laingian. Conrad takes his deepest look into the human condition and life of a man in such a way as to illumine the inmost recesses of his soul. Frequently Conrad comes to the most pessimistic conclusion as if his basic idea is to recognize the futility of life.

This sort of depth and diversity can not come solely from life itself. It shows that there is something about the work which he produced at the height of his creative power; it proves that he was devoted in his entirety to an effort of self-discovery. He asserted in his autobiographical writing, *A Personal Record*, that it is “reminiscences” and not “confessions” which form the inner core of his works. According to him “in this spectacular universe the only task man has is to make his experience of it real to himself.” In other words, there is a rejection of the “ethical universe” in favour of the “spectacular universe” which offers itself to our senses. It is moral in terms of imaginative understanding. He believed that though “imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life” but imagination, cannot by definition, merely express the self-born fantasies of men; it has to do justice to the reality of world that exists beyond the self. Hence he wrote, “... a novelist lives among imaginary things, happenings and peoples. Writing about them, he is only

writing about himself". Jacques Berthand rightly points out in his book, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* that :

Conrad the man is able to recognize and  
acknowledge this truth, Conrad the artist is able to  
discover even in the humblest existence the  
elements of a tragic grandeur.

Precisely, Conrad resisted the appeal of the "ivory-tower aestheticism" and mixed the traditional and the modern elements in his novels. For example, take the event when he mentions, the two mysterious women and doctor-cum-psychologist in the same context. The knitting women remind us of the Fates of Classical Mythology, spinning and cutting the thread of human lives, while the doctor-cum-psychologist shows the modern interest in the functioning of the human minds. He is a kind of psychiatrist who is deeply interested in analyzing the symptoms for insanity. This sort of mixing makes the novel partly a myth and partly a document of modern times indicating the new interest in the science of psychology. There are three important aspects which are entwined in his character studies: The conditions of physical existence which govern the weaknesses as well as the qualities and thus, shape the behaviour of a character under the stress or storm, the psychological make up of a character which gradually unfolds itself in the process of facing the situation or discovery and the moral ordeal of man which emerges as his strong concern of man in the face of illness or death or the dilemma of an uncertain future like a lot of hard work with small or no reward. It is through such familiar analytical methods that Conrad, as a novelist discovers that man is base and destructive therefore he cannot rise above his role as a social animal being full of human egotism. This trend is almost universal and is universally damaging. Conrad insists that it is the self-knowledge that comes to the man of imagination, which can save him from utter desperation. Conrad shows in his novels like *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Sharer*, and *The Shadow-Line*, how the sense of experience in ordeal leads to self knowledge which his character reveals in the first person. This device makes his fiction attain the

realistic effect. For instance, in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad invents a fictional narrator who is a retired English sailor named Marlow and resembles Conrad himself in the quality of much of his experience and in the temperament on which the experience worked. The story of the novel is an episode looming out of the past, Marlow's past which is identified with Conrad's. Its fundamentals are authentic but the facts are enhanced for an act which Conrad infallibly secures. He desired to give a somber theme "a sinister resonance, a tone of its own," by leaving the climax enigmatic. It becomes clear that the heart of darkness is not the heart of Central Africa but the darkness into which Mr. Kurtz has descended, "His was an impenetrable darkness". It seems that he himself was the prey of unimaginable terrors.

To Conrad, as to all the great writers, tragedy is not a sad thing, but exhilarating, dynamic and vitalizing; in short it is a triumph, "The straight contrast between the intuitive and the deductive, the imaginative and artistic and the orthodox police methods of investigation, is indirectly a manifesto of Conrad's artistic principles. Conrad assented to the claim put forward by Henry James that fiction is a form of history:

Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing.

But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents..... on second-hand impression.

(Notes on Life and Letters, "Henry James

Conrad firmly believed that when it comes to dealing with human beings, anything may be expected. Hence, Conrad's approach as a novelist is contrary to the general rule that the artist, the novelist especially, must simplify, must clarify, and make intelligible. He believed that, "Life is not to be simplified and made completely intelligible." Conrad "sees it as infinitely complex and, at the last inscrutable mystery."

Conrad expressed his artistic allegiance to imagination and not invention. Like Dickens in his rich diversity, he is unlike him as his interests are internal, psychological, psychical, and moral and anything except mere enjoyment of humours. It is rightly pointed out that :

Every one of Conrad's figures is an integer, a definite person, even the most minor character is never a mere cipher. He sees his character as wholes; whether heroes or scoundrels, they stand there with their history written on them. It is as if each one of them were the potential centre of a right word! Surely it must be lying somewhere.

Conrad was always feeling for the right word and did not invariably get it at the first try. In *A Personal Record*, he says :

“Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world..... Because written words have their accent too. Yes! Let me only find the right word! Surely it must be lying somewhere.”

Precisely, it can be said that as a novelist there were two Conrads, “The conscious Conrad who was a realist and the unconscious Conrad, who was ever dissatisfied and unhappy, was incurably romantic.”

### **2.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Conrad as a novelist.
2. Why was Conrad not a selling author?

### **2.4 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Eqbal, Kausar, *Joseph Conrad : His Art and Writing*, Shipra Publications, 2010.

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## **MAJOR THEMES AND TECHNIQUES IN THE *HEART OF DARKNESS***

### **STRUCTURE**

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Major themes and techniques in the *Heart of Darkness*
- 3.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 3.4 Suggested Reading

### **3.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to introduce to the learner major themes and techniques in the novel *Heart of Darkness*.

### **3.2 MAJOR THEMES AND TECHNIQUES IN THE *HEART OF DARKNESS***

*Heart of Darkness* is a very appealing and significant novel from the point of view of its themes and method of narration. At first it seems that its narrator, Marlow, is telling a candid adventure story and its title reveals only unexplored Africa to which Marlow, like his creator Conrad himself, had been drawn by its mystery. But as Marlow draws his listeners more and more into adventure, the novel changes its nature as the physical exploration turns out to be moral exploration. The search into the darkness of the unexplored land becomes a search into the darkness of the human heart symbolized by the ivory trader Kurtz.



The central theme of the novel is the condition prevailing in the Congo in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The country was not fully explored till then but the white men had started visiting it individually or in groups for various purposes including exploration and trade. The novel shows the clash between two cultures, the clash between the civilization of the white people and that of the black natives of a dark country. The impact of the white visitors upon the life and thought of the blacks of the Congo and the futility and waste of the effort of white men's endeavour to civilize the savages, and at the same time the exploitation of the blacks by the whites, form the thematic strands of the novel. Marlow soon realizes the actual purpose of the white man's presence in the dark continent of Africa. These races are not civilized. Actually, it is to exploit them and to keep them under terror, for instance, take the event of the repeated firing of the guns of the warship even when there was no target in view.

Conrad seems to be making a distinction between two types of reality: everyday reality on the one hand and the "unreal" on the other. The former is represented by the every day life and experiences which he terms as "surface truth of life" and then there exists the reality of the darkness of the jungle which holds a contrast with the reality of the white men's experiences at the Central Station as he states in the following passage:

I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on the station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life. Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant..... By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life! And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting

patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion. (p.52)

Conrad regarded loyalty and self-devotion as the cardinal virtues, and his life on the sea only deepened his primal conviction and supplied wealth of circumstances to illustrate his favourite theme – qualities brought to the test. His boyish prophecy about undertaking the Congo expedition of which the esoteric history is contained in *Heart of Darkness*. The novel is the outcome of his efficiency and trustworthiness, his gallantry and an itch for adventure and his “fantastic impulse to live an ideal” and his heroism.

Conrad believed that, “writing fiction is a task which mainly consists in laying one’s soul more or less bare to the world,” but this can be done, “with a regard for decency”; respect for one’s own dignity, is “inseparably united with the dignity of one’s work.” This sort of expression alarmed some of his critics and they always sensed a moral in his works. For example, even *Lord Jim* has been taken for didactic story with an appropriate lesson for mankind. Here it is pertinent to remember that in his novel the question is not quiet and remorse as in *Hamlet* or *Othello* but it is simply the question of a man’s honour, the respect of his fellows, his own sense of decency. It was not Conrad’s desire to preach. The task that he set himself, was to represent the conflict that life is a conflict with circumstances which seem to be arrayed against us. The conflict, however, the apparent hostility, is one to try character; it is the test of manhood, it is eminently a moral predicament. The moral dilemma is implied here as it is inferred in every genuine work of art. In other words, the ethical is the most momentous and most insistent aspect of the human situation to man as a self-conscious being. But to turn a work of art into the utilitarian example of a dogma would have offended Conrad’s feeling for artistic decorum; it would have run contrary to his sense of impression. It is true that he had characters like Marlow to act as commentator if he thought it fit. What Marlow does from time to time through his spontaneous remarks becomes

the need of the narrative or the story. He stands somewhere between the reader and Conrad himself, seeing things as Conrad sees them. In *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Youth* and *Typhoon*, man is shown at strife with nature, the sea and ultimately with fate and triumphing against fearful odds. In *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo*, and most of his novels and stories right down to *The Rover*, the conflict with the hostile circumstances is uppermost, while in *Heart of Darkness*, it is the devil in man himself that is the foe. In every single instance, man comes to grief, but this does not mean that man is defeated as in his novel *Victory* in which, a pair of his most exalted lovers die and it is at the moment of death that all the barriers are overthrown, and they have achieved the bliss of full spiritual communion.

To Conrad, as to all the great writers, tragedy is not a sad thing but exhilarating, vitalizing and dynamic. In short, it is a triumph. It is a triumph of human personality as it is the outcome of the strength of human spirit conquering all the ills and disasters of mortality and meeting the end serenely. It causes a sense of wonder and joy as it proves that the soul is nobler and sublimer than fate. It shows the ripeness of human personality as in the case of Lear and Cordelia who had reached a spiritual plane which is above all the evil in the world. It is the enduring consummation and, "Nothing is here for tears." Conrad's rendering of the tragedy of the human lot approximated to that of George Eliot or Hardy when they are at their best. Like George Eliot, he sometimes invoked the help of melodrama at such crises and discusses the virtues of patience and resignation but with a difference as he stated in the preface of *A Personal Record*, "Not that I think resignation the last word of wisdom. I am too much the creature of my time for that." Conrad was indeed a rebellious and unremitting warrior. Baker rightly points out quoting from *A Personal Record* :

He was so grievously aware of the predominance of evil that he asked himself whether any ethical view of the universe was not utterly fallacious. "I have come to suspect that the aim of creation can

not be ethical at all. I would firmly believe that  
its  
object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe,  
love, adoration, or hatred, if you like, but in  
this  
view – and in this view alone – never for spair....”  
The unwearied self - forgetful attention to every  
phase of the living universe may be our appointed task  
on this earth.

To Conrad, the very mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of the individual was a magic theme. It gave the insubordinate traits to him. Those who do not have the courage, such individuals developed a psychology of the crowd as the vast majority of the people suppress these insubordinate traits for various personal or social reasons. The result is undeveloped personality. However there are those who are obstinate enough to run counter to the general rules of behaviour and repudiate the collective impulses born of fear of the society. If most of the novelists create characters that live as per the herd instinct – types, averages, everyman, Conrad prefers the more interesting opposite. His reader is amazed whilst these daring, self-sufficient beings perform their feats, experience their strange emotions and reveal the force of inherent greatness, for example, consider the character of Lord Jim or even Mr. Kurtz, who is considered to be a black sheep. Here it is clear that he has two corresponding sets of characters and they are meant to show the implicit contrasts in values.

Conrad works to a scale of values entirely his own, based on his view of life as a state of incessant conflict. Though Conrad remains reticent and unemotional and apparently neutral but an alert reader can recognize those values which were dear to him. Irony was his alternative mode of indicating his own values which lie at the root of the matter and are as fundamental as his general vision of the world. Conrad does not accuse the universe, like

Hardy anathematizes fate. As to the ultimate causes, he admitted that he knew nothing. In this context, it has been perceptively observed by E.A. Baker :

Perhaps all we see is but a spectacle; nevertheless, man is an ethical being, and when the heavens seem most hostile it may be only the supreme test. The worst evils we have to contend with on this earth are human—men’s falsehood, baseness, malevolence, or the good intentions which are paralysed by weakness of will. There is no Providence to be relied on to help man in tribulations. But if he takes himself seriously, he has scope to make at least a good fight. Conrad has faith in the ability of the human soul to assert and save itself.

Conrad deals with the theme of evil very differently. According to him the heavens may be black, but instead of railing at heaven, he directs his irony at the cowardice or the lack of intelligence or the purposes that come to nothing through the foolishness or weakness that betrays. In his novels the selfishness and malevolence make the earth simply ugly and leave such ironical deceptions that we mistake evil for good. The irony in *Heart of Darkness* rises to a fierce tension when Marlow recounts his interview with the girl at Brussels, to whom he hands over the slim packet of letters Kurtz had left for “his Intended.”

Conrad has been constantly obsessed with cases of moral dereliction and has attributed it to some intimate personal motive as if to show that it was all the result of “complex.” According to a Freudian critic, who tries to narrow down Conrad’s tragic outlook on the world, it was the result of his suppressed and only half conscious remorse for having deserted Poland in her “hour of trial.” Conrad often showed himself sorely exercised in spirit over the question of breach of faith. He himself put his own ideals before the obligations of patriotism in the face of intolerable sordid realities and “sallied forth from his native place.” This sort of mental conflict and self-analysing at times leads to

“cynicism” diagnosed in many of his heroes like Lord Jim and Nostromo and even Kurtz.

Though Conrad was brought up in the Roman Catholic religion, yet he denounced all the creeds of supernaturalism. His realization of man’s uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and enigmatic universe, his sharp sense of man’s dignity and self-responsibility, and a sense of not merely of abstract justice, but of the superlative value of man of courage, endurance and loyalty to his fellowmen constituted his religion for Conrad. He believed that it is through art that perfection, for which the soul craves, is experienced and realized. His convictions lead to realize such heroic and aspiring issues to which his imagination corroborated in this “purely spectacular” journey.

To achieve this end Conrad tried a few techniques and methods. First is an elementary way to trace the story but he soon realized that it may not work effectively and may leave the narration shadowy and indistinct. Hence, in *A Personal Record* it is stated, “The trite method of following the thread of thought and feeling in a man like Almayer failed,” in Conrad’s hands. It appeared that a continuous process of analysis was not the method for him. He already showed the glimpses of his inborn faculty for realizing with a vivid intensity sensations and emotional states at crucial moments. This keenness of eye for the external traits of individuality soon matured fully as he gained experience in his craft, Conrad learned how to co-ordinate these instants of passion and vision into intelligible history of an individual and to moderate his grandiloquence. He developed what is known today as Conrad’s psychological method. Here his impressionism takes a different course. Marlow’s comment states the whole theory of Conrad’s impressionism in the remark :

All this happened in much less time that it takes  
to tell, since I am trying to interpret for you into

slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impression.

Like an impressionist who ignores any logic based on understanding, Conrad too might well say, "All creative art is Magic". Conrad's works leave such compulsive effect more intensely on the reader when his fiction comes closer to life.

### **3.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. What are the major themes dealt with, by Conrad?
2. Comment on the technique used by Conrad in his fiction.

### **3.4 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Sarkar, R.N., *A Critical Study of Conrad*, Atlantic Publications, 1993.

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**CONRAD'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO MR. KURTZ AND MARLOW**

**STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Conrad's art of characterization with special reference to Mr. Kurtz and Marlow
- 4.3 Examination Oriented Questions
- 4.4 Suggested Reading

**4.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective in this lesson is to explain the learner Conrad's art of characterization with special reference to Mr. Kurtz and Marlow in the novel.

**4.2 CONRAD'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO MR. KURTZ AND MARLOW**

Conrad as an artist is so diverse in his characterization that he has really broadened the descriptive and functional range of characters in his novels. He is intensely vivid and registers their constant and automatic activities but does not allow any interruption of the emotions of life in their pursuits whatsoever. In the presentation of the characters his focus is on the inner life maybe because of the psychological curiosity or to fulfill another purpose— that is to reach where his intuitive sense of life leads him. It makes him a different kind of a realist who is also a thinker, a different kind of novelist



who is interested in exploring an ever-present sense of mystery of fate which enhances the relevance of the profound ethical element. This sort of approach leaves his mood pessimistic and he depicts innumerable varieties of human suffering. Conrad's fundamental belief is that man is selfish – something which turns him into a violent and wild animal. The noble virtues of man like pity, solidarity, spirituality and unity do resist and find an outlet in his work but there is unfathomable darkness which lies at the heart of man and symbolizes evil. No doubt Conrad's natural temperament was attuned to this note. Let us analyse two major characters – Kurtz and Marlow – from *Heart of Darkness* to have an overall estimate of his art of characterization.

**(a) Mr. Kurtz**

The portrait of Mr. Kurtz who is a German, is one of the greatest achievements of Conrad in the field of characterization. The source of this character lies in Conrad's actual experience as a captain of a steamboat which was to take an exploring expedition led by Alexandere Delcommune to a place called Katanga in the Congo. Conrad's main duty was to bring one of the Company's agents whose health had been failing. The name of this agent was Klein. He subsequently died aboard Conrad's steamship by which he was brought. It was this agent who was transformed into Mr. Kurtz. However, there is very little resemblance between the character of Mr. Kurtz as portrayed by Marlow and the actual experience of Conrad who had not found in Mr. Klein any trace of the evil which Marlow finds in Mr. Kurtz. Actually Kurtz, with all Europe in his heredity, had come to Africa with the highest motives – for the enlightenment of its barbarian and ignorant natives and has ended there as one of the dark deities of those very people he had hoped to redeem.

Mr. Kurtz, the central figure in *Heart of Darkness*, is a striking and formidable personality. His expeditions in this region had been for ivory. He is an agent of the Trading Company and succeeds in sending to the company as much ivory as all the other agents put together. He acquires Herculean dimension by having a strong hold on the native savages.

He holds the view that it was the duty and the destiny of the white men to civilize the natives of the dark continent of Africa. By virtue of his talent he becomes a kind of god in the eyes of the natives of the Belgian Congo.

During his stay there he exerts so much influence and commands prestige at the station where he is posted that even the chiefs of the native tribes pay their personal reverence to him. He becomes a cult-figure for the savages of the whole region as he starts sharing many of the beliefs of the savages. He presides over their primitive functions and midnight dances which always end with the “unspeakable rites.” Kurtz had the skill to identify himself with his natives without obliterating his own identity as a white man. His success in subjugating the natives and ruling over them with an iron hand earns him admiration from all the quarters. It is no exaggeration to state that he has become the sovereign and the lord of whole region.

Mr. Kurtz is a master conversationist as he has a great gift of the gab. His speeches are marked by exceptional eloquence. Even those who disliked him, like the white manager of the Central Station and other white men working in the Congo, admired him. He is able to win their appreciation and devotion, for example, take the case of the Russian explorer and also of Marlow.

Kurtz retains his greed as a trader, he harbours a passion for collecting and exporting ivory. He carries out his functions as a manager of the Inner Station most efficiently and effectively. Its proof is that he succeeded in his collecting more ivory than all other agents of the company put together. It was his favourite possession and he often used to say: “My intended; my ivory; my station; my river; my everything.” He talked as if everything around him belonged to him. Here Marlow wonders if Mr. Kurtz belonged to anything except to the power of darkness. In other words, he thought that Mr. Kurtz was essentially an embodiment of the powers of evil. When he came here he, like the white men any where in the world, believed that it was his duty to civilize the natives of the continent of Africa but ironically he himself got converted and started sharing the beliefs and “unspeakable rites” of the savages.

Marlow, who had come to meet Mr. Kurtz at the Inner Station and take him back to Europe as he was ill, was inquisitive to know all about Mr. Kurtz. It was the Russian who was a great admirer and devotee of Mr. Kurtz. Actually he convinced Marlow that Mr. Kurtz was a kind of monarch governing the native people as per the traditions and customs of the land. He had established a close relationship with them and is treated as a cult-figure, deity, or god-father by them. He had acquired so much of influence and prestige there that even the chiefs of the native tribes would come crawling to him to pay their homage to him. It was so despite the fact that he was also extremely cruel with them. The skulls of the natives who have been executed under his orders reveal the other side of his personality.

At the station some people describe Mr. Kurtz as a messenger of pity, progress and creativity as he represented keen intelligence and singleness of purpose. Marlow notices a small oil-painting showing a blind-folded woman carrying a lighted torch against a dark background. This painting which held Marlow spell-bound was painted by Mr. Kurtz there itself more than a year ago. It is pertinent to note here that despite many natural gifts he had a weakness for the material possessions. It led him to many things which ruined the region and he went to extremes to satisfy his hunger and desires.

Mr. Kurtz was so deeply involved with the native people that when he was taken away by Marlow, he tried to slip away from the ship in order to re-join his followers. During the return journey, Mr. Kurtz's health started deteriorating rapidly. He felt that he would not continue living for long and one day he handed over a packet of papers and photographs to Marlow. The papers contained the ideas he wanted to propagate and the photograph was of the woman he wanted to marry and whom he called, "My Intended". One evening while he was waiting for his death, "in a whisper at some image, at some vision - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath - 'The horror! The horror!'" and died. These words may be Kurtz's vision of his own eternal damnation or the judgment of the world. His own

action shows his moral victory and thus a confession as Marlow interpreted them. Whatever the interpretation one may take Mr. Kurtz's last words were the expression of his fresh recognition of the evil in him as well as outside. He found it horrible and it shows that he grew aware of the essential truth of life by recognizing the evil. It is his attempt at self-purification which is his moral victory that makes Marlow true to him in the end. His body was buried by the manager and his white colleagues in a muddy hole. Actually they never liked Mr. Kurtz because of his faults as well as his authority over the native people.

There is a tinge of exaggeration in the brick maker's praise when he described Mr. Kurtz as "a universal genius" but none can deny that he was a very unusual person and had the capacity to be a wonderful man.

**(B) Charles Marlow**

Marlow is the main narrator of the story of *Heart of Darkness* and a very significant character who possesses extraordinary powers of observation, reflection and analysis. He can accomplish this task by using his penetrating psychological insight and deeply philosophical mind. Marlow believes that the mind of man is capable of anything because mind contains everything of the world, including all the past and the future. Only such a man could face the bare truth of the existence. As a boy Marlow had been very fond of looking at maps especially of South America, Africa or Australia. He was curious about one particular river on the map. It was the big Congo river resembling a huge snake with its head in the sea and its body at rest over a vast country and its tail lost in the depth of the land. When he had acquired substantial knowledge and experience as a seaman, he imagined himself visiting and discovering new places and sailing on this river. He is a professional sailor as well as wanderer who had a passion to discover the unknown lands. He is equally interested in wherever he is on the land or the sea. It is true that most of the sailors lead a vigorous life when sailing but once they touch the shore they lead a life of total inactivity. To them ship is their home and sea their country. They do not find mystery

anywhere except in the depths of the sea. Marlow, unlike them, philosophizes over the history even of his own nation, which according to him, must have been at one time one of the dark countries. He believes that nineteen hundred years ago when the Romans had invaded Britain they must have found it a dark land full of marshes, forests and savages. There was nothing to satisfy even the basic needs like food and water. The only source available to them must have been to drink the water of river Thames. The awful climate of the country and the wilderness must have been incomprehensible and yet fascinating to them. In the Congo Marlow describes this sort of experience as “the fascination of the abomination.” While sitting cross-legged like Buddha on the deck of the boat he draws a difference between the disgust which must have been felt by the Roman conquerors and the disgust felt by the Britishers for these people and the place. He feels that the aim of the conqueror is to rob other races of their possessions while there is some other idea or aim to achieve also.

Marlow was interested to fulfil his ambition of sailing for which he wished to find a suitable assignment. It was through his aunt that Marlow could get a desired appointment in a Trading Company, in Brussels. During his first journey to this place Marlow felt that he was not going to the heart of the continent but to the centre of the earth.

While presenting his experiences in the Belgian Congo in *Heart of Darkness* he gives his reactions to the situations and the people; he actually becomes the mouth piece of Conrad himself. In other words, it is through his eyes that we look at people, including the personality and character of Mr. Kurtz. He shows not only the conditions of existence there but also exposes the reality of the white men’s efforts to civilize the savages. They present that their basic aim is to improve the lot of people, of the dark country but the fact remains that they pursue their own selfish interest in satisfying their own greed and lust for power and material gains.

Marlow is a man of skeptical moods, as for example, when he listens to the brick-maker who not only praises Mr. Kurtz but also pays compliments

to Marlow saying that he was a member of the new fraternity of virtuous people. He is full of a sense of perplexity and wonder seeing the immensity of surrounding region which was absolutely still and can not conclude whether it conveyed to him some sort of friendliness or threat. Marlow hates telling lies which to him is something detestable and abhorrent and hence something unbearable. He feels that there was a touch of death in falsehood as it made him sick and wretched. When he is in the Congo, he tries to adopt the culture of the white men stationed at that place and become a false man showing that he is an influential person with the officials of the Company in Brussels. When he goes against his own temperament and becomes one of the “faithless pilgrims” residing there, he feels unreal and insubstantial more or less like a dream. Marlow, who tends to be indifferent to the people and his immediate surroundings on choice, grows interested in all kinds of work including that of the wrecked steamer which was unfit to sail. It is not the work of that sort which engaged him, rather it was the opportunity to discover himself or the reality about himself that he enjoyed. In other words, work for Marlow is only a means to achieve an end that is, to find out one’s essential character. In this sense he is a positive and hopeful person. That is why he is appreciated by many, including Mr. Kurtz. When Marlow meets Mr. Kurtz’s fiancée to deliver a bundle of papers and the picture of his “intended” which means the girl he wished to marry, he can notice that she loved Mr. Kurtz deeply and was proud of her relationship with him, he invents a lie to render her an emotional support. Though he remembers that Mr. Kurtz’s last words were “The horror” but he tells the girl, being overpowered by her devotion for him, that the last words spoken by Mr. Kurtz were the girl’s name. Marlow hates lies but here he allows himself to do so under the pressure of the inner necessity. Marlow’s interview with the woman is the last episode in the novel which is meant to convey that truth is unendurable in the context of everyday life and some sort of illusion is necessary for the peace and happiness of mind and existence.

Briefly, in his art of characterization Conrad is not one of the thorough going analysts. He rarely anatomizes. As Baker put it, “Conrad sees his creation as wholes acting on impulse or habit, or from a complex of emotions they themselves could not define”. They are to be known by intuition, for they are animated with “feelings of universal import”.

#### **4.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Conrad’s art of characterization.
2. Comment on the character of Mr. Kurtz. Can he be called the hero of the novel?

#### **4.4 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Sarkar, R.N., *A Critical Study of Conrad*, Atlantic Publications, 1993.

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## LIFE AND WORKS OF BAPSI SIDHWA

### STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives
- 5.3 Bapsi Sidhwa : Life and Background
  - 5.3.1 Works of Bapsi Sidhwa
  - 5.3.2 Introducing Prominent Works of Bapsi Sidhwa
- 5.4 Political Scenario of Pakistan
  - 5.4.1 Voices from Pakistan
  - 5.4.2 The Social Situation of Pakistan
- 5.5 Contemporary Situation of Pakistan
- 5.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.7 Glossary
- 5.8 Multiple Choice Questions
  - 5.8.1 Short Answer Questions
- 5.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.10 Suggested Reading

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

“*Ice-Candy Man* deserves to be ranked amongst the most authentic and best (books) on the partition of India” – *Khushwant Singh*



*Ice-Candy Man*, a renowned novel of Bapsi Sidhwa, was originally published in London in the year 1988, as *Ice-Candy Man*, later an American publisher i.e. Milkweed Editions changed its title to *Cracking India* in 1991. Film adaptation of this novel is **1947**, directed by Deepa Mehta, starring Aamir Khan and Nandita Das.

Beyond doubt, *Ice-Candy Man* is a feminist novel portrayed against the backdrop of horrific violence of 1947, resulting into two separate nations that is India and Pakistan. The novel delineates the psychological and social realities of Lahore during pre-partition, partition and post-partition days of India. Thus, it is an earnest and authentic record of political realities.

The narrative technique used by Bapsi Sidhwa is child narrator technique that is, there is a child narrator named Lenny Sethi, an eight year old girl who narrates in present tense and in first person. In other words, Sidhwa relates the partition story through the eyes of Lenny.

Bapsi Sidhwa makes ample allusions to political leaders, for instance Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbatten, Subhash Chandra Bose and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. Sidhwa honestly expresses her take on the role of these leaders during the freedom struggle. Sidhwa has given insufficient credit to the role of politicians. Adopting a humanitarian angle, she has portrayed ordinary persons as heroic; for instance Lenny's godmother helps Ayah to flee from Hira Mandi and find shelter in Amritsar refugee camp. Also, it is Lenny's mother who helps the Hindus in violence stricken Lahore to escape.

## **5.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:-

- To acquaint the learner with the life and famous works of Bapsi Sidhwa.
- To introduce the learner with the background to Sidhwa's novels by discussing contemporary, social and political situation in Pakistan and the subcontinent.

- To familiarize the learner with difficult words.
- To prepare the learner to respond to the various issues raised in the novel, by giving practice questions and key so that the students can do self evaluation.
- Suggest list of books for further reading.

### **5.3 BAPSI SIDHWA : LIFE AND BACKGROUND**

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi Zoroastrian was born on 11.08.1938, in Karachi, Pakistan. A writer by occupation she has dual citizenship that is Pakistani and American. At present she resides in Houston, Texas (United States of America). At the tender age of two she contracted polio. After graduating from Kinnaird College, Lahore in 1957, she married and shifted to Bombay (now Mumbai) at the age of nineteen. This marriage lasted only for five years. She later remarried her present husband Noshir in Lahore. A mother of three children, she began writing novels after completing the family.

Her formative years were marked by loneliness but at the same time surrounded by Parsi community. She also witnessed the freedom struggle and the eventual partition of the subcontinent. Probably this is the reason these are the main themes recurring in her works. Due to polio, she could not be sent to school and was educated at home by an Anglo-Indian governess at home. During her childhood, Lahore had a population of a five million, out of which, only two hundred were Parsis. In order to merge with the majority, the Parsis adopted practices from Muslim culture such as gender segregation. Thus she developed a feministic perspective from her formative years. Gender, specially feminism is an important aspect of her works. Bapsi Sidhwa's experiences from India, Pakistan and the U.S. developed her poetic sensibility. She likes herself to be described as a "Pakistani- Punjabi-Parsi" woman (as disclosed to Bachi Karkaria in an interview).

It was in the U.S. that Sidhwa started her career as a teacher and lecturer. She took up a position in teaching creative writing at the University

of Houston and has since taught at both American and British Universities, including Columbia University, Mount Holyoke College and Southampton University. She was also the Fanny Hurst writer-in-residence at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts in 1998-99.

Bapsi Sidhwa is a polyglot, fluent in English, Urdu, Gujarati and Punjabi but she writes in English, as she received an anglicised education. Bapsi Sidhwa is a powerful voice from the contemporary feminist writers; she has depicted strong women protagonists, who assume brave roles and establish equations with their male counterparts. Sidhwa seems to be totally dissatisfied with domesticated women central characters who are fit for traditional roles only. Besides, she is the only Parsi woman writer who chose to write on Partition.

### **5.3.1 Works of Bapsi Sidhwa**

Following is the list of all works of Bapsi Sidhwa:-

*Their Language of Love* (published in Pakistan, 2013)

*Jungle Wala Sahib* (published in Pakistan, 2013)

*City of Sin and Splendour : Writing on Lahore* (published in Pakistan, 2013)

*Water: A Novel* (published in US and Canada, 2006)

*Bapsi Sidhwa Omnibus* (published in Pakistan, 2001)

*An American Brat* (published in US, 1993 and India, 1995)

*Ice-Candy Man* (published in England, 1988 and in US published as *Cracking India* in 1991)

*The Bride* (published in England, 1982 and in India published as *The Pakistani Bride* in 1990)

*The Crow Eaters* (published in Pakistan, 1976 and published in India in 1980)

There are total nine works written by Bapsi Sidhwa, in different genres, such as translation, fiction, non-fiction and even edited works. Much known for fiction, Bapsi Sidhwa's five novels, i.e. *Water*, *An American Brat*, *The Bride*, *Ice-Candy Man* and *The Crow Eaters* would be discussed. All the above mentioned five novels are semi-autobiographical in nature, or an outcome of her personal experience in the subcontinent, partition, ill treatment of women, immigration to the US and membership in the Parsi/Zoroastrian community; but the central theme that unites all these five works is the strand of feminine consciousness that works implicitly or explicitly in the works. Although all the five works have different themes. Major themes of her works are – the partition crises, Parsi milieu and their idiosyncrasies, expatriate experience, marriage, women issues, immigration and so on.

### **5.3.2 Introducing Prominent Works of Bapsi Sidhwa**

Once, Sidhwa with her second husband was vacating in Northern Pakistan for honeymoon. There she heard the true account of a young Punjabi girl married to a Kohistani tribal, who eventually ran away. In order to avenge the dishonor, her husband and clansmen hunted / hounded and killed her. This episode had a major impact on her to compel writing. This narrative became the main crux of her first novel, *The Bride*. Though the title of the novel connotes it to be a story of a single bride but in reality it is about three brides i.e., Afshan, Zaitoon and Carol. Each bride's story has a common theme which proves that patriarchal culture exploits women.

The novel has several plots, mainly there are four plots - first plot is on the marriage of Kohistani tribal Qasim, the death of his family members during partition riots, how he adopts a Punjabi girl Munni, eventually named Zaitoon who too is orphaned during the same riots. The second part is on Zaitoon's childhood in Lahore, as she takes over as the protagonist of the novel. Her sharing of a cordial relation with their

neighbor Nikka and Miriam, a childless couple. The third part is about Zaitoon's marriage to Sakhi. In order to connect back to his roots Qasim fixes Zaitoon's marriage to his nephew Sakhi.

Marriage in this novel is a tacit agreement between male heads of families for whom a woman's body is a trope for enhancing their socio-political or economic motives. After a woman's marriage, she is used by patriarchy in the name of religion and culture to domesticate, control and exploit her in the name of honour. *The Bride*, portrays exploitation of women through the institution of marriage and ironically in the name of honour. Zaitoon, marries a tribal man to shield her father's honour. A second protagonist comes up in the story, an American woman named Carol.

Zaitoon marries a tribal man to shield her father's honour. She tries her level best to compromise with her husband until it becomes unbearable to stay with her in-laws. The fourth part of the novel shows Zaitoon running away from the clutches of her tribal husband and his clan. Zaitoon, although is chased by her husband and folks through the mountains but at last is saved and escapes back to the plains of Lahore.

Though *The Bride* was the first novel Sidhwa penned but it was second to be published in 1982. She discovered the joy of writing and immediately embarked on her second novel *The Crow Eaters*. It is a lively and humorous novel on her own community i.e., the Parsis. At that time, in 1978, publishing in English was almost non-existent in Pakistan so she self published it. Later, the novel has been re-published and translated into several European and Asian languages. The title of the book is derived from translation of a derogatory term earned by the Parsi community who talk too much. In their native tongue they are termed as 'kagra khaw' (crow eater). In the subcontinent anyone who is garrulous is said to have eaten crows.

There is a contrast in the background of *The Crow Eaters* (1978) and *The Bride* (1983) but a feministic angle is common in both the novels. In The

*Crow Eaters*, oppression and violence on women takes place in the middle of Junglewala family. *The Bride* narrates the story of Zaitoon's life, of her escape from ill-fated marriage. *The Crow Eaters* is a novel on educated Parsis, exposing the dualism of apparent patriarchy and hidden matriarchy. Though there is no preference for male child in the Parsi community, there is a preference for a male child in the novel shown through Tanya's pregnancy. Putli displays photographs of chubby-cheeked English babies all over the house in the hope that her daughter-in-law by looking at them will produce a baby boy. Tanya eventually gives birth to a girl. Though initially disappointed the family members start consoling each other by hailing her as goddess of wealth-Laxmi. Desire for a male child is clearly visible.

Women, especially in the subcontinent have been trained to lead a life of subordination from childhood, besides women accept this subordination unquestionably. It is also evident in *The Crow Eaters* that Putli is fully satisfied with her subordinate position and tries to inculcate the same quality in her daughters too.

On the surface Faredoon Junglewala alias Freddy is the protagonist but in the presence of large number of female characters he is seen only as a nominal patriarch. He is easily manipulated by the whims of the women of the family; specially he succumbs to the terrors of his mother-in-law, Jerbanoo. It is evident in his interaction with his mother-in-law, Jerbanoo. He bows down to her terror, as his numerous attempts to free the household of her presence fails. The novel is full of anecdotes of Parsi culture and society. Feministic angle is common in both the novels.

*The Crow Eaters* begins with an extended flashback. Faredoon Junglewala narrates the story of his early years to a captive audience consisting of seven children and some neighbouring kids. He speaks about his immigration from central India to Lahore, at the end of the nineteenth century, at the age of twenty-three with a pregnant wife Putli and a widowed mother-in-law, Jerbanoo along with his infant daughter Hutoxi. There is an interesting account of his struggle with his mother-in-law for control over his household that extends for many

years. Through a fraudulent scheme he sets fire to his own shop and thus by frightening the mother-in-law kills two birds with an arrow. He not only becomes rich but also master of the house. With hard work and skill he rises to power and eminence in the Parsi community.

It is through the system of patriarchy that the men dominate the household. Whenever something wrong takes place, men blame the women folk thus making her the scapegoat. In this Parsi household too, Freddy blames Putli for Yazdi's condition, for wanting to marry the prostitute Rosy. Freddy along with a friend Allen in Hira Mandi rape Rosy out of anger and revenge. He further informs Yazdi about the whole episode. Yazdi is so hurt and saddened to hear it that he renounces home to become an ascetic. Freddy puts the whole blame on Putli.

The three leading characters- Jerbanoo, Putli and Tanya lead a life of double existence. Jerbanoo exhibits a superficial respect for the male – dominated tradition, but seizes every opportunity to undermine it. Though Putli restricts herself to a traditional role but at the same time keeps a check on her husband. Tanya is assertive outside the precincts of the home and negotiates to work from there. All the three women appear to rebel in disguise. Out of the three, Jerbanoo in spite of belonging to the older generation, articulates her hostility to any form of subordination. Her favourite pass time are to challenge the feminine decency and decorum prescribed by the patriarchy. In addition, the novel has memorable characters who are individuals but not atypical and belong to all ages. The novel encompasses approximately forty years.

In the third novel, *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), Sidhwa deals with the issues of victimization and violence faced during partition. The plot of the novel focuses on Lenny's Hindu ayah, her kidnap by a mob headed by her jilted Muslim lover Ice-Candy man, and her eventual escape from his grip. Some critics have seen ayah as a symbol of the united India, and her body as a symbol of the land, desired by all religious and ethnic groups, that is about to be torn to pieces. It is also a tale of Lenny's maturation from a four year old

child into a young woman with sexual awareness. Lenny is an intelligent narrator who closely observes the horrific religious and political riots and narrates in detail everything around her. She evolves a unique self awareness and consciousness of people treating her differently because of her limp. She also checks the behavior of the group of men from different religions who secretly desire the ayah. Lenny is surrounded by various characters like-slave-sister, electric aunt, old husband, godmother, ayah and ice-candy-man. The last character is metamorphosed from ice-cream vendor, bird seller, cosmic connector to Allah via telephone and pimp.

Roughly the novel can be divided into three parts- the first part of the novel shows Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis living side by side as friends and neighbours in Lahore. Next section depicts the seering tension all over India that explodes during partition riots. The last few chapters deal with the aftermath of partition and the violence that completely altered the lives of characters. For instance, before partition, Mrs. Sethi is portrayed as a submissive lady fulfilling her husband's every requirement and managing household duties. However, during partition, she emerges as a strong woman, working fearlessly as a social worker engaged in rescuing, sheltering and uniting victimized women with their families. Belonging to the neutral Parsi community and reaping the benefits of class, she engages in humanitarian efforts to help women, victimized by partition riots. Partition gives an opportunity to Mrs. Sethi to break away the domestic sphere and thus empowers her to act for social cause.

Sidhwa shows the worst form of violence during partition on women. During the partition and its aftermath, a woman's body became the medium to celebrate and avenge victory on both sides. In the novel, ayah is kidnapped as she is the most desirable woman figure in the novel with a substantial male following. The novel is a tale on female oppression, realistically projecting female oppression in a male dominated society. It is an honest portrayal on the way how men through masculinity satiate their desires by cruelly assaulting women with violence. Simultaneously women are also shown to tolerate the pain and humiliation. Thus a woman's position is reduced to mere playthings, in order to satisfy the men's desires.



*Ice-Candy Man*, has a number of women characters who survive the brutalities of partition. Theme of violence, exploitation, slavery, disinheritance and emotional weaknesses are genuinely portrayed by Sidhwa. Thus *Ice-Candy Man* is a true account of gynocritical perspectives of social realities.

*The American Brat* (1993), another novel on Parsi culture, set partly in Lahore and partly in America, narrates the story of Feroza Ginwalla , a sixteen year old Pakistani-Parsi girl. It is a story of Americanisation of a conservative young girl. This novel marks a significant development of Sidhwa as a diasporic writer. The novel unravels the experience of Feroza, sent to United States by her parents to develop a modern approach and outlook. In short the novel speaks of metamorphosis of an expatriate. The protagonist Feroza travels through three cultural spaces- her own Parsi culture, her native country Pakistan's Islamic culture and the western culture of United States of America. This long and interesting journey transforms her from a conservative and timid girl to a confident and independent woman. In a nut shell *The American Brat* is about the change that Feroza undergoes in America and how her perspectives on life changes. The story unwinds the mental, social, cultural and psychological chasms that the shy Parsi-Pakistani girl Feroza confronts during the process of migration to the US. It also shows how well she adapts to the alien American culture after uprooting from the mother culture. The novel also raises issues on gender inequality and suffocating Islamic practices in Pakistan. Sidhwa strongly condemns the Hudood ordinances and the Zia ordinance introduced by General Zia which devalue woman to the level of a commodity. These legislative assesses were extremely unfair to women and often perpetuated crimes against them by forcing the male offenders to go scot free while the female victim was punished.

Sidhwa makes a lot of political allusions in Pakistan especially during the times of President Zia-Ul-Haq, a prominent ebb of rising fundamentalism was evident and it moulded Feroza's mental bearing into a conservative perspective. Her mother Zareen gets worried about Feroza's orthodox attitude and narrow

mindedness and feared her to be a misfit in the otherwise open-minded Parsi community. Thus to open up Feroza's mental horizon, she is sent to United States on a three month vacation. To the horror of the Giniwalla's, Feroza grows ultra modern during her stay in the United States and starts challenging the traditional views, static orthodoxy and grows beyond the confines of community and the norms of the patriarchal society.

*The American Brat* unfolds the hidden layers of a woman's power and sense of self assertion. Sidhwa aptly portrays the conflict between a girl's desire for individuality and her community which tries to subdue her freedom through the protagonist Feroza, who becomes a new woman. Her journey from Pakistan to America transforms her. She loses her inhibitions and sheds her conservative beliefs and is perfect to fit into a modern society. At the end she becomes too modern to fit in her own community back home. The traditional and shy Feroza through metamorphosis comes out of the cocoon prepared for her by the patriarchy and evolves as a confident and independent lady.

The novel *Water* (2006) is based on the film by Deepa Mehta under the same name in 2005. The backdrop is of 1930s, locale Varansi, times when child marriages were rampant. Extremely young girls were married to old men due to economic and social constraints. When the old husband died these young girls were deserted in the widow ashrams of Varansi. The subject of the novel is controversial as it highlights the exploitation of widows by rich Brahmins. Through this novel Sidhwa brings to light the fact about chauvinistic interpretation of religion and how the patriarchy uses it to enslave women. *Water* exposes the age old hypocrisy of male dominated society which under the garb of religion leaves no stone unturned to subjugate women.

The novel narrates tales about a group of widows- Chuyia, Kalyani, Shakuntala, Bua and other widows of Rawalpur widow ashram who are abandoned by their families and in-laws after the demise of husband. Kalyani is a beautiful young widow who wants to live a pious life bereft of prostitution.

Shakuntala is a scholar of scriptures, Madhumati is the mistress of the ashram is always craving for opium, Kunti becomes bitter during day time, Patirajji Bua, who is crazy about sweets and drools remembering the sweets served in her own wedding. Madhumati was given heavy dowry by her father but after her husband's death, her inheritance is usurped by her in-laws and she is forced to celibate in the name of widowhood. When she asks for her husband's heritage, as punishment is raped by her two brothers-in-law for a week and thrown in a jungle to die. Gulabi brings her to the ashram. The head helps her to recover and later sent to a client. As time passes, she replaces the head of the ashram and starts sending Kalyani to clients. In the end even Chuyia is forced into prostitution to meet the expenses of the ashram.

Just like the novel *Cracking India*, here too there is a child narrator, a child widow, Chuyia. After wedding she continues to stay with her parents as was the custom with pre-pubescent girls, but her married life takes a tragic turn and she is widowed even without consummation of marriage. All symbols signifying her wifhood are removed. She is forced tonsuring, her glass bangles are smashed and forced to wear homespun white cloth. She is too innocent to realize the meaning of widowhood and asks her father, that how long she would be a widow. Her father Somnath is not bold enough to break the rigid tradition and advocates the system though he hurts his own daughter.

Her presence in the ashram affects the lives of the other widows like Shakuntala and Kalyani. In *Water* one gets a glimpse of the sad and painful plight of widows. Sidhwa refers to Gandhi's freedom movement, focusing on promoting social justice, eradication of untouchability, promoting women's rights. These widows cover the double colonization of women during the early twentieth century of Indian history. Though since then circumstances have changed in India but one can still witness poor, deserted widows in Varanasi.

#### **5.4 POLITICAL SCENARIO OF PAKISTAN**

The political scene of Pakistan had a deep impact not only on Bapsi Sidhwa's formative years but also Sidhwa, the writer. As a matter of fact, Pakistan

came into existence in 1947 and Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the founder of Pakistan. The women were the major sufferers during partition riots, as a result they were forced to restraint themselves inside homes and thus denied participation in public domain and affairs. Jinnah had a secular and democratic plan for Pakistan and stressed on the importance of women's involvement in the nation building by fostering their educational and professional development. After his tragic and untimely death in 1948, his approach was forgotten.

New formed country Pakistan was multi-handled by several military and democratic regimes until 1977 military rule of General Zia-Ul-Haq during which religious fanatics and extremist forces began to gain political power. Zia-Ul-Haq implemented strict Islamic laws, for instance, he introduced the Hudood Ordinance which didn't discriminate between rape and adultery in Islamic society. The military rule headed by Gen Zia-Ul-Haq favoured the tribal and feudal lords from Baluchistan and NWFP (North West Frontier Province), who were already in power as delegated by the Britishers. Zia's conservative Islamic ideology became extremely dominant in Pakistani society. Thus women became a central concern of political and national discourse. Gradually the Pakistani regime became harsher on women.

Thus the Pakistani women evolved by an inter-play of diverse factors, due to exploitation, oppression and the outlook of the ruling political party. Women issues thus caught the fancy of the writers of that time. Perhaps this is the main reason that all novels of Bapsi Sidhwa have a feminine angle.

#### **5.4.1 Voices from Pakistan**

Many writers have enriched Pakistani writings in English. Prominent women writers are Bapsi Sidhwa, Monica Ali, Feryal Ali, Gauhar, Sarah Suleri, Uzma Aslam Khan, Kamila Shamsie and Qaisra Sharaz. Chief male writers of Pakistani English fiction are Zulfiqar Ghose, Tariq Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Hanif Qureshi, Mohsin Hamid and Mohammad Hanif. Not only these but there are many upcoming and

new writers who have joined the bandwagon and continue writing from both inside and outside of Pakistan.

Aijaz Ahmad rightly points out that Pakistani fiction is the continuation and extension of the fiction produced under the colonial rule in India. The lives of Pakistani women are depicted under the imposing role of religious, economic and social restrictions. The realities that the women confront in the Pakistani fiction are partly modern and partly traditional. The genesis of Pakistani feminist English literature can be traced back to the subcontinent where Muslim educated women like Mumtaz Shah Nawaz (1912-1948) prepared the path for other women. Her novel *The Heart Divided* is the first South Asian English novel on partition. Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed in their book *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* point out the inter-play of a range of diverse factors- linguistic, cultural and religious which defines Pakistani women. They show how women of different status are prey to exploitation and oppression. They evolve the gradual process of feminist movements across Pakistan, from its origin in 1947 to right after Zia's military rule. From that time at both political and social levels, Pakistani English literature has become an effective instrument of protest. Women's issues, including the feudal patriarchal exploitation of women became increasingly popular among novelists.

The late 1970s was indicative of a strong feminist voice in Pakistan. The military dictatorship, religious fundamentalism, censorship on open discourse and strict laws on women resulted in surfacing of a strong and progressive feminist consciousness. This consciousness left its mark on the works of Bapsi Sidhwa too.

#### **5.4.2 The Social Situation in Pakistan**

Though Bapsi Sidhwa belonged to a progressive ethnic group i.e. Parsis, but at the same time was a part of the orthodox Pakistani society which was brimming with pains and sufferings of the women. The Pakistani

society had a patriarchal construct. Sidhwa's novels are firmly grounded in the lived experiences of her stay in Pakistan, India and the U.S. Her works have female characters shown in resistance against the socially constructed norms that try to control their bodies and objectify them as icons of male honour. Sidhwa in her novels has explored the social issues of women such as marriage, victimization of women, exploitation of women and treatment of women as sexual objects in Pakistani society. Thus, as a woman writer, Sidhwa pays close attention to the lives of women around her. She has also used her diasporic experiences to scrutinize and present the position of women in Pakistani society through seminal themes. Sidhwa has analysed the social position of women within Pakistani society from a non-muslim point of view. In her works she has reflected the struggle of women against the stifling social constraints and the female characters emerge as confident women even against impossible man-made social taboos, which like demons have possessed women in the name of culture and religion.

Patriarchy as a social institution has always defined and limited the lives of women in Pakistan and the Subcontinent. A chaotic social unrest is evident in pre and post-partitioned Pakistan.

## **5.5 CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IN PAKISTAN**

Media has made evident the dire need of peace and reforms in Pakistan. There is growing need of peace to combat increasing intolerance of religious and ethnic diversity in the country. Debate is in progress regarding the rights of married Indian muslim women, with special reference to the concept of triple talaq. Gender discrimination is evident in Pakistani society. State encourages economic and social hierarchies leaning heavily on ideology of inequality and domination thus creating fertile grounds for one gender to exploit, oppress, use, manipulate and control the other gender to achieve its own objectives. State structure legitimizes these socio-economic relationships between genders. Thus the state can be viewed as a political, ideological and an economic entity that reinforces and promotes gender discrimination rather than removing it.

At the same time there is no denying fact that the status of women is changing in the Pakistani society. In all fields such as – sports, politics, courts, media, literature and bureaucracy, representation of women is conspicuous. This improvement in the status of woman has also empowered her.

## **5.6 LTE US SUM UP**

Bapsi Sidhwa is originally from Karachi, Pakistan. A writer by occupation she has dual citizenship i.e., Pakistani and American. At present she resides in Houston, Texas (United States of America). There are total nine works written by Bapsi Sidhwa, but she is more famous for fiction, these works are *Water*, *An American Brat*, *The Bride*, *Ice-Candy Man* and *The Crow Eaters*. *Ice-Candy Man* was originally published in London in the year 1988, later an American publisher i.e. Milkweed Editions changed its title to *Cracking India* in 1991. Film adaptation of this novel is 1997, directed by Deepa Mehta. Roughly the novel can be divided into three parts- the first part of the novel shows Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis living side by side as friends and neighbours in Lahore. Next section depicts the seering tension all over India that explodes during partition riots. The last few chapters deal with the aftermath of partition and the violence that completely altered the lives of characters.

## **5.7 GLOSSARY**

- Adaptation: An adaptation of a book is a film based on it
- Narrative technique: how a story is told
- Humanitarian: person who helps suffering people
- Formative: something that has an important and lasting influence
- The subcontinent: Area that contains India, Pakistan and Bangladesh
- Protagonist: Main character of a book
- Patriarchy: A system in which men have all powers and importance
- Scapegoat: to blame somebody for something bad without fault

- Gynocritical: a female framework for the analysis of women's literature
- Diaspora: People whose ancestors come from a different country of origin
- Ordinance: an authoritative order or regulation
- Allusion: indirect reference to somebody or something
- Metamorphosis: a person develops and changes into something
- Ethnic: connected with or related to a different cultural group

### 5.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who said that *Ice-Candy Man* is the most authentic and best book on partition of India ?
  - (a) R.K.Narayan
  - (b) Mulk Raj Anand
  - (c) Khushwant Singh
  - (d) Raja Rao
2. Which publisher changed the title from *Ice-Candy Man* to *Cracking India* ?
  - (a) Milkweed Editions
  - (b) Cornweed Editions
  - (c) Wheatweed Editions
  - (d) Riceweeds Editions
3. Which narrative technique is used in *Ice-Candy Man* ?
  - (a) Flash back
  - (b) Flash forward
  - (c) Child Narrative
  - (d) Foreshadowing



4. Age of Lenny is ?
- (a) 6 years
  - (b) 7 years
  - (c) 8 years
  - (d) 9 years
5. Which famous Indian writer sees Lenny as the autobiographical heroine of Bapsi Sidhwa ?
- (a) Anita Desai
  - (b) Jhumpa Lahiri
  - (c) Shashi Deshpande
  - (d) Namita Gokhale
6. Who helps Ayah to flee from Hira Mandi ?
- (a) Electric Aunt
  - (b) Ice-Candy Man
  - (c) Godmother
  - (d) Lenny
7. Bapsi Sidhwa was born on which date of 1938 ?
- (a) 9<sup>th</sup> Aug.
  - (b) 10<sup>th</sup> Aug.
  - (c) 11<sup>th</sup> Aug.
  - (d) 12<sup>th</sup> Aug.
8. Sidhwa has dual citizenship of Pakistan and .
- (a) UK
  - (b) USA
  - (c) Canada
  - (d) France

9. Sidhwa graduated from of Lahore .
- (a) Kinnaird College
  - (b) Kinnor College
  - (c) Kohinoor College
  - (d) Christ College
10. Sidhwa's governess was .
- (a) Swiss German
  - (b) Anglo Indian
  - (c) Chinese
  - (d) Indian
11. During an interview to Bachi Karkaria, Bapsi describes herself as .
- (a) Pakistani-Parsi
  - (b) Pakistani-Indian
  - (c) Pakistani- Punjabi-Parsi
  - (d) American-Parsi
12. Sidhwa is not fluent in .
- (a) English
  - (b) Urdu
  - (c) Gujarati
  - (d) Marathi
13. Which of the following is not written by Sidhwa ?
- (a) *Jungle Wali Sahiba*
  - (b) *Water*
  - (c) *The Bride*
  - (d) *Their Language of Love*

14. How many books has Sidhwa written?
- (a) 6 books
  - (b) 7 books
  - (c) 8 books
  - (d) 9 books
15. Zaitoon of *The Bride* had affinity to a real girl from ?
- (a) Baluchistan
  - (b) Kohistan
  - (c) Balouch
  - (d) Lahore
16. Which novel was first to be written but second to be published?
- (a) *Water*
  - (b) *Crow Eaters*
  - (c) *The Bride*
  - (d) *Ice-Candy Man*
17. Which novel was self-published by Sidhwa?
- (a) *Crow Eaters*
  - (b) *Water*
  - (c) *The Bride*
  - (d) *Ice-Candy Man*
18. Faredoon Junglewala is also known as .
- (a) Farie
  - (b) Freddy
  - (c) Junglewala
  - (d) Farishta

19. How is Zaitoon's marriage fixed to Sakhi?
- (a) meet up
  - (b) word of mouth
  - (c) ring exchange
  - (d) written agreement
20. In which year was *Ice-Candy Man* published?
- (a) 1985
  - (b) 1986
  - (c) 1987
  - (d) 1988
21. Feroza Ginwalla is .
- (a) 15 years old
  - (b) 16 years old
  - (c) 17 years old
  - (d) 18 years old
22. The novel *Water* is based on a film by.
- (a) Deepa Sarin
  - (b) Deepa Mehta
  - (c) Deepa Ahidi
  - (d) Deepjyoti
23. Name the child widow in *Water*.
- (a) Chuiya
  - (b) Kalyani
  - (c) Shakuntala
  - (d) Madhumati

24. Who was the founder of Pakistan?

- (a) Zia Ul Haq
- (b) Muhammad Ali Jinah
- (c) Muhammad Qureshi
- (d) Major Mushtaq

25. When did Jinnah die?

- (a) 1937
- (b) 1938
- (c) 1947
- (d) 1948

**Answers :**

- 1. (c) Khushwant Singh
- 2. (a) Milkweed Editions
- 3. (c) Child Narrative
- 4. (c) 8 years
- 5. (a) Anita Desai
- 6. (c) Godmother
- 7. (c) 11<sup>th</sup> August
- 8. (b) USA
- 9. (a) Kinnaird College
- 10. (b) Anglo Indian
- 11. (c) Pakistani- Punjabi-Parsi
- 12. (d) Marathi
- 13. (a) *Jungle Wali Sahiba*
- 14. (d) 9 books
- 15. (b) Kohistan

- 16. (c) *The Bride*
- 17. (a) *Crow Eaters*
- 18. (b) Freddy
- 19. (b) Word of mouth
- 20. (d) 1988
- 21. (b) 16 years old
- 22. (b) Deepa Mehta
- 23. (a) Chuiya
- 24. (b) Muhammad Ali Jinnah
- 25. (d) 1948

**5.8.1 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Why all novels of Bapsi Sidhwa have a feminine angle?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.2 Name some prominent Pakistani women writers writing in English.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 3 Name some prominent Pakistani male writers writing in English.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 4 How a strong feminist consciousness arose in Pakistan?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 5 Describe some social issues explored by Sidhwa.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 6 In contemporary situation of Pakistan, what is the role of the State?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 7 What are some of the major themes of *Ice-Candy Man* ?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 8 Briefly summarise *Ice-Candy Man*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.9 Why does Zaitoon marry Sakhi and eventually runs away from his home?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 10 Discuss the title of the novel *The Bride*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Possible answers :**

- A. 1 All novels of Bapsi Sidhwa have a feminine angle because during that time the women were suffering due to exploitation, oppression and the harsh outlook of the ruling political party . This gave rise to several issues, which caught the fancy of the writers of that time.
- A. 2 Prominent Pakistani woman writers, writing in English are Bapsi Sidhwa, Monica Ali, Feryal Ali, Gauhar, Sarah Suleri, Uzma Aslam Khan, Kamila Shamsie and Qaisra Sharaz.
- A. 3 Chief Pakistani male writers writing in English are Zulfiqar Ghose, Tariq Ali, Nadeem Aslam, Hanif Qureshi, Mohsin Hamid and Mohammad Hanif.
- A. 4 The late 1970s was indicative of a strong feminist voice in Pakistan. The military dictatorship, religious fundamentalism, censorship on open discourse and strict laws on women resulted in surfacing of a strong and progressive feminist consciousness.
- A. 5 Sidhwa in her novels has explored the social issues of women such as marriage, victimization of women, exploitation of women and treatment of women as sexual objects in Pakistani society.
- A. 6 In contemporary Pakistan, a fertile ground for one gender to exploit, oppress, use, manipulate and control the other gender to achieve its own objectives still exists. State structure legitimizes these socio-economic relationships between genders. Thus the state can be viewed as a political, ideological and an economic entity that reinforces and promotes gender discrimination rather than removing it.
- A.7 *Ice-Candy Man*, has a number of women characters who survive the brutalities of partition. Themes related to their oppression, exploitation, slavery, disinheritance, violence and emotional weaknesses are genuinely portrayed by Sidhwa in the *Ice-Candy Man*.
- A. 8 The novel can be divided into three parts- the first part of the novel shows Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis living side by side as friends

and neighbours in Lahore. Next section depicts the seering tension all over India that explodes during partition riots. The last few chapters deal with the aftermath of partition and the violence that completely altered the lives of characters.

- A. 9 Zaitoon, marries Sakhi, a tribal man to shield her father's honour. She tries her level best to compromise with her husband until it becomes unbearable to stay with her in-laws. Thus she runs away one day.
- A.10 The title, *The Bride*, connotes it to be a story of a single bride but in reality it is about three brides that is Afshan, Zaitoon and Carol. Each bride's story has a common theme which proves that patriarchal culture exploits women.

### **5.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1 Compare and contrast the characters of Ayah and Ice-CandyMan.
- Q.2 Discuss the role of godmother as a true humanitarian.
- Q. 3 Khushwant Singh has called *Ice-Candy Man* as the most authentic book on partition. Elaborate.
- Q.4 There are some Parsi characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*, who even during the turmoil of Partition riots maintain a neutral position. Discuss in relation to the Parsi characters in the novel.
- Q. 5 Discuss *Ice-Candy Man* as a feminist novel.
- Q. 6 Write a short appraisal on life and works of Bapsi Sidhwa.
- Q. 7 Elaborate the major themes in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 8 Discuss *Ice-Candy Man* as a story of Lenny's maturation into a young woman with sexual awareness.

### **5.10 SUGGESTED READING**

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- Menon, Ritu and Bhasin, Kamla. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition*. New Delhi : Kali for Women , 1998. Print.
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**SUMMARY OF *ICE-CANDY MAN*****STRUCTURE**

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives
- 6.3 The Novel : *Ice-Candy Man* - Summary in Brief
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Glossary
- 6.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 6.7 Self - Assessment Questions
- 6.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 6.9 Suggested Reading

**6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* covers the partition phase in the subcontinent and its consequences on life of the common people. A unique novel in the sense that it is the first novel that has attempted to give an earnest picture of the times from a vantage point. In the beginning the reader is introduced to lame Lenny whose movements are restricted between Waris road, her residence, to Jail road. Col. Bharucha is a surgeon by profession who puts a plaster on Lenny's leg. The whole Parsi community of Lahore visits her but Lenny only wants her Godmother. Lenny is a keen observer and continues watching the

people from there. Her schooling is stopped by the doctor but he recommends that Lenny can lead an ordinary life with marriage. This suggestion of the doctor connotes the fixed role of a woman in the society, i.e. tying of the nuptial knot and managing the home affairs only. Limiting Lenny's exposure to school closes her fate of learning and at a young age Lenny learns the duties of womanhood.

After about a month she is allowed to go out in a stroller under the supervision of the ayah, an eighteen year old woman called Shanta. She narrates the story in first person. Lenny is not only an introverted personality but always preoccupied in her own world. A keen observer, her sensibility towards sexuality grows by observing the reactions of people around the ayah. People specially men are fascinated with the graceful figure of ayah. At a young age she discovers about the difference in religions. She realizes that it is difficult to inculcate a spirit of brotherhood between men of diverse religions. When Lenny comes to know that the ayah is amiss, she tries to search for her frantically but unfortunately ayah becomes a prey to Hindu Muslim riots. Sidhwa has given a realistic account of exploitation and repression of women folk. Sidhwa has painted Lenny with bold colours.

Lenny does not only seem to be courageous and brave but also a feminist at heart. Just by observing the women folk around her, Lenny understands the limitations of women amidst a patriarchal society. Men with the aid of their masculine prowess satiate their desires and in return assault women. In a subtle manner Sidhwa protests against the marginalization of women. Lenny's mother is docile and an epitome of a perfect housewife who has learnt to stifle her desires. Lenny conveys the message that men folk have to end egos and women need to be more assertive. A change of old mindsets is the need of the hour for establishing equality. In short, Sidhwa has a positive and constructive approach towards upliftment and betterment of the status of women. *Ice-Candy Man* picturises the emotional turmoil, weaknesses, physical assault and cruelty inflicted on women through a series of women characters.

## 6.2 OBJECTIVES

- That the learner should read, with care this seminal work of one of the major Parsi-Pakistani/ diaspora/ South Asian writers.
- That the learner should be able to give an account of the summary of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analysis of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- That the learner should be able to express insights which are related to the novel and the novelist

## 6.3 THE NOVEL : *ICE-CANDY MAN* – SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Critics and intelligentsia have hailed *Ice-Candy Man* as an authentic account of partition of the subcontinent and its consequences. There is another aspect to it i.e. *Ice-Candy Man* is a unique novel in the sense that it is the first novel from a writer of Pakistani origin to describe the fate of people of Lahore. Beginning with an excerpt from Iqbal's poetry titled, 'complaint to God' the narrator Lenny is introduced in the first chapter. As discussed in the earlier chapters, she is polio stricken i.e. has a limp and dependent on others, her medical condition prevents her free movement. Colonel Bharucha is a surgeon who casts Lenny's leg in plaster and performs surgery which is so painful that she gets bed ridden. Lots of people of Parsi community come to see Lenny but she just wants to be with the Godmother. Since she is not free to move around, she becomes extremely observant.

Different localities of Lahore are described by Lenny, who is also the child narrator. Whenever her eyes fall on Salvation Army wall with ventilation slits, it discerns a feeling of loneliness and sadness in her. She imagines about the dumb animals on the other side of the wall lurking in fear for survival. Lenny is not only introvert but also preoccupied in her own thoughts. The ayah, an eighteen year old girl Shanta is engaged to take care of Lenny. In a stroller the ayah takes her to a zoo.

During the outing an Englishman approaches Ayah and requests her to put Lenny down but Ayah explains to him about Lenny's disability. For Lenny watching Ayah interact with people is an education. Gender behavior in society gets evident to Lenny by watching Colonel Bharucha, old and young men including even the beggars and holymen get drawn towards the Ayah's feminine and graceful body. Ayah has a large number of male admirers, the Ice-Candy-Man, is one of them. An eponymous character has the talent of speaking on any topic under the sun. He is not only a chatter box but also changes roles, he becomes a bird man in the streets of Lahore and the rich ladies give him money for feeding the birds. Ayah has two more admirers—a Chinaman and a Pathan. They too are fascinated by her charms. They visit Lenny's house daily to talk to her.

Lenny gives candid observation about her own community. The Parsi community gathers in a community hall of the Parsi temple. Preparations for worship of fire were in progress by priests. All this is shown through the eyes of Lenny. The dilemma of the Parsi community during partition is apt to the peace loving and adjusting nature of the Parsis. When Col. Bharucha informs about the latest political condition with respect to partition into two countries; the Parsi community fails to reach a consensus regarding backing and supporting a particular country. After long heated arguments the Parsi community of Lahore agree on maintaining a neutral position.

Shankar and Gita are the newly wedded couple and also the tenants of Lenny's house. The kids of the house observe their romantic behavior with interest. Gita's culinary and story telling skills popularizes her with the younger lot. Other inhabitants of Lenny's household are Hari, the gardener and Imam Din, the cook. Imam Din is robust, six footer and sixty five year old male who too is fond of children of the household. One day, Imam Din takes Lenny to his village Pir Pindo on bicycle. This village is blessed with communal harmony as Hindus and Muslims live with a sense of brotherhood. Lenny observes that the villagers are enthusiastically discussing the politics of Bihar and Bengal and are agitated to hear about the inaction of Britishers

on Hindu-Muslim riots. However, the headman of Pir Pindo assures safety to them if such riots occur there. After meeting some children i.e., Ranna and his sisters Khatija and Parveen, Lenny returns back to Lahore with Imam.

Lenny was fond of Electric aunt, who was a widow. Unable to attend school, Lenny used to visit Mrs. Pen for education. Mrs. Pen's house was on Jail Road, next to Godmother's. Often accompanied by ayah, Lenny would visit Godmother after tuitions. During Gandhiji's visit to Lahore, Lenny met him with her mother. The myth about Gandhiji, Lenny harbored in her heart shattered as he talked of enema-therapy after blessing them. Lenny was puzzled at his grand status of Mahatma, to her he appeared a semi-clown and demon.

In the month of April, Lahore began to sizzle. The rumors about partition percolated in Lahore. It was evident that India and Pakistan would be two separate nations. The Muslim league wanted Pakistan for Muslims and news of communal riots were rife. Under such circumstances Imam was worried about his folks and visited Pir Pindo. Again Lenny forcibly joins him as she was nostalgic about her last visit. In order to enjoy Baisakhi fair and feast, they went to Dera Tek Singh along with Dost Mohammad. But the bliss did not last long, and people of the village apprehended trouble. The relatives of Imam Din came to Lahore and were accommodated with Imam Din. Military personnel started evacuating the Muslims of Pir Pindo to safer places. This resulted in utter confusion among the peasants. Violence is rampant and people shudder with fear at the sight of Mr. Roger's, who is the Inspector General of Police, whose mutilated body is thrown in a gutter. People start migrating to safer places. Pir Pindo is badly affected by communal riots. Religious brotherhood is converted into blood enemies, bent on spilling each others blood. In Lahore, people start moving to safer places, specially the Hindus and Sikhs move to Amritsar. People are dependent upon updates from All India Radio on political situation.

Though the Parsi community is safe but apprehensive about its future prospects. Muslim mobs attack Hindu houses in Lahore. One such mob stopped over at Lenny's house to enquire about whereabouts of Hindu



servants in the household. They were keen on Shanta but Imam lied that she had left the precincts. Suddenly Ice-Candy-Man asks Lenny about ayah, who discloses of her hiding place. Lenny is shocked to see the frantic Muslim crowd dragging ayah and she is stunned to see how an innocent truth can ruin somebody's life. Lenny is remorseful for speaking the truth. Ice-Candy-Man's mother was a prostitute and he takes the ayah to Hira Mandi, which is a red light area of Lahore. In reality, ayah was fond of Masseur's songs but Ice-Candy-Man loved ayah for her youthful looks. He is also fond of Urdu poetry.

The bliss and communal harmony of Pir Pindo was short lived. Pir Pindo faced one of the worst forms of communal violence due to partition. Sikhs were continuously attacking the Muslims of the village. Men were killed, women gang raped and children slaughtered. It was preplanned to hide some sturdy men folk to safer places but nothing seemed to work. Majority of Muslims were killed. The women folk of the village gather at Chaudhary household and spill kerosene oil around the house, in order to burn themselves. Ranna, manages to escape as he was buried under a heap of dead bodies, badly hurt and shocked, he reaches a refugee camp at Lahore. Reaching Lahore Ranna witnessed most horrifying scenes one could ever imagine. He was in rags, amidst rotting dead bodies and wandering through the abandoned lanes of looted houses, he satiates his appetite with stolen chappaties. By chance, Ranna is hurled to a refugee camp at Badami Baug, where coincidentally he meets Iqbal Chacha and Noni Chachi.

Lenny is deeply guilt stricken for revealing the truth about the ayah to the Ice-Candy Man, the sight of dragging the ayah forward and her feet receding back to Lenny's home is a torturous sight. For days Lenny stares at her tongue in the bathroom mirror, trying frantically to pain her tongue as it is the tongue's revelation that result in ayah's abduction. Had she not disclosed ayah's hiding place to Ice-Candy Man, she wouldn't have been abducted by the Muslim mob. Ice-Candy Man is totally changed due to witnessing the

communal riots, specially the sight of his dead muslim brothers. His beloved ayah becomes just a Hindu for him during the riots. For days Lenny remains in shock at ayah's abduction, Ice-Candy Man's behavior is shocking to her. She remains lonely and sad without ayah, specially during Papoo's marriage. Worldly experiences after ayah's departure matures Lenny physically and mentally.

Godmother is a famous and extremely well connected personality of Lahore. Ayah is spotted in a taxi, dressed up like a film actress by Lenny and few others. Lenny informs this to godmother, who orders search for the ayah. Godmother calls for ayah's husband in the evening. Lenny is restless and waits till six p.m. to see him but he is not surprised to discern that the bridegroom is none other than Ice-Candy Man. He is dressed up in flowing white muslin clothes and well versed in Urdu poetry. He admits that she has been accepted by family of dancers and married to him.

Godmother knew everything through her espionage system and scolds him for letting ayah be raped. To this accusation he replies that he is a man and men are never faithful. Only dogs are faithful. If one wants faithfulness, then ayah should have married a dog. Godmother gets wild at hearing this and calls him son of pigs and pimps who has brought disgrace and shame to his wife that is ayah. Godmother scolds him violently and Ice-Candy-Man is so shaken that he weeps and promises to make ayah happy from then onwards. Wearing a Jinnah-cap, Ice-Candy Man's face is grief stricken and shocked. Ayah is renamed as Mumtaz after marriage to Ice-Candy Man. Godmother wanted to meet ayah and Lenny insists on accompanying her to ayah's new abode i.e., Hira Mandi. So they reach in a tonga and visit ayah's well decorated room, sprinkled with flowers. Though ayah is dressed in a bridal finery but Lenny is sensitive enough to discern the sadness in her eyes. The glow and life on ayah's face has disappeared.

During Ice-Candy Man's absence, ayah begs Godmother to help her unite with her relatives in Amritsar. Ayah does not want to live in Hira

Mandi. Godmother asks her to be firm in her decision and ayah pleads to leave this place. Godmother and Lenny leave ayah after assuring that she would be rescued to Amritsar. Visiting ayah's place in Hira Mandi has an impact on Lenny's sensibilities and she begins to understand about the influence of kotha on Ice-Candy Man and ayah. Kotha is not only a place for dancing girls but a storehouse of powerful force that has changed Ice-Candy man into a Mughal courtier and a poet; ever ready with rhyming couplets.

Beyond doubt, the Godmother, as her name is suggestive of power, force and influence; contacts the Government officials for transporting ayah across border to Amritsar in India. Soon a police troop visit Hira Mandi to take away ayah from Ice-Candy Man's clutches. She is kept in a well guarded woman's camp at Warris road. Ice-Candy Man reaches the camp, following ayah but is rebuffed by a robust Sikh sentry. Ice-Candy Man is transformed into a wandering lover in search of his lost love. He looks like a sad fakir who has left this world, in search of his beloved. To win back his beloved, he places fresh flowers for her over the boundary wall of the camp every morning and sing poems of love for her. This ritual of placing flowers and singing songs continues for several days but Ice-Candy Man could not be benefitted in any way. He could not win back his beloved wife ayah alias Mumtaz.

Soon the news of ayah's union with her family in Amritsar reaches Lenny. Ice-Candy-Man, follows her to India, crossing the border in order to pursue his lost love. Thus, the novel has a sad ending. In a nut shell the novel unfolds the political events in the history of the partition of the subcontinent. Laced with authentic scenes of rape, murder, violence and suffering it creates a classic piece of literature through Lenny, the child narrator. Ice-Candy-Man has been hailed as a multifaceted protagonist of the novel.

#### **6.4 LET US SUM UP**

*Ice-Candy Man* presents an authentic account of the partition trauma and its subsequent aftermaths. It is also the first work of a Pakistani to describe the fate of people in Lahore during partition and later. Lenny is the child narrator

who is always lost in her own world. As Lenny was polio stricken, ayah alias Shanta, an eighteen year old charming maidservant was engaged to look after Lenny. Ayah was extremely attractive to the opposite sex and Lenny learnt a lot about male sex attraction by watching the men around her. Lenny watches how the men were drawn towards the feminine graces of ayah. Among the admirers of ayah, Ice-Candy Man was the most versatile character. The novel *Ice Candy Man* is also a true account of the position of the Parsi community during partition. The Parsi community gathers in a fire temple and is engaged in a hot debate as to whom to side during partition. Unable to reach a consensus, they reach a decision to maintain a neutral position, instead of supporting a particular country.

There are some servants in the servant quarters of Lenny's home. Imam Din is a cook, with whom Lenny visits his village Pir Pindo. This village is blessed with communal harmony as Hindus and Muslims live with a sense of brotherhood. The headman assures the villagers if riots break out safety would be provided to each one of them. Later in the novel when the communal riots become a reality due to partition, the peace and brotherhood of Pir Pindo is robbed. At Baisakhi time Imam revisits the village with Dost Mohammad and Lenny. He brings his relatives to Lahore and accommodates in his own home and the police also starts evacuating the Muslims of Pir Pindo to safer places.

Mrs. Pen was Lenny's tutor who lived next to Godmother's house. Lenny was fond of both Godmother and Electric aunt. Sidhwa cracks the myth of Gandhiji through Lenny's encounter with him in Lahore. Hearing about his enema-therapy, Lenny finds him half clownish. Though the Parsi community enjoyed a neutral position yet they were apprehensive about future prospects of the community. Lahore burnt with communal tension and Lenny's household was no exception. Once a Muslim mob barged in, enquiring about Hindu servants, specially about ayah. Imam lied that she had left the house but Ice-Candy Man trickfully asks Lenny and not realizing the harmful intentions of the Ice-Candy Man, she discloses about the hiding place of the ayah. Lenny is shocked to see how religion has divided the servants and how the wall of brotherhood collapsed. Lenny

remains guilt ridden for days due to the fact that how an innocent truth ruined somebody's life.

Ice-Candy Man's mother was a prostitute and he marries ayah. Renaming her as Mumtaz he keeps her in the red light area of Lahore and turns a pimp. News about ayah's stay in Hira Mandi reaches the Godmother who calls Ice-Candy Man, scolds him for stooping so low as to make ayah available as prostitute to other men. Godmother on Lenny's insistence visits ayah. In Ice-Candy Man's absence the sad eyed ayah expresses her desire to be united with her relatives in Amritsar. Exercising her influence, the Godmother helps ayah to reach Amritsar with the help of police force and Ice-Candy-Man is rebuked. Ultimately Ice-Candy-Man also crosses the border in the hope to win back his lady love.

## **6.5 GLOSSARY**

- Partition: a division of one country into two or more countries
- Subcontinent: a large landmass that forms part of a continent, especially the part of Asia that includes India, Pakistan and Bangladesh
- Vantage point: a higher position from where you can watch something
- Parsi: (also parsee) member of a religious group whose ancestors originally came from Persia and whose religion is Zoroastrianism
- Nuptial : connected with marriage or wedding
- Connote: suggest a feeling, an idea, etc., as well as the main meaning
- Stroller: ( buggy, push-chair), a small folding seat on wheels in which a small child sits and is pushed along
- Inculcate: to cause somebody to learn and remember ideas
- Subtle: not very noticeable or obvious
- Docile: quiet and easy to control
- Epitome: a perfect example of something
- Turmoil: a state of great anxiety and confusion

- Seminal: very important and having a strong influence on later developments
- Diaspora: movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country
- Bibliography: list of books or articles about a particular subject
- Excerpt: a short piece of writing, music, film, etc., taken from a longer whole
- Godmother: a female godparent (responsible for a child)
- Gender: the fact of being male or female
- Feminine: having the qualities or appearance considered to be typical of women
- Eponymous: eponymous character of a book, play, film, etc., is the one mentioned in the title
- Candid: saying what you think openly and honestly
- Dilemma: predicament, situation in which you have to make a very difficult choice between things of equal importance
- Neutral: not supporting or helping either side in disagreement
- Culinary: connected with cooking or food
- Robust: strong and healthy
- Communal : involving different group of people
- Riots: a situation in which a group of people behave in a violent way in public place
- Enema: a liquid that is put in the rectum of a person
- Therapy: treatment of a physical problem
- Rumors: a piece of information that people talk about but that may not be true
- Percolate: to move gradually

- Nostalgic: a feeling of sadness mixed with pleasure and affection when you think of happy times in the past
- Apprehend: to understand or recognize something
- Rampant: existing or spreading everywhere in a way that cannot be controlled
- Mutilate: to damage somebody's body very severely
- Prospects: the possibility that something will happen
- Precincts: area around a place or a building
- Slaughter: the cruel killing of large number of people
- Frantically: done quickly and with a lot of activity but in a way that is not organized
- Muslin: a type of fine cotton cloth that is almost transparent
- Espionage: spying
- Pimp: a man who controls prostitutes and lives on the money they earn
- Sensibility: the ability to experience and understand deep feelings
- Kotha: a room where the dancing girls perform
- Rebuff: an unkind refusal of a friendly offer, rejection
- Fakir: a Muslim religious ascetic who lives solely on alms
- Bliss: extreme happiness
- Spilling: to flow over the edge

## **6.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- (1) Lenny's movements are restricted between .
- (a) Waris to Jail road
  - (b) Hira Mandi to Jung road
  - (c) Wahab to Jamail road
  - (d) Waaris to Mirza Ismail road

- (2) Who puts plaster on Lenny's leg?
- (a) Col. Brown
  - (b) Col. Bharucha
  - (c) Col. Todd
  - (d) Col. Mirza
- (3) Col. Bharucha, by profession is a .
- (a) Army Officer
  - (b) Guard
  - (c) Surgeon
  - (d) Medical specialist
- (4) Ayah's age is .
- (a) 17 years
  - (b) 18 years
  - (c) 19 years
  - (d) 20 years
- (5) Ayah's name is .
- (a) Shanti
  - (b) Shanta
  - (c) Shant
  - (d) Shantu
- (6) After marriage ayah is renamed as.
- (a) Munni Begum
  - (b) Mumtaz
  - (c) Munirka
  - (d) Rosy



- (7) Who are fascinated by ayah's graceful figure?
- (a) Men
  - (b) Women
  - (c) Children
  - (d) Britishers
- (8) Who is docile and an epitome of a perfect housewife?
- (a) Godmother
  - (b) Electric aunt
  - (c) Lenny's mother
  - (d) Ayah
- (9) *Ice-Candy Man* is a unique novel in the sense that it is the first novel from a \_\_\_\_\_ writer of Pakistani origin to describe the fate of people of \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Delhi
  - (b) Rawalpindi
  - (c) Mumbai
  - (d) Lahore
- (10) *Ice-Candy Man* begins with an excerpt from \_\_\_\_\_ poetry titled 'Complaint to God'.
- (a) Allah Baksh's
  - (b) Rumi's
  - (c) Iqbal's
  - (d) Faiz Ahmad Faiz's
- (11) Whenever Lenny's eyes fall on \_\_\_\_\_ Army wall with ventilation slits, it discerns a feeling of loneliness and sadness in her.
- (a) Salvation

- (b) Red Cross
  - (c) Pakistan Army
  - (d) Amritsar refugee camp
- (12) Who is an eponymous character .
- (a) Bapsi Sidhwa
  - (b) Lenny
  - (c) Godmother
  - (d) Ice-Candy-Man
- (13) Ayah has two more admirers *a* chinaman and a \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Pathan
  - (b) Lenny
  - (c) Godmother
  - (d) Ice-Candy-Man
- (14) Parsis worship .
- (a) Water
  - (b) Air
  - (c) Fire
  - (d) Earth
- (15) During partition, the Parsi community of Lahore agree on maintaining a \_\_\_\_\_ position.
- (a) Pro- India
  - (b) Neutral
  - (c) Pro- Pakistan
  - (d) Independent
- (16) Shankar and Gita are the newly wedded couple and also the \_\_\_\_\_

— of Lenny's house.

- (a) servants
  - (b) landlords
  - (c) cooks
  - (d) tenants
- (17) Gita's — and storytelling skills popularizes her with the younger lot.
- (a) culinary
  - (b) sewing
  - (c) singing
  - (d) debating
- (18) Hari is the cook and Imam Din is a gardener. (True/False). \_\_\_\_\_
- (19) Who takes Lenny to Pir Pindo?
- (a) Ayah
  - (b) Imam Din
  - (c) Shankar
  - (d) Col. Bharucha
- (20) Names of Ranna's sisters are Khatija and\_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Prerna
  - (b) Parmeshwari
  - (c) Parveen
  - (d) Parjeet
- (21) Who was Lenny's tutor?
- (a) Mrs. Penny
  - (b) Mrs. Pan
  - (c) Ms. Paan

- (d) Mrs. Pen
- (22) The myth about which leader was shattered in Lenny's heart?
- (a) Gandhiji
  - (b) Gen. Zia-Ul-Haq
  - (c) Mohammad Ali Jinnah
  - (d) Jawahar Lal Nehru
- (23) About which therapy did Gandhiji talk?
- (a) Natural
  - (b) Ayurveda
  - (c) Enema
  - (d) Homeopathy
- (24) During riots the people of Lahore were dependent on updates on political situation on whose services?
- (a) Doordarshan
  - (b) Rashtrdoot
  - (c) The Lahore Times
  - (d) All India Radio
- (25) Who asks Lenny about ayah's hiding place?
- (a) Imam Din
  - (b) Dost Mohammad
  - (c) Ice-Candy-Man
  - (d) Hari
- (26) Ice- Candy Man's mother was a \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Prostitute
  - (b) Tutor
  - (c) Singer

- (d) Maid
- (27) Ice-Candy Man takes ayah to \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Amritsar
  - (b) Waaris road
  - (c) Hira Mandi
  - (d) Pir Pindo
- (28) Ranna was hurled to a refugee camp at \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Delhi Haat
  - (b) Badami Baug
  - (c) Lahore camp
  - (d) Kashmiri Baug
- (29) Who coincidentally meets Iqbal Chacha and Noni Chachi in the refugee camp?
- (a) Parveen
  - (b) Ice-Candy Man
  - (c) Mumtaz
  - (d) Ranna
- (30) Who said, "If one wants faithfulness, then ayah should have married a dog".
- (a) Godmother
  - (b) Ice-Candy Man
  - (c) Lenny
  - (d) Electric Aunt
- (31) Whom does ayah beg for help?
- (a) Godmother
  - (b) Ice-Candy Man
  - (c) Lahore camp

- (d) Kashmiri Baug
- (32) Where do ayah's relatives live?
- (a) Delhi Haat
  - (b) Badami Baug
  - (c) Lahore camp
  - (d) Amritsar
- (33) "He looks like a sad fakir who has left this world, in search of his beloved".  
Who is he?
- (a) Parveen
  - (b) Ranna
  - (c) Mumtaz
  - (d) Ice-Candy Man
- (34) Who has been hailed as a multifaceted protagonist of the novel?
- (a) Sidhwa
  - (b) Ranna
  - (c) Ice-Candy Man
  - (d) Lenny
- (35) Who crosses the border in the hope to win back his lady love?
- (a) Col. Bharucha
  - (b) Ranna
  - (c) Ice-Candy Man
  - (d) Imam Din

**Possible Answers :**

- |       |        |        |        |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| (1) a | (2) b  | (3) c  | (4) a  |
| (5) b | (6) b  | (7) a  | (8) c  |
| (9) d | (10) c | (11) a | (12) d |

- (13) a            (14) c            (15) b            (16) d  
(17) a            (18) False (19) b            (20) c  
(21) d            (22) a            (23) c            (24) d  
(25) b            (26) a            (27) c            (28) b  
(29) d            (30) b            (31) a            (32) d  
(33) d            (34) c            (35) c

**6.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

Q.1 Which phase of the subcontinent does the *Ice-Candy Man* cover?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 2 Comment on the role of young Lenny .

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 3 Why are the kids attached to Shankar and Gita?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 4 Why did the Muslim League want Pakistan?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 5 During partition riots how were the people taking care of their safety in Lahore?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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Q. 6 Describe communal violence in Pir Pindo during partition.

Ans. 

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Q. 7 Describe Lenny's way of punishing herself for revealing the truth about ayah's hiding place.

Ans. 

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Q. 8 Describe Ice-Candy Man as ayah's husband.

Ans. 

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Q.9 Describe ayah's meeting with Lenny after marriage in Hira Mandi.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.10 How does Godmother rescue ayah from Hira Mandi and send her to her relatives in Amritsar?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q.11 What did the Ice-Candy Man do to win back his love? Was he benefitted from it?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Possible Answers :**

- (1) Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* covers the Partition phase in the subcontinent and its consequences on life of the common people.
- (2) Gender behavior in society gets evident to Lenny by watching Colonel Bharucha, old and young men including even the beggars and holymen get drawn towards the ayah's feminine and graceful body.
- (3) The kids of the house observe the romantic behavior of Shankar and Gita with interest. Gita's culinary and story telling skills popularizes her with the kids.
- (4) The Muslim league wanted Pakistan for Muslims.
- (5) In Lahore, people started moving to safer places, specially the Hindus and Sikhs moved to Amritsar
- (6) Pir Pindo faced one of the worst forms of communal violence due to partition. Sikhs were continuously attacking the Muslims of the village. Men were killed , women gang raped and children slaughtered.
- (7) Lenny was deeply guilty for revealing the truth about the ayah to the Ice-Candy Man, for days Lenny stared at her tongue in the bathroom mirror, trying frantically to pain her tongue as it was the tongue's revelation that resulted in ayah's abduction.
- (8) After marriage Ice-Candy Man is dressed up in flowing white muslin clothes and well versed in Urdu poetry.
- (9) Lenny with Godmother, reach in a tonga and visit ayah's well decorated room, sprinkled with flowers. Though ayah is dressed in a bridal finery but Lenny is sensitive enough to discern the sadness in her eyes. The glow and life on ayah's face had disappeared .
- (10) The Godmother, as her name is suggestive of power, force and influence; contacts the Government officials for transporting ayah across border to Amritsar in India. Soon a police troop visit Hira

Mandi to take away ayah from Ice-Candy Man's clutches. She is kept in a well guarded woman's camp at Warris road.

- (11) To win back his beloved, he places fresh flowers for her over the boundary wall of the camp every morning and sing poems of love for her. This ritual of placing flowers and singing songs continued for several days but Ice-Candy Man could not be benefitted in any way.

### **6.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- (1) What is the relevance of the title *Ice-Candy Man* ?
- (2) Discuss *Ice-Candy Man* as a political novel.
- (3) Discuss major themes of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (4) Elaborate the portrayal of partition in *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (5) Discuss feminism in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (6) Write down the character sketch of *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (7) Write down the autobiographical elements in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (8) Discuss the role of Parsi community during partition, as described in the novel *Ice- Candy Man*.
- (9) Discuss the character sketch of Lenny.
- (10) Throw light on gender behavior as evident between the ayah and her male admirers.

### **6.9 SUGGESTED READING**

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- (10) Singh, R.A. , A.K. Singh, *Perspectives on Indian Writings in English*, Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2006
- (11) Singh, Dr. Pramod Kumar, *Indian Fiction in English*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2009

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### **THEMES IN *ICE-CANDY MAN***

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives
- 7.3 Major Themes in *Ice-Candy Man*
- 7.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.5 Glossary
- 7.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 7.7 Short Answer Questions
- 7.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 7.9 Suggested Reading

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

*Ice-Candy Man* is a major realistic novel on partition; on a larger scale but while closely examining the warp and woof of the story; several strands are revealed. In other words there is one major episode of the partition saga that runs from beginning to the end of the novel and several smaller episodic stories strewn around the text. These smaller episodes reveal diverse themes in them. A theme can be defined as the main idea in a piece of writing, talk or

work. A piece of literature, for example a novel may have a central theme or central idea and several other themes. These themes may be major or minor, depending on the author's treatment of these themes. For example partition is a major theme in *Ice-Candy Man* which deals with the division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. While narrating about the partition process, Sidhwa gave an honest picture of the Parsi community's neutral stand during riots. Here neutrality can be a minor theme. Sidhwa also extensively picturises Pir Pindo before and during partition. Pir Pindo is blessed with communal harmony but later it is dominated with violence and bloodshed. In respect of the village Pir Pindo, religious brotherhood and communal violence can be minor themes.

The novel *Ice-Candy Man*, is a rich text in the sense, Bapsi Sidhwa has realistically interwoven, a major story along with smaller stories together into a larger picture. The novel is so perfectly written that it requires a sensitive reader to recognize the boundaries of smaller stories. Thus, the torturous happening of the partition led to dislocation and breaking down of individuals due to chaotic violence. Bapsi Sidhwa uses present tense while narrating the story thus creating an authentic picture with a strong element of universality.

The novel is an amalgamation of several themes, such as, partition, neutrality, manipulation, feminism, dislocation, survival instinct and greed.

## **7.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:

- That the learner should be able to define 'theme' and be able to identify and draw a line between major and minor themes from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate familiarity with the actual historical background in the history of partition of the Indian subcontinent.
- That the learner should be able to demonstrate capacity to develop critical analysis of the major and minor themes of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.

### 7.3 MAJOR THEMES IN *ICE-CANDY MAN*

#### **Feminism**

There is no denying the fact that all works of Sidhwa have a feministic angle and *Ice-Candy Man* is no exception. It has a broad feminine perspective too. There are many women characters in the novel, the child narrator Lenny, her ayah Shanta who is renamed as Mumtaz after marriage to Ice-Candy-Man, Godmother, Lenny's mother, Electric aunt and several minor women characters like Mrs. Pen, Lenny's tenant Gita, Ranna's sisters Khatija and Parveen. A gynocritical study of the novel shows that women characters in the novel occupy a central place and some of them are powerful like the Godmother. Though Ice-Candy Man is an eponymous character, versatile and manipulative but his character acquires a negative shade. He is submissive in front of Godmother and hurls ayah into prostitution. He does not rise to the level of any of these powerful women. The novel *Ice-Candy Man* inverts the patriarchal set up by showing strong willed women characters who are not only assertive but also powerful and well connected. The Godmother strongly scolds Ice-Candy-Man for taking his wife into prostitution and even promises ayah of her desire to be united with relatives in Amritsar. Godmother through her influence sends police to rescue ayah and send her across the border. Ice-Candy Man tries to woo her back but he is unsuccessful. He even crosses the border and follows ayah but without any luck.

Lenny's mother is a docile housewife yet dominant in compassion and motherhood. The ayah's attraction is so dominant that she has a trail of male followers. Ice-Candy Man becomes a pimp to ayah and earns his livelihood. He marries her and renames her as Mumtaz, ayah is shown as oppressed and is used as a commodity by bearing the brunt of all wrongs of the men around her but she exhibits courage and intelligence when she reveals her desire to be rescued from Hira Mandi in Ice-Candy Man's absence. Not even once ayah is shown to have repented her decision of



leaving her husband, exhibiting grit and strength as she leaves Pakistan for good and turns down all advances of Ice-Candy Man, for returning back to him.

Lenny is sensitive and intelligent as she understands gender behavior by watching men around ayah. She is innocent as she discloses the hiding place of ayah but has strong morals, for days she is guilty of speaking the truth. Her love for ayah is evident as she asserts on accompanying Godmother to Hira Mandi. Lenny loves Godmother too as after her leg operation, she insists on meeting only the Godmother. All feelings of Lenny are positive and hence considered powerful.

### **Partition / Violence**

*Ice-Candy Man* is well known for authentic and realistic picture of partition. Partition riots are at an apogee through news from Ice-Candy-Man's commentary and All India Radio coverage. Kidnapping of ayah by a Muslim mob is a proof that Pakistan was not a safe place during that time for Hindus. Ranna's village too is rife with partition violence and the spirit of brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims disappears. The village is taken by surprise by a large mob of Sikhs, most probably they were avenging the burning of their own village and Ranna was the only survivor of the attack to come out alive. The village is filled with shrieks and cries from women. Ranna himself lied buried and hidden under a heap of dead bodies. These dead bodies were of his own people and at waking up he is shocked at the gory sight. Ranna witnessed the worst form of atrocities on women. A particular religion or ethnic group targeted the enemy group and raped, humiliated, impregnated and cruelly murdered and slaughtered women and children. Hamida, the new ayah of Lenny was kidnapped by Sikhs and taken to Amritsar. Her family refused to accept her back as she was considered a 'fallen woman' and her integrity was doubted by her husband and in-laws as they felt she has been touched by other men.

Before partition, ayah had admirers from various religions such as Muslim, Hindu and Sikh but during partition she is abducted and many

Hindus like the ayah had to make symbolic conversions to Islam to avoid infliction of communal hatred and violence on them during partition. She is thrown into prostitution by force. Sidhwa also mentions the name of prominent leaders during partition such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbattan, Subhash Chandra Bose and Mohammed Ali Jinnah.

### **Colonialism**

Postcolonial fiction not only depicts the aftermaths of colonialism but also the injustice, oppression and exploitation by the colonizers on the colonized. Women have been a subaltern group in South Asian countries and are doubly colonized. Women face a lot of problems in a patriarchal setup and are forced to exist in a way to suit the whims and fancies of men and powerful women. Women comprise of a silent majority. In order to preserve their cultural values or vindicate the other religious group, the men made stronger social taboos. Ayah who was a domestic help at Sethi household is forced to become a public entertainer within a few months of partition. She is a puppet in the hands of Ice-Candy Man. There may have been thousands of unsung ayahs who had to bear the brunt of harshest crime on women and 'other' religious group.

Lenny herself is no exception from becoming colonized at the hands of male cousins. Despite several prohibitions, her elder male cousin fumbles with her and succeeds to touch her private parts. As Lenny is metamorphosed from a child to a lady, she finds herself in the position of becoming 'other' and is colonized by the colonizer or the 'male'.

Colonisation not necessarily takes place when a stronger nation exploits it's colony or a male oppresses a female. It can take place when a powerful individual of the same sex suppresses another. As is evident in the relationship between the Godmother and Slave Sister, exploitation, suppression and manipulation of one individual on another can exist in a female-female relationship too. Though the Godmother is hailed and placed on high pedestal of feminine power yet her actions reveal that at times she has misused her powers.

## **Dislocation**

In the novel, many people were migrating, be for instance Imam Din shifted his folks to Lahore as Pir Pindo was vulnerable to attack by the Sikh religious group. The gravity of migration question is evident from the thoughts of some Muslim folks, who questioned themselves asking, as to where a Muslim can go? And how can they abandon the graves of their ancestors, land of their own kith and kin. The thought of abandoning their land is so shameful that they are apprehensive of holding up their heads erect again. Several individuals were dislocated, for instance ayah was taken away from Lenny's home to Hira Mandi, and Hamida lost her home and had to take refuge elsewhere in order to earn her livelihood.

Beyond doubt, home is a place of safety and comfort for everyone and many people were not prepared to abandon their homes and accept uprooting and dislocation, this is one of the reasons so many people died.

## **Parsi Community / Parsi ethnic group/ minority discourse**

Sidhwa belongs to Parsi community and in almost all her works does not hide her love for the community and *Ice-Candy Man* is no exception. She throws light on their views, customs and religious practices in day-to-day life. Sidhwa does not hide the aloofness and indifference of the community. The Parsis in the beginning are shown together for Jashan Prayer, to celebrate the British victory at the Fire temple in Lahore. Though the Parsis were loyal to the British but as partition was evident, they were in a fix as to whom to side. With During the year 1947, the pre-partition days created havoc in the lives of the Parsi community, particularly those who lived in Lahore.

Col. Bharucha, who was a Parsi doctor as well as the president of the Parsi anjuman sounded a note of caution. According to him, if they side with Hindus, their business would be swept away under their own noses and if they side with the Muslims, there was a danger of Parsi community becoming extinct as they might convert Parsis to Muslims. Col. Bharucha, in between also voiced out his candid views that the Parsis will not be safe in

Pakistan after partition and they should migrate to Bombay, where the majority of Parsis live. Ultimately it was decided to abide by the rulers of Lahore despite the religion of the ruler. It does not matter if the ruler was a Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or a Christian. Thus in the heated discussion, it was decided that following the peace loving and adjusting nature of the Parsis; the Parsis of Lahore would follow who so ever became the ruler of Lahore.

Parsis are also shown to shake off their political neutrality and help Hindus and Sikhs trapped in Lahore. At the same time the Parsis have maintained a safe distance from communal violence. One example is ayah, who is rescued by Godmother in crossing over to India. Thus the Parsis helped in healing process after partition violence aftermath.

### **Lust and desire**

Ice-Candy-Man alias Dilnawaz's personality is full of passions of love and desire for ayah whom he abducts and imprisons in a brothel house of Hira Mandi. The ayah from the beginning attracts male eyes wherever she goes be it street men, servants of the Sethi household, British officials or anyone crossing ayah's path. She is attractive to the opposite sex, irrespective of any religion. Beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart drivers, cooks, coolies and cyclists give ayah covetous glances. The real network of her friends and admirers consists of the Fallettis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, masseur, Ice-Candy Man, restraint wrestler, knife sharpner Sharbat Khan, Ramzana the butcher, Imam Din, Sikh zoo attendant, Sher Singh and a China man. All these men are of different religions and ethnicity yet they have one thing in common i.e. the desire and love for ayah. Of these the masseur and Ice-Candy-Man are ayah's favourite. All others only talk to her but these two have the privilege to touch her. Masseur often massaged ayah under her sari and Ice-Candy Man let his toes crawl along her leg and sometimes even to her private parts.

The way Ice-Candy Man succeeds in abducting the ayah brings forth his selfish and immoral traits. He was already married and kept his first wife

in the village he belonged to. Feelings of desire and lust for ayah are prominent in Ice-Candy Man's personality. In short he is not true to any of these two women in his life.

Ice-Candy Man is a versatile character, he keeps assuming new roles and professions but from the beginning to the end of the novel, his pursuit of the ayah is constant. He is unmindful of the evident, sadness in the eyes of ayah but only concerned with fulfilling his own desires.

### **Religious Intolerance**

As the saying goes, 'one man's religion is another man's poison', there are ample evidences in the text of *Ice-Candy Man* to prove it. In the Sethi household the ayah's group was a combination of people from variety of religions. During the partition riots the group disintegrates. Public is affected by intolerance to another's faith. Religion is used as a weapon to divide the society. Many people changed their faiths to survive. Ayah alias Shanta is one of them, who becomes Mumtaz in a muslim dominated area.

With the advent of partition violence, religious intolerance mushrooms up. Sikhs and Muslims lived amicably but this feeling was replaced by religious hatred. Though Sidhwa hints for maintaining communal harmony by reminding that the *Koran* is kept next to the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the Golden Temple. She also tells that the Sikh faith came into existence in order to maintain Hindu-Muslim harmony.

The reader is reminded that just like the train in Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*, in *Ice-Candy Man* too this train arrives from Gurdaspur and it is full of dead bodies of Muslims. There are no young women in the bodies as it might be a possibility that they have been detained for sexual abuses. It was awfully gruesome to receive two gunny bags of women's breasts. Ice-Candy-Man justifies his indulgence in violent killing of Hindus and Sikhs by avenging the massacre of dead Muslims in the train from Gurdaspur. He hurls grenades through the windows of Hindu and Sikh homes.

In order to shield oneself from communal violence some people convert to the faith of the majority, for instance Hari not only shaves his bodhi but also circumcises his penis. Moti, another servant from Sethi household becomes a Christian. In Lahore no Brahmins with castemark or Hindu in appearance were visible. Lahore was full of Muslim refugees from India. Sikhs in Pakistan had occupied five villages around Dehra Misri. They moved like a marauding army of forty thousand people. They not only killed the Muslims but paraded the Muslim women naked in the streets.

Religious intolerance looms large all over the city, especially in the Queen's park, people of similar religions sit together and show intolerance to other religious groups.

### **Disintegration / Degeneration**

The novel shows disintegration of the Indian subcontinent. Not only it is divided into two countries that is, India and Pakistan but also different religious groups which disintegrate. Ayah's circle which was close knit and friendly disintegrates during partition riots. This disintegration results into degeneration of individual as well as the society. The level of stooping of individual is evident in the way men in ayah's circle exploit her after her abduction. She was sexually harassed for three months after which Ice-Candy Man marries her. The degeneration of the society is evident in the gross kind of violence on people of the other religion. Train from Gurdaspur and Ice-Candy Man's retaliation on Sikh community amply proves degeneration of character of an individual. During communal riots people of different religions try to destroy, disintegrate and de-generate the opposite religious group. They are not only conscious of their individuality but also aware of their differences.

People become so parochial and ghettoized that the feelings of religious differences even seep into children. When Lenny goes to join play with Sikh children, masseur follows her and drag her away. Some

Sikh women ask Lenny as to what her religion is? Lenny answers that she is a Parsi. They are surprised at the discovery of a new religion. These incidents are minor specimens of the happenings in Lahore and other cities of India during partition.

Masseur is murdered and Ice-Candy Man is the suspect. His mutilated body is discovered in a gunny sack by Hari aka Himat Ali and Lenny. Ayah is terribly shocked at this incident. She stops meeting visitors and starts distrusting everybody. With Lenny she visits all the places she and masseur used to visit. Ice-Candy Man follows them without their knowledge. He joins ruffians to plunder and wipe out traces of Hindus and Sikhs from Lahore.

#### **7.4 LET US SUM UP**

Bapsi Sidhwa is a conspicuous figure from the Pakistani literary world. Through her novel *Ice-Candy Man*, she has addressed a number of issues through various themes. Lenny is the child narrator of the novel and Lenny also bears autobiographical similarities to Bapsi Sidhwa. The central theme of *Ice-Candy Man* is the partition portrayal and that is why the novel was printed by another subtitle i.e., *Cracking India*, connoting the cracking of the Indian subcontinent into two parts. *Ice-Candy Man* is well known for authentic and realistic picture of partition. Partition riots are at an apogee through news from Ice-Candy Man's commentary and All India Radio coverage. Kidnapping of ayah by a Muslim mob is a proof that Pakistan was not a safe place during that time for Hindus. Postcolonial fiction not only depicts the aftermaths of colonialism but also the injustice, oppression and exploitation by the colonizers on the colonized. In between Sidhwa touches upon minor themes, for instance, theme of interfaith marriage between the Ice-Candy Man and ayah, communal disharmony, disintegration, lust and desire.

There is no denying the fact that all works of Sidhwa have a feministic angle and *Ice-Candy Man* is no exception. It has a broad feminine

perspective too. Women have been a subaltern group in South Asian countries and are doubly colonized. The women face a lot of problems in a patriarchal setup and forced to exist in a way to suit the whims and fancies of men and powerful women. Dislocation is a modern day phenomenon and a theme related to partition. Due to partition riots, innumerable people from various religions were dislocated from their native places and transported to an unknown land. Leaving behind their homes, business and property, millions were displaced from lands of their origin and migrated to a land where they could merge in terms of religious similarity.

Sidhwa belongs to Parsi community and in almost all her works does not hide her love for the community and *Ice-Candy Man* is no exception. She throws light on their views, customs and religious practices in day-to-day life. Sidhwa does not hide the aloofness and indifference of the community. In short the main theme is partition which has various other themes generating out of it such as violence, disintegration, love, desire, interfaith marriages and so on.

## 7.5 GLOSSARY

- warp and woof- criss-cross threads of a cloth
- saga- a long series of events
- amalgamation- to put two or more things together, merge
- manipulation- skilful at influencing somebody at what you want
- global – covering or affecting the whole world
- gynocritical – gynocriticism or gynocritics is the term coined by Elaine Showalter to describe a new literary project intended to construct, “a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature”.
- versatile- (of a person) able to do many different things
- patriarchy – a society, system or country that is ruled or controlled by men



- gender – gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of women and men
- colonialism – colonialism occurs when a country (nation) takes control of other lands, regions , or territories outside of its borders (boundaries of the country) by turning those other lands, regions, or territories into a colony.
- postcolonialism – a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is concerned with both, how the European nations conquered and controlled third world cultures and how these groups have since responded to and resisted those encroachments.
- subaltern – of lower status, in critical theory and post colonialism, subaltern refers to the populations that are socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and colonial homeland.
- apogee – the highest point of something where it is greatest
- migration – movement of large numbers of people from one place to another
- masseur – a person whose job is giving people massages
- ethnicity – the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition
- neutrality – a state of not supporting any side during a dispute or disagreement
- degeneration – the process of becoming worse
- marauding – going around a place in search of things to steal or people to attack
- South Asia – Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan constitute the Indian subcontinent; with Afghanistan and Maldives included referred as South Asia

## 7.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- (1) There is no denying the fact that all works of Sidhwa have a .... angle .
- (a) Feministic
  - (b) Patriarchal
  - (c) Chauvinistic
  - (d) Congenial
- (2) A ..... study of the novel shows that women characters in the novel occupy a central place.
- (a) Gender
  - (b) Close
  - (c) Critical
  - (d) Gynocritical
- (3) The novel *Ice-Candy Man* inverts the ..... set up by showing strong willed women characters who are not only assertive but also powerful and well connected.
- (a) British
  - (b) Patriotic
  - (c) Patriarchal
  - (d) Feministic
- (4) Lenny is sensitive and intelligent as she understands ..... behavior by watching men around ayah.
- (a) Slave
  - (b) Gender
  - (c) Hindu-Muslim
  - (d) Lover's

- (5) Ranna himself lied buried and hidden under a heap of dead bodies. These dead bodies were of his .....
- (a) Own people
  - (b) Hindus
  - (c) Hindu-Muslim
  - (d) Women folk
- (6) Women have been a ..... in South Asian countries and are doubly colonized.
- (a) Maid servants
  - (b) Religious
  - (c) Slave sisters
  - (d) Subaltern group
- (7) While considering migration, Imam Din shifted his folks to Lahore as Pir Pindo was vulnerable to attack by the ..... religious group.
- (a) Hindu
  - (b) Sikh
  - (c) Parsi
  - (d) Christian
- (8) The Parsis in the beginning are shown together for Jashan Prayer, to celebrate the British victory at the ..... in Lahore.
- (a) Pandemonium
  - (b) Parsi temple
  - (c) Fire temple
  - (d) Jashan hall

- (9) Col. Bharucha, who was a Parsi doctor as well as the ..... of the Parsi anjuman.
- (a) President
  - (b) Treasurer
  - (c) Secretary
  - (d) Mayor
- (10) Who said that the Parsis will not be safe in Pakistan after partition and they should migrate to Bombay, where the majority of Parsis live?
- (a) Lenny
  - (b) Ice-Candy-Man
  - (c) Col. Bharucha
  - (d) Godmother
- (11) Sidhwa has shown the Parsis as to shake off their political neutrality and help Hindus and Sikhs trapped in Lahore at the same time they (Parsis) have maintained a safe distance from .....
- (a) Migrating to Bombay
  - (b) Police of Lahore
  - (c) British officials
  - (d) Communal violence.
- (12) Masseur's mutilated body was discovered in box. (True/False).
- (13) The Parsis helped in healing process after partition violence aftermath. (True/False).
- (14) Godmother helped ..... to cross over the border.
- (a) Lenny
  - (b) Ayah
  - (c) Col. Bharucha
  - (d) Ice-Candy Man

- (15) Ayah's admirers only talk to her but two have the privilege to touch her, one is Ice-Candy-Man and second is .....
- (a) Masseur
  - (b) Imam Din
  - (c) Col. Bharucha
  - (d) Hari, the gardener
- (16) Sidhwa reminds the readers of *Ice-Candy Man* that the ..... is kept next to the *Guru Granth Sahib* in the Golden Temple
- (a) *Bible*
  - (b) *Zend Avestha*
  - (c) *Koran*
  - (d) *Gita*
- (17) Sidhwa tells the readers of *Ice-Candy Man* that the ..... faith came into existence in order to maintain Hindu-Muslim harmony.
- (a) Parsi
  - (b) Christian
  - (c) Buddhist
  - (d) Sikh
- (18) On the arrival of the train from Gurdaspur, full of dead bodies of Muslims ; the reader is reminded of .....
- (a) Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*
  - (b) Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchables*
  - (c) Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Gitanjali*
  - (d) R.K. Narayan's *The Bullet Train*

- (19) During communal violence in Lahore ..... not only shaved his bodhi but also circumcised his penis. .... another servant from Sethi household became a Christian.
- (a) Moti Hari  
 (b) Hari, Moti  
 (c) Shankar, Imam Din  
 (d) Masseur, Moti
- (20) Sikhs in Pakistan had occupied five villages around .....
- (21) In ..... of Lahore, people of similar religions sit together and show intolerance to other religious groups.
- (a) Waaris road area  
 (b) Lodhi road  
 (c) Sethi House  
 (d) Queen's park
- (22) During riots in Lahore, .....was murdered and .....was the suspect.
- (a) Moti, Hari  
 (b) Masseur, Ice-Candy-Man  
 (c) Shankar, Imam Din  
 (d) Masseur, Moti
- (23) Masseur's mutilated body was discovered in a .....
- (24) Hari was also known as Himat Ali (True/False).
- (25) ..... dead body was discovered by Hari and Lenny !

**Answers:**

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| (1) a, Feministic, | (2) d, gynocritical    |
| (3) c, patriarchal | (4) b, gender          |
| (5) a, own people  | (6) d, subaltern group |
| (7) b, Sikh        | (8) c, Fire temple     |

- (9) a, president (10) c, Col. Bharucha  
 (11) d, communal violence (12) True  
 (13) True (14) b, ayah  
 (15) a, Masseur (16) c , *Koran*  
 (17) d, Sikh (18) a, Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*  
 (19) b, Hari, Moti 20) Dehra Misri  
 (21) d, Queen's park (22) b, Masseur, Ice-Candy Man  
 (23) gunny sack (24) True (25) Masseur's .

**7.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Q. 1 Name some women characters from *Ice-Candy Man*.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Q. 2 Which quality of ayah results into a trail of male followers?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Q. 3 Who is Hamida? Describe her personal tragedy by her husband and in-laws.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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Q. 4 Name some prominent leaders mentioned by Sidhwa during partition in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.

Ans. 

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Q. 5 What does Sidhwa reveal about Parsi culture through the novel *Ice-Candy Man* ?

Ans. 

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Q. 6 Name some admirers of ayah and to which class of society do these persons belong.

Ans. 

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Q. 7 Describe the gruesome sight connected with the train from Gurdaspur.



Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 8 What does Masseur do when Lenny goes to play with the Sikh children?  
Why does he do that?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 9 What do the Sikh women ask Lenny? Why are they surprised?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 10 Write your views about the second title *Cracking India* of the novel  
*Ice-Candy Man*. Which title is apt according to you?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Possible answers :**

- A-1 The child narrator Lenny, her ayah Shanta who is renamed as Mumtaz after marriage to Ice-Candy-Man, Godmother, Lenny's mother, Electric aunt and several minor women characters like Mrs. Pen, Lenny's tenant Gita, Ranna's sisters Khatija and Parveen are present in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- A-2 Ayah's dominant attraction results into a trail of male followers. She exhibits courage and intelligence when she reveals her desire to be rescued from Hira Mandi in Ice-Candy-Man's absence.
- A-3 Hamida is the new ayah of Lenny. She was kidnapped by Sikhs and taken to Amritsar. Her family refused to accept her back as she was considered a 'fallen woman' and her integrity was doubted by her husband and in-laws as they feel she has been touched by other men.
- A-4 Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lord Mountbattan, Subhash Chandra Bose and Mohammed Ali Jinah are some prominent leaders mentioned by Sidhwa during partition in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- A-5 The Parsis in the beginning are shown together for Jashan Prayer, to celebrate the British victory at the Fire temple in Lahore. Col. Bharucha, was the president of the Parsi anjuman.
- A-6 The admirers of ayah are from all classes of society, beggars, holy men, hawkers, cart drivers, cooks, coolies, cyclists the Fallettis Hotel cook, the Government House gardener, masseur, Ice-Candy-Man, restraint wrestler, knife sharpner Sharbat Khan, Ramzana the butcher, Imam Din, Sikh zoo attendant Sher Singh and a China man, they all give ayah covetous glances.
- A-7 A train arrives from Gurdaspur and it is full of dead bodies of Muslims.

There are no young women in the bodies as it might be a possibility that they have been detained for sexual abuses. It was awfully gruesome to receive two gunny bags of women's breasts too.

- A-8 When Lenny goes to join play with Sikh children, Masseur follows her and drags her away. He does that because due to partition riots and violence people of different religions stopped mixing up. Different religions ghettoized the people.
- A-9 Some Sikh women ask Lenny as to what her religion is? Lenny answers that she is a Parsi. They are surprised at the discovery of a new religion. These incidents are minor specimens of the happenings in Lahore at the time of partition.
- A-10 *Cracking India*, suggests the crack or division of the Indian subcontinent into two parts. To me *Cracking India* is more suitable as partition is the main theme or central to the novel, rest other themes germinate out of it.

## 7.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1 Define gender. Differentiate between the words feminine and masculine. Discuss the novel *Ice-Candy Man* as a feminist discourse.
- Q. 2 What do you understand by Gynocriticism? Discuss women characters from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 3 Partition is the mother of all themes in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*. Discuss.
- Q. 4 Discuss colonialism as a theme in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 5 Discuss dislocation as a theme of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*. How are the people of Pir Pindo dislocated?
- Q. 6 What do you know about Parsis from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 7 Discuss the themes of 'lust and desire' as evident in the lives of the male characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.

- Q. 8 Elaborate on growing religious intolerance in Lahore during partition riots in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 9 Discuss the theme of degeneration in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*. How degeneration of an individual results in worst forms of violence?
- Q. 10 Discuss the relevance of the title *Cracking India*.

### 7.9 SUGGESTED READING

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4. R.K.Dhawan, *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa: South Asian Women Writings*, N. Delhi: South Asia Books, 1999
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6. Macwan, Mital Joseph, *A Critical Analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's Major Works*, N. Delhi: Creative Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2010
7. Fiayaz, Afreen, *Thematic Concerns in the Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa: A Treatise*, N. Delhi: Lambart Academy Publisher, 2012
8. Dhawan, R.K. and Novy Kapadia. Eds. *The Novels of Bapsi Sidhwa*, N. Delhi: Prestige Books, 1996
9. Hussain, Naila, "On the Writers World" . Interview with Bapsi Sidhwa, *The Nation*, 26 May, 1993:19

10. Dhawan, R.K., Jaydipsingh Dodiya and Novy Kapadia, eds. *Parsi Fiction*. N. Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001, 2 vols.
11. Gaur, Rashmi, ed. *Bapsi Sidhwa's Ice-Candy Man: A Readers Companion*, N. Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2004

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**CHARACTERS IN *ICE-CANDY MAN*****STRUCTURE**

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Objectives
- 8.3 How to write a character sketch
  - 8.3.1 Important characters from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Glossary
- 8.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 8.7 Short Answer Questions
- 8.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 8.9 Suggested Reading

**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The novel *Ice-Candy Man*, is a complex mesh of various characters and Sidhwa has woven a wonderful partition saga with the help of these characters. Characters manifest various facets of their personalities through their actions, dialogues and reactions to the environment around them. These characters look so life like that they must be having true counterparts in actual history. The novel *Ice-Candy Man* has a number of characters and Sidhwa is a genius for creating these characters. The reader at once starts imagining the physiognomy and stature of the characters while reading the book.

Broadly there are two types of characters, that is , flat and round characters. A flat character is a static character in the sense that it does not change with time,that is, from the beginning to the end of the novel it remains the same. A round character experiences growth as the novel progresses i.e., it alters from its nature and by the time the reader reaches the end of the novel the essence or the qualities of that character are almost opposite to what the character was in the beginning, for instance in Henrik Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House*, Nora was a docile housewife and at the end of the play she becomes an assertive and dominating woman with a mind of her own.

Characters are the puppets in the hands of the author. The author makes use of these characters as per the storyline and the requirement of the target readers. C.M. Stebbins in the book, *A Progressive Course in English* states that a, “character sketch is a form of exposition which has a deep human interest. It calls not only for an explanation of the qualities of character and the manner in which they manifest themselves, but it demands, or perhaps is, a description of the nature of the individual.” This definition is complete in itself and the student must keep it in mind while attempting to draw a character sketch. It explains as to what a character sketch comprises of.

## **8.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:

- That the learner should be able to demonstrate skills for writing/ portraying pen pictures/ character sketches of various characters present in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- In this lesson we will familiarize you with some prominent characters of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- We will discuss important points related to the important characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man* and facilitate your efforts of comprehending and learning by:

- (a) giving you detailed information about some points one has to keep in mind for attempting a character sketch. We will also provide you with some character sketches of prominent characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- (b) giving you glossary of difficult words and phrases
- (c) giving you practice to have your own assessment by trying to make you answer questions in your own language.
- (d) giving you multiple choice questions to make concepts more clear and avoid confusion between similar options.
- (e) giving you the correct answers so that you may verify your own answers.
- (f) discussing the summary of the lesson.
- (g) giving a concise list of the important sources suggested for further reading.

### **8.3 HOW TO WRITE A CHARACTER SKETCH**

- Carefully read the novel and observe the moral principles of the characters while interacting with others or while executing any activity.
- Observe the alternates and options in the character's behavior and what kind of choices the character makes in the story.
- Take note of the internal thoughts and external actions of the characters. Try to match these emotions and form a conclusion based on these factors, is there any contradiction or do the dual current i.e., external and internal currents coincide.
- Observe the language of the characters.
- Try to read between the lines.
- Keep in mind the historical time or the period in which the novel was written and keep in mind the tendencies of the time. In other words do not make a modern times judgment of a Victorian novel.



- Be sensitive enough to discern whose side the author is taking during the narrative, for instance critics have pointed out that Hawthorne portrayed Hester as good and Chillingworth as evil.
- These are some pointers which can help the learner in character writing but can add on or leave out these points as per the sensibility while reading a text.

### **8.3.1 Important Characters from the novel *Ice-Candy Man***

#### **Ice-Candy-Man**

Ice-Candy Man is the protagonist of the novel, hailing from Hira Mandi, housing the dancing girls of Lahore; his mother was one of them. Thus the place shaped traits of the locality in his formative years. Ice-Candy Man is the most versatile character of the novel, for instance, as the name suggests he sells ice candies during summers but as the sales decrease during winters he becomes a birdman, who sells sparrows and birds. He doesn't stop here, he skips a number of roles to amuse people. He is a jolly and friendly person. He is an ardent lover of the Hindu ayah of Lenny. He is a regular visitor of Lenny's house for an ayah's sake. He is fascinated by her charm and beauty. First half of the novel presents Ice-Candy Man as a jolly and good natured person. He has another facet to his personality. He becomes a cruel and vengeful person as one incident brings this change in him. He witnesses the train from Gurdaspur carrying dead bodies of Muslims and a sack containing chopped women breasts. This gory sight not only shocks him but makes him a beast craving for Hindu blood. He joins a band of Muslim hooligans hounding the Hindus of Lahore. His love for ayah evaporates in seconds and by any means he wants the ayah from Sethi household to be taken away. Imam Din tries to shield ayah by telling the Muslim mob that the Hindu servants have left the household but Ice-Candy Man's shrewd nature at once discerns the situation and he enquires from Lenny about ayah's whereabouts. She not realizing the dangerous situation innocently points

at the direction where ayah was hiding. Ice-Candy Man's trick works and the mob drags away ayah and she is raped by many persons for several days. After about a fortnight the Ice-Candy Man marries her but it was very late and she had to stay in the same locality of prostitutes from where the Ice-Candy Man hailed i.e., Hira Mandi.

His love for ayah is evident till the end of the novel as he follows her to Amritsar, crossing the Wagah border after her. He has become a wandering woe-begone lover looking for his beloved. He is completely changed by the end of the novel and becomes a lovelorn lover. He is shrewd enough to get her by any means. He was a crude rustic who is ever ready to nudge ayah but later he becomes refined and well conversant with poetry and royal courtesan like behavior. He becomes a poet and confessed that he belongs to the red light area i.e., Hira Mandi. He is a gifted poet, rather poetic in his interaction with others. He would recite a couplet from Urdu poetry whenever required. He is well conversant with politics of the time.

Ice-Candy Man's behavior is parallel to growing discord between the two chief religions i.e., Hindu and Muslim, during partition. At the peak of partition riots, he is with the Muslim mob and kidnaps ayah, but as the communal disharmony subsides, he too sobers down and by the end of the novel he crosses the border and follows his Hindu love i.e., ayah to Amritsar and spends rest of his life in search of his lost love. His personality is completely changed. His aggression totally subsides by the end. Another facet of his personality is evident here that he abandons the land of his birth for the sake of his lost love. He not only is an epitome of self sacrifice but also a hope of establishing peaceful relations between the two warring religions i.e., Hindu and Muslim.

Ice-Candy Man's character aptly evolves the impact of violence and trauma on a common man's personality. The sight of genocide on Muslims encourages him to avenge the deaths of his Muslim brothers.

The story in the novel proves how racial and religious identity can play havoc with the life of a person like Ice-Candy Man.

### **Lenny**

Sidhwa uses the child narrator technique in her novel and this technique is extensively used in modern fiction. Lenny is the child narrator, also having a strong resemblance to Sidhwa hence an autobiographical character in the novel. Lenny belongs to the Parsi community and develops limp in a leg at an early age. After surgery too she didn't improve and as advised remains confined to home. She didn't attend school, instead goes for home tuitions to Mrs. Pen's house. She was very fond of Godmother and her ayah, Shanta. Lenny's love for Shanta is evident when she goes with Godmother to see Shanta in Hira Mandi locality and her heart was beating fast to see the bridegroom of ayah. During Lenny's childhood, Shanta used to take her out, initially in a pram and was very protective about Lenny, on being asked by a British officer as to why Lenny was not walking instead sat in a pram, the ayah explained Lenny's infirmity. Lenny was an intelligent and keen observer. Through first person narration, Lenny takes the reader into her own, personal and intimate world. She learnt about gender behavior by observing ayah and her admirers. Sidhwa shows Lenny growing from a child to a sensitive young woman by recording minutest details from her life. The reader clearly sees the external world of Lenny through her eyes.

Lenny is pure hearted and simple by nature. During the partition riots, a Muslim mob headed by Ice-Candy Man, storms into Sethi household premises, enquire about the whereabouts of the Hindu servants, when they could not gather any information about the ayah, Ice-Candy Man cunningly asks Lenny about the ayah. Unable to judge the mal-motives of Ice-Candy Man, Lenny innocently points at the direction where ayah is hiding. In seconds, ayah is dragged out of Sethi household and abducted. After ayah's kidnap, Lenny feels very

lonely. For several days, Lenny remains guilt ridden for disclosing the hiding place of ayah. In order to punish herself, she would take out her tongue in front of the mirror and pinch it hard. In short Lenny is the mouthpiece of the author Bapsi Sidhwa.

### **Shanta (ayah)**

Ayah is a prominent character of the novel. She is a Hindu girl, eighteen years old and although has kind and powerful Parsi masters, yet she is unprotected during the partition riots that lead to her kidnap and tragedy. Her attractiveness makes her look at like a sex object. From street beggars to British officers, everyone walking on the road ogle at her while she remains unaffected and unconcerned pushing the pram wearing the expression of a Hindu goddess. She knows about her charms and uses them for gaining favours like getting cheap doilies, food, nuts etc. She had been using personal charm to get what she wanted till the partition violence destroyed her personal bliss.

She has a strong will power which is evident in the fact that after her abduction, rape by several persons for days, marriage with Ice-Candy Man pushed into prostitution, she preserved her will to face her relatives and be united with them and to live with them forever. Ice-Candy Man kills her vivacious inner self and she is bereft of the warmth that she once possessed as observed by Lenny towards the end of the novel when she goes with Godmother to Hira Mandi area. Lenny feels that ayah's soul has been extracted from her body, ayah's radiance and liveliness too is gone, as evident from ayah's eyes although bigger and wider than before but having a vacant look. Her romantic world is destroyed by actions of Ice-Candy Man, but Shanta's determination makes her look forward to future plans despite emotional and physical mutilation. Ayah's heart is so hardened that she ignores the pleadings of Ice-Candy Man, when he begs Godmother to persuade ayah not to leave him. Shanta even

turns a deaf ear to his romantic poetry and following her to refugee camp. This shows that she is firm and strong in decisions.

## **MAJOR FEMALE CHARACTERS**

### **Godmother**

As the name suggests she was like a surrogate mother to Lenny who was fascinated by her. Lenny always insisted on meeting her after tuitions at Ms. Pen's home as Godmother stayed in the same locality. Godmother was an old lady, always in Khaddar sarees and completely covered from head to toe. She always took extra pains to know of everybody around her. She was extremely helpful to everybody around her. She played an important role in rescuing ayah from Hira Mandi area and transporting her across the border. Her strong personality is evident when she scolds Ice-Candy Man for throwing ayah to public in Hira Mandi area and Ice-Candy Man pleads her to convince ayah not to leave him. She volunteered for blood donations. She even gets Ranna admitted to a boarding school.

Godmother was witty, ever ready with witty answers and had a deep understanding of human psyche. She was a sensitive woman. At home she had a domineering presence. While dealing with people outside her household Godmother displayed compassion and understanding but inside her home she was bossy and cruel as displayed in her dealing with her family members. Mini aunty whom Sidhwa aptly titles as Slave sister, constantly does household work and Godmother constantly criticizes her despite this fact.

### **Other women characters**

Women characters in the novel bring to light the fact that women are victimized in society and they have to live according to gender roles as defined by the society. Their lives also show the patriarchal biases affecting the society. Though Godmother is an exception. Rodabai,

Mini aunty, Mrs. Pen, Muccho - the sweepress and her daughter Papoo are some female characters in the novel. Mucchoo makes Papoo do all household chores and in return beats and abuses her. Though ayah and servants of Sethi household try to rescue Papoo but their efforts are wasted. Once Papoo is hospitalized for two weeks due to her mother's severe beatings. Despite these facts, Papoo is not submissive by nature. She is strong and high-spirited. Muccho fixes Papoo's marriage to a middle aged man of short stature and a cruel looking face. Papoo is drugged with opium as her mother fears revolt from her side.

The women characters are not only a victim of the male set up but also dominated by stronger counterparts like the Godmother and Muccho.

### **Minor Characters**

Sidhwa has presented many life-like characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man* like Lenny's cousin, Imam Din the cook, Hari the gardener, the Masseur, Dr. Bharucha, Mr. Rodgers, Adi; Lenny's brother, Ranna the village boy from Pir Pindo, Sher Singh, Dost Mohammad, Yousaf and Butcher. These characters form the world of Lenny. Whatever happens to these characters or the actions of these characters are introduced to the reader through the eyes of Lenny. Sidhwa has given an excellent insight into human behavior by presenting these characters.

## **8.4 CONCLUSION**

The novel *Ice-Candy Man* has a number of characters and Sidhwa has given them life and breath through her masterpiece strokes of character delineation. The protagonist is Ice-Candy Man, an eponymous character and the book gets its title from him. As the name suggests, he sells ice candies in summers and changes roles/jobs during other seasons or sometimes to please people. He is the most versatile character of the novel, for instance, as the name suggests he sells ice candies during summers but as the sales decrease during winters he becomes a birdman, who sells sparrows and birds. He hails

from the red light area of Lahore as his mother is a prostitute. Beyond doubt, he acquires traits of the locality from his formative years. He is an ardent lover of the Hindu ayah Shanta. He is a regular visitor of Sethi household for ayah's sake. He is fascinated by her charm and beauty. First half of the novel presents Ice-Candy Man as a jolly and good natured person. He has another facet to his personality which is manifested in the later part of the novel. He becomes a cruel and vengeful person after witnessing the train from Gurdaspur carrying dead bodies of Muslims and a sack containing chopped women breasts.

Lenny, the child narrator belongs to the Parsi community and develops a limp in a leg at an early age. After surgery too she didn't improve and as advised remained confined to home. She didn't attend school, instead went for home tuitions to Mrs. Pen's house. She was very fond of her ayah, Shanta. Lenny's love for Shanta is evident when she goes with Godmother to see Shanta in Hira Mandi locality and her heart beats fast to see the bridegroom of ayah. The ayah is a prominent character of the novel. She is a Hindu girl, eighteen years old and although has kind and powerful Parsi masters, yet she is unprotected during the partition riots that led to her kidnap and tragedy. Her attractiveness makes her look like a sex object. From street beggars to British officers, everyone walking on the road ogle at her while she remains unaffected and unconcerned and pushes the pram wearing the expression of a Hindu goddess. She knows about her charms and uses them for gaining favours like getting cheap doilies, food, nuts, etc. She had been using personal charm to get what she wanted till the partition violence destroyed her personal bliss.

Godmother is another character, loved by Lenny. Lenny always insisted on meeting her after tuitions at Ms. Pen's home as Godmother stayed in the same locality. Godmother was an old lady, always in Khaddar sarees and completely covered from head to toe. She always took extra pains to know of everybody around her. She was extremely helpful to everybody around her. She played an important role in rescuing ayah from Hira Mandi area and transporting her across the border. Her strong personality is evident when she scolds Ice-Candy Man for throwing ayah to public in Hira Mandi area and

Ice-Candy Man pleads her to convince ayah not to leave him. She volunteered for blood donations. She even gets Ranna admitted to a boarding school.

Rodabai, Mini aunty, Mrs. Pen, Muccho - the sweeppress and her daughter Papoo are some female characters in the novel. Some of these women are exploited by their own kind, for instance, Mucchoo makes Papoo do all household chores and in return beats and abuses her. Some women characters are shown to be victimized in society and they have to live according to gender roles as defined by it. Their lives also show the patriarchal biases affecting the society. Sidhwa has also portrayed some strong women characters like the Godmother, ayah (whose spirit was not destroyed till the end and desired to be united with her relatives in Amritsar), Lenny (who had strong morals and was guilty for days for revealing ayah's hiding place to the rowdy mob).

## **8.5 GLOSSARY**

- Mesh – network, tangle
- Manifest- display, exhibit, show
- Facet – aspect, feature, side
- Counterparts – coequal, equivalent, mate
- Exposition – explanation, description
- Executing – carry out, accomplish
- Coincide – occur simultaneously
- Sensibility – sensitivity, finer feelings
- Protagonist – central character
- Traits – attribute, essential quality
- Formative – developing, growing
- Versatile – adaptable, multifaceted
- Shrewd – clever, sagacious
- Whereabouts – location, position



- Woebegone – sad, unhappy
- Beloved – sweetheart, love
- Nudge – poke, elbow, touch
- Conversant – familiar, acquainted
- Discord – strife, conflict
- Epitome – model, paradigm
- Trauma – shock, injury
- Genocide – mass murder, massacre
- Havoc – devastation, disorder
- Technique – method, skill
- Infirmity – ailment, malady
- Abduct – kidnap
- Ogle – stare at
- Bliss – happiness
- Prostitution – whoring
- Mutilation – disfigure
- Surrogate – substitute
- Volunteer – offer one’s services
- Psyche – subconscious, mind
- Domineering – authoritarian, overbearing

## **8.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- (1) How many types of characters are there?
- (a) one
  - (b) two
  - (c) three
  - (d) four

- (2) Types of characters are.
- (a) long and short
  - (b) thin and fat
  - (c) big and small
  - (d) flat and round
- (3) A flat character is a ———— character in the sense that it does not change with time, that is, from the beginning to the end of the novel it remains the same.
- (a) static
  - (b) stagnant
  - (c) dynamic
  - (d) stationery
- (4) A round character experiences ———— as the novel progresses that is, it alters from its nature and by the time the reader reaches the end of the novel the essence or the qualities of that character are almost opposite to what the character was in the beginning
- (a) development
  - (b) progress
  - (c) growth
  - (d) extension
- (5) Who states that a, “character sketch is a form of exposition which has a deep human interest. It calls not only for an explanation of the qualities of character and the manner in which they manifest themselves, but it demands, or perhaps is, a description of the nature of the individual”.
- (a) C.M. Stebbins
  - (b) C.M. Shoals
  - (c) Z.N. Patel
  - (d) Thomas Hardy

- (6) Who is the author of the book *A Progressive Course in English* ?
- (a) Thomas Hardy
  - (b) C.M. Shoals
  - (c) Z.N. Patel
  - (d) C.M. Stebbins
- (7) Ice-Candy Man is the protagonist of the novel, hailing from \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) Sethi household
  - (b) Waaris road
  - (c) Hira Mandi
  - (d) Wagah border
- (8) Ice-Candy Man is the most \_\_\_\_\_ character of the novel.
- (a) versatile
  - (b) virile
  - (c) active
  - (d) charming
- (9) Ice-Candy Man sells ice candies during summers and in winters becomes a \_\_\_\_\_ who sells sparrows and birds.
- (a) hunter
  - (b) birdman
  - (c) snake man
  - (d) zoo keeper
- (10) Ice-Candy Man is a regular visitor of Lenny's house for \_\_\_\_\_ sake.
- (a) employment's
  - (b) money's
  - (c) entertainment's
  - (d) Ayah's

- (11) Who changes from a jolly person to a cruel and vengeful person by witnessing an incident during partition riots?
- (a) Imam Din
  - (b) Shanta
  - (c) Ice-Candy Man
  - (d) Shankar
- (12) The train from Gurdaspur carries dead bodies of Muslims and a sack containing chopped \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) women breasts
  - (b) Shanta
  - (c) Ice-Candy Man
  - (d) Shankar
- (13) Who dragged away ayah?
- (a) Ice-Candy Man
  - (b) Parsi men
  - (c) Muslim mob
  - (d) Shankar
- (14) “He has become a wandering woe-begone lover looking for his beloved”. Who is he?
- (a) Imam Din
  - (b) Ranna
  - (c) Ice-Candy Man
  - (d) Shankar
- (15) “He is a gifted poet, rather poetic in his interaction with others.” Who is he?
- (a) Ice-Candy Man
  - (b) Ranna
  - (c) Imam Din
  - (d) Shankar

- (16) Sidhwa uses the child narrator technique in her novel and this technique is extensively used in \_\_\_\_\_ fiction.
- (a) feministic
  - (b) postcolonial
  - (c) gynocritical
  - (d) modern
- (17) Who is the autobiographical character of Bapsi Sidhwa in the novel?
- (a) Godmother
  - (b) Lenny
  - (c) Rodabai
  - (d) Mini Aunty
- (18) Who didn't attend school, instead went for home tuitions to Mrs. Pen's house?
- (a) Lenny
  - (b) Shanta
  - (c) Rodabai
  - (d) Mini Aunty
- (19) During Lenny's childhood, Shanta used to take her out, initially in a" \_\_\_\_\_
- (a) bicycle
  - (b) bus
  - (c) taxi
  - (d) pram
- (20) Who in the novel gave home tuitions?
- (a) Mrs. Pen
  - (b) Slave sister
  - (c) Mini aunty
  - (d) Col. Brown

- (21) Through first person narration, who takes the reader into her own, personal and intimate world?
- (a) Bapsi Sidhwa
  - (b) Lenny
  - (c) Mini aunty
  - (d) Col. Brown
- (22) Lenny learnt about \_\_\_\_\_ by observing ayah and her admirers.
- (a) patriarchal society
  - (b) male behavior
  - (c) gender behavior
  - (d) slaves and masters
- (23) What is the correct age of ayah?
- (a) 18 years
  - (b) 19 years
  - (c) 17 years
  - (d) 28 years
- (24) Who is an old lady always clad in khaddar sarees?
- (a) Mrs. Pen
  - (b) Rodabai
  - (c) Godmother
  - (d) Mini aunty
- (25) Mini aunty is aptly titled as \_\_\_\_\_ by Sidhwa.
- (a) Tutor lady
  - (b) Rodabai
  - (c) Godmother
  - (d) Slave sister

**Answers Key (MCQS):**

- |                          |                         |                        |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) (b) two              | (2) (d) flat and round  | (3) (a) static         |
| (4) (c) growth           | (5) (a) C.M. Stebbins   | (6) (d) C.M. Stebbins  |
| (7) (c) Hira Mandi       | (8) (a) versatile       | (9) (b) birdman        |
| (10) (d) Ayah's          | (11) (c ) Ice-Candy Man | (12) (a) women breasts |
| (13) (c) Muslim mob      | (14) (c ) Ice-Candy Man | (15) (a) Ice-Candy Man |
| (16) (d) modern          | (17) (b) Lenny          | (18) (a) Lenny         |
| (19) (d) pram            | (20) (a) Mrs. Penn      | (21) (b) Lenny         |
| (22) (c) gender behavior | (23) (a) 18 years       | (24) (c ) Godmother    |
| (25) (d) Slave sister    |                         |                        |

**8.7 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Q. 1) Contrast the character of *Ice-Candy Man* in the beginning of the novel and during partition riots. Which incident brings this sudden change in him?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 2) Describe the predicament of ayah after abduction.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Q. 3) Describe the Ice-Candy Man's sad condition after ayah had crossed Pakistan border.

Ans. 

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Q. 4) Describe Lenny's plight after ayah's abduction.

Ans. 

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Q. 5) Describe people's reaction to the attractiveness of the ayah. How does she use this quality for her own benefits?

Ans. 

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Q. 6) Which quality does ayah's character reveal after her abduction? Justify your answer.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 7) Describe Godmother as per your reading of the novel *Ice-Candy Man* .

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 8) 'Godmother had a strong personality', prove the statement.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q. 9) Contrast Godmother's behavior inside and outside the Sethi household.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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Q. 10) Name some female characters from the novel.

Ans. 

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Q.11 Muccho was a strict mother, despite this fact Papoo had a strong personality. Explain with examples.

Ans. 

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Q.12 Name some minor characters from the novel *Ice-Candy Man* .

Ans. 

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**Answers:**

- A-1) The first half of the novel presents Ice-Candy Man as a jolly and good natured person. During the riots another facet to his personality is visible i.e. he becomes a cruel and vengeful person. This change is by witnessing the train from Gurdaspur carrying dead bodies of Muslims and a sack containing chopped women breasts. This gory sight not only shocks him but makes him a beast craving for Hindu blood. He joins a band of Muslim hooligans hounding the Hindus of Lahore.
- A-2) Ayah is abducted by a Muslim mob which drags her away and she is eventually raped by many persons for several days. After about a fortnight the Ice-Candy Man marries her but it was very late and she had to stay in the same locality of prostitutes from where the Ice-Candy Man hailed i.e. Hira Mandi.
- A-3) Ice-Candy Man's love for ayah is evident till the end of the novel as he follows her to Amritsar, crossing the Wagah border after her. He has become a wandering woe-begone lover looking for his beloved. He is completely changed by the end of the novel and becomes a lovelorn lover.
- A-4) After ayah's kidnap, Lenny feels very lonely. For several days, Lenny remained guilt ridden for disclosing the hiding place of ayah. In order to punish herself, she would take out her tongue in front of the mirror and pinch it hard. In short Lenny is the mouthpiece of the author Bapsi Sidhwa.
- A-5) Ayah's attractiveness makes her look like a sex object. From street beggars to British officers, everyone walking on the road ogle at her

while she remains unaffected and unconcerned pushes the pram wearing the expression of a Hindu goddess. She knows about her charms and uses them for gaining favours like getting cheap doilies, food, nuts etc. She had been using personal charm to get what she wanted till the partition violence destroyed her personal bliss.

- A-6) She has a strong will power which is evident in the fact that after her abduction, rape by several persons for days, marriage with Ice-Candy Man, pushed into prostitution, she preserved her will to face her relatives and be united with them and to live with them forever.
- A-7) As the name suggests Godmother was like a surrogate mother to Lenny who was fascinated by her. Lenny always insisted on meeting her after tuitions at Mrs. Pen's home as Godmother stayed in the same locality. Godmother was an old lady, always in Khaddar sarees and completely covered from head to toe. She always took extra pains to know of everybody around her. She was extremely helpful to everybody around her
- A-8) Godmother played an important role in rescuing ayah from Hira Mandi area and transporting her across the border. Her strong personality is evident when she scolds Ice-Candy Man for throwing ayah to public in Hira Mandi area and Ice-Candy-Man pleads her to convince ayah not to leave him.
- A-9) While dealing with people outside her household Godmother displayed compassion and understanding but inside her home she was bossy and cruel as displayed in her dealing with her family members. Mini aunty whom Sidhwa aptly titles as Slave sister, constantly does household work and Godmother constantly criticizes her despite this fact.
- A-10) Rodabai, Mini aunty, Mrs. Pen, Muccho - the sweepress and her daughter Papoo are some female characters in the novel.

A-11) Mucchoo makes Papoo do all household chores and in return beats and abuses her. Once Papoo was hospitalized for two weeks due to her mother's severe beatings. Despite these facts, Papoo was not submissive by nature. She was strong and high-spirited. Mucchoo fixes Papoo's marriage to a middle aged man of short stature and a cruel looking face. Papoo is drugged with opium as her mother fears revolt from her side.

A-12) Some minor characters from the novel *Ice-Candy Man* are - Lenny's cousin, Imam Din the cook, Hari the gardener, the Masseur, Dr. Bharucha, Mr. Rodgers, Adi; Lenny's brother, Ranna the village boy from Pir Pindo, Sher Singh, Dost Mohammad, Yousaf and Butcher.

## 8.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q. 1) What is a character sketch? What points one has to keep in mind for writing a character sketch.
- Q. 2) What do you understand by round and flat characters? Discuss with suitable examples from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 3) Discuss Ice-Candy Man as the protagonist of the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q. 4) Sidhwa has given shades of autobiographical touches to Lenny's character. Elaborate.
- Q. 5) Ayah's life has seen many ups and downs in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*, how do the events affect the character of ayah?
- Q. 6) Discuss the character of Godmother as a storehouse of power.
- Q. 7) Discuss the minor characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.
- Q.8) Discuss the minor women characters. Elaborate how they are victimized by the patriarchal society.
- Q.9) Draw a character sketch of your favourite character from the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.

Q.10) Draw pen-pictures of child characters in the novel *Ice-Candy Man*.

### 8.9 SUGGESTED READING

- (1) Kulke, Eckehard, *The Parsis in India: A Minority as Agent of Social Change*, N. Delhi: Vikas, 1974
- (2) Kumar, Narendra, *Parsee Novel*, N. Delhi: Prestige Books, 2002
- (3) Malik, Seema, *Partition and Indian English Women Novelists*, N. Delhi: Prestige Books, 2007
- (4) Singh, Randhir Pratap, *Bapsi Sidhwa*, N. Delhi: Ivy Publishing House, 2005
- (5) Chandra, Subhash, "Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*: A Feministic Perspective" *The Commonwealth Review*, 6.1 (1994-95).
- (6) Didur Jill, "Cracking the Nation: Gender, Minorities and Agency in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 29.3 (1998)
- (7) Dubey, Amit Kumar, *The Fictional World of Bapsi Sidhwa: Gender, Community and History*, N. Delhi: Creative Books, 2013

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## **CHINUA ACHEBE-LIFE AND LEGACY**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives
- 9.3 Chinua Achebe's Life
- 9.4 Achebe's Times and his Legacy
- 9.5 Chinua Achebe's Interviews
  - 9.5.1 From The Atlantic Unbound
  - 9.5.2 After Empire : Chinua Achebe and the great African novel  
(by Ruth Franklin, The New Yorker, 26 May 2008)
- 9.6 Short Answer Questions
- 9.7 Self-Assessment Questions
- 9.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.9 Suggested Reading

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chinua Achebe's place as one of Africa's greatest writers is not contestable. He bestrode the African literature world like a colossus and he would be remembered not only by us but by generations to come in Africa and elsewhere. In his work he restored pride to Africa whose postcolonial

condition had tried to rob him of human dignity because of Western colonial policies denigrating African culture.

## **9.2 OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the lesson is to introduce the learner to the writer, his work and the times in which he lived.

## **9.3 CHINUA ACHEBE'S LIFE**

**Early Years:** Chinua Achebe (pronounced Chee-noo-ah Ah-chay-bay) was born in the Igbo (formerly spelled Ibo) town of Ogidi in eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930, the fifth child of Isaiah Okafor Achebe and Janet Iloegbunam Achebe. His father was an instructor in Christian catechism for the Church Missionary Society. Nigeria was a British colony during Achebe's early years, and educated English-speaking families like the Achebes occupied a privileged position in the Nigerian power structure. His parents even named him Albert, after Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria of Great Britain (Achebe himself chose his Igbo name when he was in college).

**Education:** Achebe attended the Church Missionary Society's school where the primary language of instruction for the first two years was Igbo. At about eight, he began learning English. His relatively late introduction to English allowed Achebe to develop a sense of cultural pride and an appreciation of his native tongue — values that may not have been cultivated had he been raised and taught exclusively in English. Achebe's home fostered his understanding of both cultures. He read books in English in his father's library, and he spent hours listening to his mother and sister's traditional Igbo stories.

At fourteen, Achebe was selected to attend the Government College in Umuahia, the equivalent of a university preparatory school and considered the best in West Africa. Achebe excelled at his studies, and after graduating at eighteen, he was accepted to study medicine at the new University College



at Ibadan, a member college of London University at the time. The demand for educated Nigerians in the government was heightened because Nigeria was preparing for self-rule and independence. Only with a college degree was a Nigerian likely to enter the higher ranks of the civil service.

The growing nationalism in Nigeria was not lost on Achebe. At the university, he dropped his English name “Albert” in favor of the Igbo name “Chinua,” short for Chinualumogo. Just as Igbo names in *Things Fall Apart* have literal meanings, Chinualumogo is translated as “My spirit come fight for me.”

At University College, Achebe switched his studies to liberal arts, including history, religion, and English. His first published stories appeared in the student publication the *University Herald*. These stories have been reprinted in the collection *Girls at War and Other Stories*, which was published in 1972. Of his student writings, only a few are significantly relative to his more mature works; short stories such as “Marriage is a Private Affair” and “Dead Man’s Path” explore the conflicts that arise when Western culture meets African society.

**Career Highlights:** After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1953, Achebe joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation as a producer of radio talks. In 1956, he went to London to attend the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Staff School. While in London, he submitted the manuscript for *Things Fall Apart* to a publisher, with the encouragement and support of one of his BBC instructors, a writer and literary critic. The novel was published in 1958 by Heinemann, a publishing firm that began a long relationship with Achebe and his work. Fame came almost instantly. Achebe has said that he never experienced the life of a struggling writer. Achebe is considered by many critics and teachers to be the most influential African writer of his generation. His writings, including the novel *Things Fall Apart*, have introduced readers throughout the world to creative uses of language and form, as well as to factual inside accounts of modern African

life and history. Not only through his literary contributions but also through his championing of bold objectives for Nigeria and Africa, Achebe has helped to reshape the perception of African history, culture, and place in world affairs. The first novel of Achebe's, *Things Fall Apart*, is recognized as a literary classic and is taught and read everywhere in the English-speaking world. The novel has been translated into at least forty-five languages and has sold several million copies. A year after publication, the book won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize, a major literary award.

Upon returning to Nigeria, Achebe rose rapidly within the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. As founder and director of the Voice of Nigeria in 1961, Achebe and his colleagues aimed at developing more national identity and unity through radio programs that highlighted Nigerian affairs and culture.

*Later Writing:* Like many other African writers, Achebe believes that artistic and literary works must deal primarily with the problems of society. He has said that "art is, and always was, at the service of man" rather than an end in itself, accountable to no one. He believes that "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose."

Continuing his relationship with Heinemann, Achebe published four other novels: *No Longer at Ease* (the 1960 sequel to *Things Fall Apart*), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). He also wrote and published several children's books that express his basic views in forms and language understandable to young readers.

In his later books, Achebe confronts the problems faced by Nigeria and other newly independent African nations. He blames the nation's problems on the lack of leadership in Nigeria since its independence. In 1983, he published *The Trouble with Nigeria*, a critique of corrupt politicians in his country. Achebe has also published two collections of short stories and three collections of essays. He is the founding editor of Heinemann's African Writers

series; the founder and publisher of *Uwa Ndi Igbo: A Bilingual Journal of Igbo Life and Arts*; and the editor of the magazine *Okike*, Nigeria's leading journal of new writing.

*Teaching and Literary Awards:* In addition to his writing career, Achebe maintained an active teaching career. In 1972, he was appointed to a three-year visiting professorship at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and, in 1975, to a one-year visiting professorship at the University of Connecticut. In 1976, with matters sufficiently calm in Nigeria, he returned as professor of English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with which he had been affiliated since 1966. In 1990, he became the Charles P. Stevenson, Jr., professor of literature at Bard College, Annandale, New York.

Achebe received many awards from academic and cultural institutions around the world. In 1959, he won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize for *Things Fall Apart*. The following year, after the publication of its sequel, *No Longer At Ease*, he was awarded the Nigerian National Trophy for Literature. His book of poetry, *Christmas in Biafra*, written during the Nigerian civil war, won the first Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1972. More than twenty universities in Great Britain, Canada, Nigeria, and the United States have awarded Achebe honorary degrees.

Achebe died on March 21, 2013. He was 82.

#### **9.4 ACHEBE'S TIMES AND HIS LEGACY**

Turmoil in Nigeria from 1966 to 1972 was matched by turmoil for Achebe. In 1966, young Igbo officers in the Nigerian army staged a coup d'état. Six months later, another coup by non-Igbo officers overthrew the Igbo-led government. The new government targeted Achebe for persecution, knowing that his views were unsympathetic to the new regime. Achebe fled to Nsukka in eastern Nigeria, which is predominantly Igbo-speaking, and he became a senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In 1967, the eastern part of Nigeria declared independence as the nation of Biafra. This incident triggered thirty months of civil war that ended only when Biafra

was defeated. Achebe then fled to Europe and America, where he wrote and talked about Biafran affairs.

Beyond his maiden text, when one considers Africa's literary history over the last five decades, Achebe's body of work constitutes an important intervention. His works have had a tremendous impact within the academy in Africa and beyond. Achebe is read and discussed more than any other African writer. His works, to use his words, have always provided us "with a second handle on existence", enabling us to create for ourselves "a different set of reality from that which has been given to us". If Achebe's works, even those set deep into colonial history, continue to resonate with freshness of insight, it is because they often jolt us into an awareness of our own weaknesses too, as Africans, as blacks, while equally speaking forcefully to our common humanity. As black Africans, they compel us to come to grips with our history, especially our encounter with colonialism in order to understand where we lost the initiative and agency—to locate where the rain began to beat us as he would have it.

In trying to map out a new vision in the postcolonial state in Africa, Achebe's works teach us not to fall into the trap of essentialism and political dogma. They urge us to move beyond simple binary opposition and to come to terms with how we are implicated in our own political paralysis and social decay. Like the character, Ikem Osodi, in his novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe insists that the role of the writer in Africa, is "to widen the scope of that self-examination [...] And not to foreclose it with catchy, half-baked orthodoxy" (158). On this he remains adamant and reminds us that: "Whenever something stands, something else stands beside it", or better still, in his most eloquent proverb on change: "The world is like a dancing mask, if you want to see it, you must move with it" (*Arrow of God* 61). It is the way Achebe's vision forces us to reckon with the duality and complexity of existence, constantly urging us to look at things twice and to complicate meaning that sets his works apart from the average writers. For those who cling to political dogma or seek

ideological closures, he warns them that they have no space in the complex world of mother Idoto.

And yet Achebe's works also underscore the sheer power of narrative, of the story, of memory as an indispensable agent of history. This is what the old man of Abazon in *Anthills of the Savannah* means when he says that the story, memory, is our escort: "It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence" (124). The tragic death, for example, of Ken Saro-Wiwa during the tyrannical rule of Sani Abacha, Achebe would argue, is precisely because our political leadership fears the story teller because they remind them of where we come from and the perils of repeating the same mistakes that our erstwhile conquerors made.

Achebe's works also stand out because of his consummate and eloquent use of language; that ability to transform ordinary metaphors into myth and complex instruments of cognition. Through his creative use of the English language, Achebe has shown us that Africans were not mere passive victims of those institutions of Western modernity, but rather, they engaged with them, appropriated and quite often used them to fuel their own projects. He animates his works with Igbo linguistic genius through new images and idioms, and the imposition of new syntactic structures and rhythms, and quite literally forces the English language to mediate the peculiar Igbo and African universe. In this sense, he not only helped in subverting and undermining the so-called purity and the unassailable position of the English language, but he also succeeded in domesticating it to mediate our peculiar realities.

It is a sad irony of life that Chinua Achebe lived his last days and died outside Africa, the continent that has been a major source of inspiration for most of his works. The iroko tree may have fallen, but this giant of African letters leaves behind him a rich literary legacy.

## 9.5 CHINUA ACHEBE'S INTERVIEWS

### 9.5.1 From *The Atlantic Unbound*

**Q. You have been called the progenitor of the modern African novel, and *Things Fall Apart* has maintained its resonance in the decades since it was written. Have you been surprised by the effect the book has had?**

Was I surprised? Yes, at the beginning. There was no African literature as we know it today. And so I had no idea when I was writing *Things Fall Apart* whether it would even be accepted or published. All of this was new—there was nothing by which I could gauge how it was going to be received.

But, of course, something doesn't continue to surprise you every day. After a while I began to understand why the book had resonance. I began to understand my history even better. It wasn't as if when I wrote it I was an expert in the history of the world. I was a very young man. I knew I had a story, but how it fit into the story of the world—I really had no sense of that. Its meaning for my Igbo people was clear to me, but I didn't know how other people elsewhere would respond to it. Did it have any meaning or resonance for them? I realized that it did when, to give you just one example, the whole class of a girls' college in South Korea wrote to me, and each one expressed an opinion about the book. And then I learned something, which was that they had a history that was similar to the story of *Things Fall Apart*—the history of colonization. This I didn't know before. Their colonizer was Japan. So these people across the waters were able to relate to the story of dispossession in Africa. People from different parts of the world can respond to the same story, if it says something to them about their own history and their own experience.

**Q. It seems that people from places that haven't experienced colonization in the same way have also responded to the story.**

There are different forms of dispossession, many, many ways in which people are deprived or subjected to all kinds of victimization—it doesn't have to be colonization. Once you allow yourself to identify with the people in a story, then you might begin to see yourself in that story even if on the surface it's far removed from your situation. This is what I try to tell my students: this is one great thing that literature can do—it can make us identify with situations and people far away. If it does that, it's a miracle. I tell my students, it's not difficult to identify with somebody like yourself, somebody next door who looks like you. What's more difficult is to identify with someone you don't see, who's very far away, who's a different color, who eats a different kind of food. When you begin to do that then literature is really performing its wonders.

**Q. A character in *Things Fall Apart* remarks that the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart.” Are those things still severed, or have the wounds begun to heal?**

What I was referring to there, or what the speaker in the novel was thinking about, was the upsetting of a society, the disturbing of a social order. The society of Umuofia, the village in *Things Fall Apart*, was totally disrupted by the coming of the European government, missionary Christianity, and so on. That was not a temporary disturbance; it was a once and for all alteration of their society. To give you the example of Nigeria, where the novel is set, the Igbo people had organized themselves in small units, in small towns and villages, each self-governed. With the coming of the British, Igbo land as a whole was incorporated into a totally different polity, to be called Nigeria, with a whole lot of other people with whom the Igbo people had not had direct contact before. The result of that was not something from which you could recover, really. You had to learn a totally new reality, and accommodate yourself to the demands of this new reality, which is the state called

Nigeria. Various nationalities, each of which had its own independent life, were forced by the British to live with people of different customs and habits and priorities and religions. And then at independence, fifty years later, they were suddenly on their own again. They began all over again to learn the rules of independence. The problems that Nigeria is having today could be seen as resulting from this effort that was initiated by colonial rule to create a new nation. There's nothing to indicate whether it will fail or succeed. It all depends.

One might hear someone say, how long will it take these people to get their act together? It's going to take a very, very long time, because it's really been a whole series of interruptions and disturbances, one step forward and two or three back. It has not been easy. One always wishes it had been easier. We've compounded things by our own mistakes, but it doesn't really help to pretend that we've had an easy task.

**Q. In *Home and Exile*, you talk about the negative ways in which British authors such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary portrayed Africans over the centuries. What purpose did that portrayal serve?**

It was really a straightforward case of setting us up, as it were. The last four or five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light and Africans in very lucid terms. The reason for this had to do with the need to justify the slave trade and slavery. The cruelties of this trade gradually began to trouble many people in Europe. Some people began to question it. But it was a profitable business, and so those who were engaged in it began to defend it—a lobby of people supporting it, justifying it, and excusing it. It was difficult to excuse and justify, and so the steps that were taken to justify it were rather extreme. You had people saying, for instance, that these people weren't really human,



they're not like us. Or, that the slave trade was in fact a good thing for them, because the alternative to it was more brutal by far.

And therefore, describing this fate that the Africans would have had back home became the motive for the literature that was created about Africa. Even after the slave trade was abolished, in the nineteenth century, something like this literature continued, to serve the new imperialistic needs of Europe in relation to Africa. This continued until the Africans themselves, in the middle of the twentieth century, took into their own hands the telling of their story.

**Q. You wrote in *Home and Exile*, “After a short period of dormancy and a little self-doubt about its erstwhile imperial mission, the West may be ready to resume its old domineering monologue in the world.” Are some Western writers backpedaling and trying to tell their own version of African stories again?**

This tradition that I'm talking about has been in force for hundreds of years, and many generations have been brought up on it. What was preached in the churches by the missionaries and their agents at home all supported a certain view of Africa. When a tradition gathers enough strength to go on for centuries, you don't just turn it off one day. When the African response began, I think there was an immediate pause on the European side, as if they were saying, Okay, we'll stop telling this story, because we see there's another story. But after a while there's a certain beginning again, not quite a return but something like a reaction to the African story that cannot, of course, ever go as far as the original tradition that the Africans are responding to. There's a reaction to a reaction, and there will be a further reaction to that. And I think that's the way it will go, until what I call a balance of stories is secured. And this is really what I personally wish this century to see—a balance of stories where every people will be able to contribute to a definition of themselves, where we are not victims of other people's accounts. This is not to say that nobody should write about anybody else—I think

they should, but those that have been written about should also participate in the making of these stories.

**Q. And that's what started with *Things Fall Apart* and other books written by Africans around the 1950s.**

Yes, that's what it turned out to be. It was not actually clear to us at the time what we were doing. We were simply writing our story. But the bigger story of how these various accounts tie in, one with the other, is only now becoming clear. We realize and recognize that it's not just colonized people whose stories have been suppressed, but a whole range of people across the globe who have not spoken. It's not because they don't have something to say, it simply has to do with the division of power, because storytelling has to do with power. Those who win tell the story; those who are defeated are not heard. But that has to change. It's in the interest of everybody, including the winners, to know that there's another story. If you only hear one side of the story, you have no understanding at all.

**Q. You're talking about a shift in power, so there would be more of a balance of power between cultures than there is now?**

Well, not a shift in the structure of power. I'm not thinking simply of political power. The shift in power will create stories, but also stories will create a shift in power. So one feeds the other. And the world will be a richer place for that.

**Q. Do you see this balance of stories as likely to emerge in this era of globalization and the exporting of American culture?**

That's a real problem. The mindless absorption of American ideas, culture, and behavior around the world is not going to help this balance of stories, and it's not going to help the world, either. People are limiting themselves to one view of the world that comes from somewhere else. That's something that we have to battle with as we go along, both as writers and as citizens, because it's not just in the literary or artistic

arena that this is going to show itself. I think one can say this limiting isn't going to be very healthy for the societies that abandon themselves.

**Q. In *Anthills of the Savannah* the poet Ikem says, “The prime failure of our government is the ... failure of our rulers to reestablish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being.” Does this hold true for Nigeria today?**

Yes, this is very much the Nigerian situation. The British handed over the reins of government to a small group of educated people who then became the new rulers. What Ikem is talking about is the distance between this new class of rulers and the other Nigerian people. What needs to be done is to link the two together again, so that those who control power will see the direct relationship to the people in whose name this power is wielded. This connection does not happen automatically, and has not happened in many instances. In the case of Nigeria, the government of the military dictator General Abacha is a good example. The story coming out of his rule is of an enormous transfer of the country’s wealth into private bank accounts, a wholesale theft of the national resources needed for all kinds of things—for health, for education, for roads. That’s not the action of someone who sees himself as the servant of the Nigerian people. The nation’s infrastructure was left to disintegrate, because of one man’s selfish need to have billions. Or take what is happening today, now that we have gotten rid of this military dictator and are beginning to practice again the system of democratic rule. You have leaders who see nothing wrong in inciting religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. It’s all simply to retain power. So you find now a different kind of alienation. The leadership does not really care for the welfare of the country and its people.

**Q. There are those who say that media coverage of Africa is one-sided—that it focuses on the famines, social unrest, and political violence, and leaves out coverage of the organizations and**

**countries that are working. Do you agree? If so, what effect does this skewed coverage have? Is it a continuation of the anti-Africa British literature you talk about in *Home and Exile*?**

Yes, I do agree. I think the result has been to create a fatigue, whether it's charity fatigue or fatigue toward being good to people who are less fortunate. I think that's a pity. The reason for this concentration on the failings of Africans is the same as what we've been talking about—this tradition of bad news, or portraying Africa as a place that is different from the rest of the world, a place where humanity is really not recognizable. When people hear the word Africa, they have come to expect certain images to follow. If you see a good house in Lagos, Nigeria, it doesn't quite fit the picture you have in your head, because you are looking for the slum—that is what the world expects journalists covering a city in Africa to come back with.

Now, if you are covering America, you are not focusing on slums every day of your life. You see a slum once in a while, maybe you talk about it, but the rest of the time you are talking about other things. It is that ability to see the complexity of a place that the world doesn't seem to be able to take to Africa, because of this baggage of centuries of reporting about Africa. The result is the world doesn't really know Africa. If you are an African or you live in Africa, this stands out very clearly to you, you are constantly being bombarded with bad news, and you know that there is good news in many places. This doesn't mean that the bad news doesn't exist, that's not what I'm saying. But it exists alongside other things. Africa is not simple—people want to simplify it. Africa is very complex. Very bad things go on—they should be covered—but there are also some good things.

This is something that comes with this imbalance of power that we've been talking about. The people who consume the news that comes back from the rest of the world are probably not really interested in hearing about something that is working. Those who have the ability

to send crews out to bring back the news are in a position to determine what the image of the various places should be, because they have the resources to do it. Now, an African country doesn't have a television crew coming to America, for instance, and picking up the disastrous news. So America sends out wonderful images of its success, power, energy, and politics, and the world is bombarded in a very partial way by good news about the powerful and bad news about the less powerful.

**Q. You mentioned that literature was used to justify slavery and imperialism. What is this negative coverage of Africa being used to justify now?**

It's going to be used to justify inaction, which is what this fatigue is all about. Why bother about Africa? Nothing works there, or nothing ever will work. There is a small minority of people who think that way, and they may be pushing this attitude. But even if nobody was pushing it, it would simply happen by itself. This is a case of sheer inertia, something that has been happening for a long time just goes on happening, unless something stops it. It becomes a habit of mind.

**Q. Could you talk about your visit to Nigeria this past summer? What was it like for you to go back there?**

It was a very powerful and emotional experience. Emotional mostly because I had not been there in many years, but the circumstances of my leaving Nigeria were very sad, and many people who were responding to my return had that in their mind, and so it was more than simply someone who had not been home in quite a few years. And then you add to that all the travails that Nigeria had gone through in the rule of General Abacha, the severe hardship and punishment that the country had suffered in those years. And the new experiment in democratic rule was also just a few months old when I went home, so it was a very powerful experience.

**Q. Do you hope to be able to go back there to live at some point?**

Yes, I do indeed. Things would have to be better than they are now for me to be able to do that. Things like hospitals that used to be quite good before have been devastated. The roads you have to take to get to a hospital if the need arises, not to talk about the security of life—both of those would have to improve. But we are constantly watching the situation. It's not just me, but my family. My wife and children—many of them would be happier functioning at home, because you tend to have your work cut out for you at home. Here there are so many things to do, but they are not necessarily the things you'd rather be doing. Whereas at home it's different—it's clear what needs to be done, what's calling for your special skills or special attachment.

**Q. Could you talk about your dream, expressed in *Home and Exile*, of a “universal civilization” — a civilization that some believe we've achieved and others think we haven't?**

What the universal civilization I dream about would be, I really don't know, but I know what it is not. It is not what is being presented today, which is clearly just European and American. A universal civilization is something that we will create. If we accept the thesis that it is desirable to do, then we will go and work on it and talk about it. We have not really talked about it. All those who are saying it's there are really suggesting that it's there by default—they are saying to us, let's stop at this point and call what we have a universal civilization. I don't think we want to swindle ourselves in that way; I think if we want a universal civilization, we should work to bring it about. And when it appears, I think we will know, because it will be different from anything we have now.

There may be cultures that may sadly have to go, because no one is rooting for them, but we should make the effort to prevent this. We have to hold this conversation, which is a conversation of stories, a conversation of languages, and see what happens.

### 9.5.2 “After Empire: Chinua Achebe and the great African novel”

(by Ruth Franklin, *The New Yorker*, 26 May 2008)

In a myth told by the Igbo people of Nigeria, men once decided to send a messenger to ask Chuku, the supreme god, if the dead could be permitted to come back to life. As their messenger, they chose a dog. But the dog delayed, and a toad, which had been eavesdropping, reached Chuku first. Wanting to punish man, the toad reversed the request, and told Chuku that after death men did not want to return to the world. The god said that he would do as they wished, and when the dog arrived with the true message he refused to change his mind. Thus, men may be born again, but only in a different form.

The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe recounts this myth, which exists in hundreds of versions throughout Africa, in one of his essays. Sometimes, Achebe writes, the messenger is a chameleon, a lizard, or another animal; sometimes the message is altered accidentally rather than maliciously. But the structure remains the same: men ask for immortality and the god is willing to grant it, but something goes wrong and the gift is lost forever. “It is as though the ancestors who made language and knew from what bestiality its use rescued them are saying to us: Beware of interfering with its purpose!” Achebe writes. “For when language is seriously interfered with, when it is disjoined from truth . . . horrors can descend again on mankind.”

The myth holds another lesson as well—one that has been fundamental to the career of Achebe, who has been called, “the patriarch of the African novel”. There is danger in relying on someone else to speak for you: you can trust that your message will be communicated accurately only if you speak with your own voice. With his masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, one of the first works of fiction to present African village life from an African perspective, Achebe began the literary reclamation of his country’s history from generations of colonial writers. Published fifty years ago—a new edition has just appeared, from Anchor

(\$10.95)—it has been translated into fifty languages and has sold more than ten million copies.

In the course of a writing life that has included five novels, collections of short stories and poetry, and numerous essays and lectures, Achebe has consistently argued for the right of Africans to tell their own story in their own way, and has attacked the representations of European writers. But he also did not reject European influence entirely, choosing to write not in his native Igbo but in English, a language that, as he once said, “history has forced down our throat.” In a country with several major languages and more than five hundred smaller ones, establishing a lingua franca was a practical and political necessity. For Achebe, it was also an artistic necessity—a way to give expression to the clash of civilizations that is his enduring theme.

Achebe was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in 1930, in the region of southeastern Nigeria known as Igboland. (He dropped his first name, a “tribute to Victorian England,” in college.) Ezenwa-Ohaeto, the author of the first comprehensive biography of Achebe, writes that the young Chinua was raised at a cultural “crossroads”: his parents were converts to Christianity, but other relatives practiced the traditional Igbo faith, in which people worship a panoply of gods, and are believed to have their own personal guiding spirit, called a *chi*. Achebe was fascinated by the “heathen” religion of his neighbors. “The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together, like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully,” he later observed.

At home, the family spoke Igbo (sometimes also spelled Ibo), but Achebe began to learn English in school at the age of about eight, and he soon won admission to a colonial-run boarding school. Since the students came from different regions, they had to “put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the language of their colonizers,” Achebe writes. There he had his first exposure to colonialist



classics such as “Prester John,” John Buchan’s novel about a British adventurer in South Africa, which contains the famous line, “That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility.” Achebe, in an essay called “African Literature as Restoration of Celebration,” has written, “I did not see myself as an African to begin with. . . . The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts.”

At University College, Ibadan, Achebe encountered the novel *Mister Johnson*, by the Anglo-Irish writer Joyce Cary, who had spent time as a colonial officer in Nigeria. The book was lauded by *Time* as “the best novel ever written about Africa.” But Achebe, as he grew older, no longer identified with the imperialists; he was appalled by Cary’s depiction of his homeland and its people. In Cary’s portrait, the “jealous savages . . . live like mice or rats in a palace floor”; dancers are “grinning, shrieking, scowling, or with faces which seemed entirely dislocated, senseless and unhuman, like twisted bags of lard.” It was the image of blacks as “unhuman,” a standard trope of colonial literature, that Achebe recognized as particularly dangerous. “It began to dawn on me that although fiction was undoubtedly fictitious it could also be true or false, not with the truth or falsehood of a news item but as to its disinterestedness, its intention, its integrity,” he wrote later. This belief in fiction’s moral power became integral to his vision for African literature.

“Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond.” From the first line of *Things Fall Apart*—Achebe’s first novel—we are in unfamiliar territory. Who is this Okonkwo whom everybody knows? Where are these nine villages? Achebe began to write *Things Fall Apart* during the mid-fifties, when he moved to Lagos to join the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. In 1958, when he submitted the manuscript to the publisher William Heinemann, no one knew what

to make of it. Alan Hill, a director of the firm, recalled the initial reaction: “Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There are no precedents.” That was not entirely accurate—the Nigerian writers Amos Tutuola and Cyprian Ekwensi had published novels earlier in the decade. But the novel as an African form was still very young, and *Things Fall Apart* represented a new approach, showing the collision of old and new ways of life to devastating effect.

Set in a fictional group of Igbo villages called Umuofia sometime around the beginning of the twentieth century, *Things Fall Apart* begins with an episodic, almost dreamlike chronicle of village life through the family of Okonkwo. A boy named Ikemefuna has just come from outside Umuofia to live with them, and soon becomes like a brother to Okonkwo’s son Nwoye. (Ikemefuna’s father had killed a woman from Umuofia, and the villagers agreed to accept a virgin and a young man as compensation. Over the next three years, the story follows Okonkwo’s family through harvest seasons, religious festivals, and domestic disputes. The language is rich with metaphors drawn from the villagers’ experience: Ikemefuna “grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life”. The dialogue, too, is aphoristic and allusive. “Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten,” the narrator explains. (As the reader has already seen, palm oil is used to flavor yams, the villagers’ staple food.)

Despite the pastoral setting, there is nothing idyllic about this portrayal of village life. If the yam harvest is bad, the villagers go hungry. Babies are not expected to live to adulthood. (Only after the age of six is a child said to have “come to stay”). Some customs are cruel: newborn twins, thought to be inhabited by evil spirits, are “thrown away” in the bush. The Igbo are not presented as a museum exhibit—if their behavior is not always familiar, their emotions are. In a

pivotal scene, a group of men, including Okonkwo, lead Ikemefuna out of the village after the local oracle determines that he must be killed. The boy thinks that he is at last returning home, and he worries that his mother will not be there to greet him. To calm himself, he resorts to a childhood game:

He sang [a song] in his mind, and walked to its beat. If the song ended on his right foot, his mother was alive. If it ended on his left, she was dead. No, not dead, but ill. It ended on the right. She was alive and well. He sang the song again, and it ended on the left. But the second time did not count. The first voice gets to Chukwu, or God's house. That was a favorite saying of children.

Tradition holds the people together, but it also drives them apart. After Nwoye finds out that his father killed Ikemefuna, "something seemed to give way inside him, like the snapping of a tightened bow." When the first missionaries arrive, those who have suffered most under the village culture are the first to join the church. To Okonkwo's dismay, Nwoye is among them. The missionaries, though ignorant of local customs, are not all bad: one in particular treats the villagers with respect. But others show little interest in their way of life. "Does the white man understand our custom about land?" Okonkwo asks a friend in puzzlement. "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" the other man responds. In the book's final chapter, the colonizer's voice takes over; the silence that surrounds it speaks for itself.

Western reviewers praised Achebe's detailed portrayal of Igbo life, but they said little about the book's literary qualities. The *New York Times* repeatedly misspelled Okonkwo's name and lamented the disappearance of "primitive society." *The Listener* complimented Achebe's "clear and meaty style free of the dandyism often affected by Negro authors." Others were openly hostile. "How would novelist Achebe like to go back to the mindless times of his grandfather instead of holding the modern job he has in broadcasting in Lagos?" the British

journalist Honor Tracy asked. Reviewing Achebe's third novel, *Arrow of God* (1964), which forms a thematic trilogy with *Things Fall Apart* and its successor, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), another critic disparaged the book's language as "folk-patter."

This was a grotesque misreading. In a 1965 essay titled "The African Writer and the English Language," Achebe explains that he had no desire to write English in the manner of a native speaker. Rather, an African writer "should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience." To demonstrate, he quotes several lines from *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu, the village's chief priest, is curious to find out about the activities of the new missionaries in the village:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.

Achebe then rewrites the passage, preserving its content but stripping its style:

I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

By deploying stock English phrases in unfamiliar ways, Achebe expresses his characters' estrangement from that language. The phrases that Ezeulu uses—"be my eyes," "bring home my share"—have no exact equivalents in Achebe's "translation". And how great the gap between "my spirit tells me" and "I have a hunch"! In the same essay,

Achebe writes that carrying the full weight of African experience requires “a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings”. Or, as he later put it, “Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard of things with it.”

Achebe’s views on English were not yet widely accepted. At a conference on African literature held in Uganda in 1962, attended by emerging figures such as the Nigerian poet and playwright Wole Soyinka and the Kenyan novelist James Ngugi, the writers tried and failed to define “African literature,” unable to decide whether it should be characterized by the nationalities of the writers or by its subject matter. Afterward, the critic Obi Wali published an article claiming that African literature had come to a “dead end,” which could be reopened only when “these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that true African literature must be written in African languages”. Ngugi came to agree: he wrote four novels in English, but in the nineteen-seventies he adopted his Gikuyu name of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and vowed to write only in Gikuyu, his native language, viewing English as a means of “spiritual subjugation”.

At the conference, Achebe read the manuscript of Ngugi’s first novel, *Weep Not, Child*, which he recommended to Heinemann for publication. The publisher soon asked him to sign on as general editor of its African Writers Series, a post he held, without pay, for ten years. Among the writers whose novels were published during his tenure were Flora Nwapa, John Munonye, and Ayi Kwei Armah—all of whom became important figures in the emerging African literature. Heinemann’s Alan Hill later said that the “fantastic sales” of Achebe’s books had supported the series. But the appeal of English was not purely commercial. A great novel, Achebe later argued, “alters the situation in the world.” Igbo, Gikuyu, or Fante could not claim a global influence; English could.

Political imperatives were not hypothetical in Nigeria, which, having achieved independence in 1960, entered a prolonged period of upheaval. In 1967, following two coups that had led to genocidal violence against the Igbo, Igboland declared independence as the Republic of Biafra. Achebe himself became a target of the violence: his novel *A Man of the People* (1966), a political satire, had forecast the coup so accurately that some believed him to have been in on the plot. He devoted himself fully to the Biafran cause. For a time, he stopped writing fiction, taking up poetry—“something short, intense, more in keeping with my mood”. Achebe travelled to London to promote awareness of the war, and in 1969 he helped write the official declaration of the “Principles of the Biafran Revolution”.

But the fledgling nation starved, its roads and ports blockaded by the British-backed Nigerian Army. By the time Biafra was finally forced to surrender, in 1970, the number of Igbo dead was estimated at between one million and three million. At the height of the famine, Conor Cruise O’Brien reported in *The New York Review of Books*, five thousand to six thousand people—“mainly children”—died each day. The sufferers could be recognized by the distinctive signs of protein deficiency, known as kwashiorkor: bloated bellies, pale skin, and reddish hair. Achebe’s poem “A Mother in a Refugee Camp” describes a woman’s efforts to care for her child:

*She took from their bundle of possessions  
A broken comb and combed  
The rust-colored hair left on his skull  
And then—humming in her eyes—began carefully to part it.  
In their former life this was perhaps  
A little daily act of no consequence  
Before his breakfast and school; now she did it  
Like putting flowers on a tiny grave.*

The heartbreak of Biafra shook the foundations of Nigerian society and led to decades of political turmoil. Achebe took the opportunity to distance himself temporarily, spending part of the early nineteen-seventies teaching in the United States. During these years, as the independence era's potential for brutality became clear, he set out to correct the colonial record with even greater vigor. In essays and lectures, he railed against what he called "colonialist criticism"—the conscious or unconscious dehumanization of African characters, the vision of the African writer as an "unfinished European who with patient guidance will grow up one day," the assumption that economic underdevelopment corresponds to a lack of intellectual sophistication ("Show me a people's plumbing, you say, and I can tell you their art"). He was infuriated to find how widespread these attitudes remained. One student, learning that Achebe taught African literature, remarked casually that "he never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff".

Achebe recounts this anecdote in "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1977). Examining Conrad's descriptions of the "savages," Achebe shows that the novel, far from subverting imperialist constructions, falls victim to them. Marlow, the story's narrator, describes the Africans as "not inhuman," and continues, "Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman". And yet the blacks in the novel are nameless and faceless, their language barely more than grunts; they are assumed to be cannibals. The only explanation for this, Achebe concludes, is "obvious racism". Many have responded that Achebe oversimplifies Conrad's narrative: *Heart of Darkness* is a story within a story, told in the highly unreliable voice of Marlow, and the novel is, to say the least, ambivalent about imperialism. The writer Caryl Phillips has asked, "Is it not ridiculous to demand of Conrad that he imagine an African humanity that is totally out of line with both the times in which he was

living and the larger purpose of his novel?” But, even if Conrad’s methods can be justified, the significance of Achebe’s essay was that justification now became necessary: he made the ugliness latent in Conrad’s vision impossible to ignore.

In contrast to European modernism, with its embrace of “art for art’s sake” (a concept that Achebe, with characteristic bluntness, once called “just another piece of deodorized dog shit”), Achebe has always advocated a socially and politically motivated literature. Since literature was complicit in colonialism, he says, let it also work to exorcise the ghosts of colonialism. “Literature is not a luxury for us. It is a life and death affair because we are fashioning a new man,” he declared in a 1980 interview. His most recent novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), functions clearly in this mold, following a group of friends who serve in the government of the West African country of Kangan, obviously a stand-in for Nigeria. Sam, who took power in a coup, is steering the nation rapidly toward dictatorship. When Chris, the minister of information, refuses to take Sam’s side against Ikem, the editor of the government-controlled newspaper, the full wrath of the government turns against both of them. The book does not match the artistic achievement of *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*, but it gets to the heart of the corruption and the idealism of African politics.

Achebe insists that in its form and content the African novel must be an indigenous creation. This stance has led him to criticize other writers whom he regards as insufficiently politically committed, particularly Ayi Kwei Armah, whose novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) presents a dire vision of postcolonial Ghana. The novel begins with the image of a man sleeping on a bus with his eyes open. Streets and buildings are caked with garbage, phlegm, and excrement. Beneath the filthy surfaces, structures are rotten to the core. Armah’s novel has been acclaimed as a vivid rendering of disillusionment with the country’s new politics under Kwame Nkrumah. But Achebe finds Armah’s



“alienated stance” no better than Joyce Cary’s, and particularly objects to Armah’s existentialism, which he calls a “foreign metaphor” for the sickness of Ghana. Even worse, Armah has said that he “not an African writer but just a writer,” which Achebe calls “a statement of defeat.”

Is it too utopian to imagine that the African novel could exist simply as a novel, absolved of its social and pedagogical mission? Achebe has been fiercely critical of those who search for “universality” in African fiction, arguing that such a standard is never applied to Western fiction. But there is something reductive about Achebe’s insistence on defining writers by their ethnicity. To say that a work of literature transcends national boundaries is not to deny its moral or political value.

In 1990, Achebe was paralyzed after a serious car accident. Doctors advised him to come to the United States for treatment, and he has taught at Bard College ever since. *Home and Exile*, a short collection of essays, is the only book he has published during this period, though he is said to be at work on a new novel. But, if Achebe is largely retired, another generation of writers has taken up his call for a new African literature, and the majority have followed his lead: they embrace the English language despite its colonial connotations, but they also seek to establish an African literary identity outside the colonial framework. And the achievements of African writers are increasingly recognized: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*, an excruciating and remarkable novel about the Biafran war, won Britain’s Orange Prize last year.

The “situation in the world,” fifty years after *Things Fall Apart*, is not as altered as one might wish. As Binyavanga Wainaina, the founding editor of the Kenyan literary magazine *Kwani?*, demonstrated in a satiric piece called “How to Write About Africa,” racist stereotypes are still prevalent: “Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. . .

Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat.” But the power of Achebe’s legacy cannot be discounted. Adichie has recalled discovering his work at the age of about ten. Until then, she said, “I didn’t think it was possible for people like me to be in books.”

### 9.6 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1. What does Odili wish the people could see about Chief Nanga?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q2. What series of events lead to Odili’s disillusionment with the POP?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q3. In *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe, is Chief Nanga a corrupt man? Discuss.

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Q4. Who are the main characters in the novel *A Man of the People*?

Ans.

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Q5. What is the setting of the novel *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe?

Ans.

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Q6. In *A Man of the People*, discuss the relationship between Odili and the other main characters in the novel.

Ans.

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Q7. Briefly discuss the main themes in *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe.

Ans.

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Q8. What does the British amalgamation represent in *A Man of the People*?

Ans.

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9. In *A Man of the People*, how do Jean and John represent the fear Africans have toward Americans?

Ans.

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10. *A Man of the People* offers a postcolonial view of the African society. Discuss.

Ans.

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## 9.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Q1. \_\_\_\_\_ is Chinua Achebe's first novel.
- (a) *Things Fall Apart*
  - (b) *Arrow of God*
  - (c) *A Man of the People*
  - (d) *Anthills of Savannah*
- Q2. Chinua Achebe is a/an \_\_\_\_\_ writer.
- (a) Nigerian
  - (b) Indian
  - (c) American
  - (d) Scandanavian
- Q3. In 1959, he won the Margaret Wong Memorial Prize for\_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) *No Longer at Ease*
  - (b) *Things Fall Apart*
  - (c) *Arrow of God*
  - (d) *A Man of the People*
- Q4. Achebe was given a Christian name, \_\_\_\_\_, by his parents.
- (a) Albert
  - (b) Edward
  - (c) Ngugi
  - (d) Peter
- Q5. Achebe's three novels are popularly known as\_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) The Three Gems
  - (b) The African Trilogy
  - (c) The Set of Three Utopias
  - (d) Three Volumes on Literary Africa

## Answer Key

1. (a)
2. (a)
3. (d)
4. (a)
5. (b)

## 9.8 LET US SUM UP

Chinua Achebe is recognized as one of Africa's most important and influential writer and his novels have focused on the ways in which the European tradition of the novel and African modes of expression relate to each other in both complementary and contesting ways.

## 9.9 SUGGESTED READING

1. Chinua Achebe. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
2. Chinua Achebe. 1960. *No Longer At Ease*. London: Heinemann Educational
3. Chinua Achebe. 1964. *Arrow of God*. New York: Anchor Books.
4. Chinua Achebe. 1975. *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann.
5. Chinua Achebe. 1987. *Anthills of Savannah*. New York: Doubleday.
6. Chinua Achebe. 1988. *Hops and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987*. London: Heinemann

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**NOVEL *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*—  
A GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

**STRUCTURE**

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives
- 10.3 The Trilogy
- 10.4 Introduction to the Text: *A Man of the People*
- 10.5 Plot Summary
- 10.6 Detailed Summary
- 10.7 Important Excerpts from the Novel
- 10.8 Odili Samalu's Character and his Relationship with Others
- 10.9 Character Sketch of Chief Nanga
- 10.10 Self-Assessment Questions
- 10.11 Answer Key
- 10.12. Examination Oriented Questions
- 10.13 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.14 Suggested Reading

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel carries themes of interlinked political and sexual jealousy, of the young westernized idealist and would-be leader of his people, of political demagoguery, and of political abuse in a situation where African and European forms of political leadership and participation each have a particular kind of appeal and function.

## 10.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson's is to introduce the novel, *A Man of the People*. It offers detailed summary for the learner.

## 10.3 THE TRILOGY

Chinua Achebe's African Trilogy consists of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964).

These books, written by Achebe in his late 20s and early 30s and set in his Nigerian homeland, established him as the foremost African novelist and, as writer Margaret Atwood described him as, "one of the greatest [writers] of the twentieth century." He lived a life that, in addition to his writing, included unsuccessful efforts to keep the short-lived Republic of Biafra independent.

*Things Fall Apart*, the most widely read and widely studied African novel, is considered Achebe's masterpiece. Yet, the other two are just as strong. Indeed, *Arrow of God*, because of its complexity, may pack a greater psychological intensity.

### *Tragic figures*

Each is the story of a tragic figure, a man of great talents brought to ruin by his nature:

- *Things Fall Apart*: Okonkwo is a champion wrestler and warrior, and a man of great drive and passion who prides himself on the five skulls of men he killed in battle, hanging in his hut. But, in the early 1900s, he is unable to adapt to great changes taking place in his society.



- *No Longer at Ease*: A half century later, in the late 1950s, Okonkwo's grandson Obi is a bright 25-year-old, man just back from education in England and working in a cushy colonial government job. He's planning to marry a pretty nurse named Clara and has access to more money than most other Nigerians. But, callow and feckless, he banks too much on change — and fails to understand its ramifications.
- *Arrow of God*: In the early 1920s, when British rule of Nigeria is firmly established, Ezeulu is the Chief Priest of Ulu, the deity protecting six Ibo villages. His interactions with the white governors, particularly T.K. Winterbottom, are marked by confusion and miscommunication, but he sees a way to use the white man to punish his enemies. He goes too far, however.

Each of these books is about change, and that change is set into motion by the presence of powerful white men. Viewed from a sociological perspective, these are accounts of one culture flooding into and over another society, forcing it to adapt.

After Ezeulu is arrested by White officials, the leaders of the six Ibo villages meet to decide what to do, and one elder says:

*I have traveled to Olu, and I have traveled to Ibgo, and I can tell you that there is no escape from the white man. He has come. When Suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool. The white man is like that.*

### ***Transcending culture***

Yet, Achebe's African Trilogy is much more than an account of white oppression of the native people. The books transcend culture.

True, Okonkwo and Obi and Ezeulu are Nigerian men with deep roots in a rich, full and vibrant society. Their downfalls, though, are those that every human fears and, to some extent, has to endure.

The change that the white man brings is the symptom, not the disease. The disease is the way that human existence doesn't fit together — that, as W.B Yeats wrote and Achebe quotes, “Things fall apart, the center cannot hold./ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

As the song that Uchendu quoted says, “For whom is it well? ..... No one”.

Or as the elder says, “When Suffering knocks at your door and you say there is no seat left for him, he tells you not to worry because he has brought his own stool”.

Each of these novels is essentially a character sketch. Throughout his telling of a protagonist's story, Achebe adds a highlight here and a shadow there. So that, even as the stories near their conclusions, the reader is learning more about these men.

And Achebe's skill is also evident in his treatment of minor characters, such as Enoch in *Things Fall Apart*:

*Enoch was short and slight of build, and always seemed in great haste. His feet were short and broad, and when he stood or walked his heels came together and his feet opened outwards as if they had quarreled and meant to go in different directions. Such was the excessive energy bottled up in Enoch's small body that it was always erupting in quarrels and fights.*

His talent can also be seen in the way Achebe weaves together the classic novel form of English literature with Ibo proverbs and metaphors that provide a particular African tang to his writing.

Here, to conclude, are some examples:

- “*What annoys me is not that an overblown fool dangling empty testicles should forget himself because wealth entered his house by mistake.....*” (*Arrow of God*)

- *When the rain finally came, it was in large, solid drops of frozen water which the people called “the nuts of the water of heaven.” (Things Fall Apart)*
- *Mr. Okonkwo told him that to believe such a thing was to chew the cud of foolishness. (No Longer at Ease)*

#### **10.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT: A MAN OF THE PEOPLE**

For a critic or researcher to do literary justice to Achebe’s fourth novel – *A Man of the People*, it is important that one cast cursory look at the author’s works that preceded it. In this instance, the reference is to *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*. Although, these three novels along with *A Man of the People* has been categorized by many critics as Achebe’s tetralogy, I agree with this on the basis of chronology of its publication in the sequence of time, rather than sequence of events and the thematic import inherent in the four novels.

Critics believe that the first four novels of Achebe are interrelated in content and context, but at the same time *A Man of the People* holds entirely different contextual and thematic significance from the first three novels that preceded it. The novel has a distinct identity and thematic focus far from Achebe’s first three works. Although *No Longer at Ease* published after *Things Fall Apart*, comes close to *A Man of the People*, it does not directly deal with the central theme addressed in *A Man of the People*.

In the beginning of his writing career, Achebe started out with *Things Fall Apart*, as the custodian of his people (Igbo, by extension Nigeria and Africa) – culture, the historian who understands their past and could now situate the past in the present.

Challenged, by his perceived misconceptions of Africa and Africans by the European-centric writers like Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) and Joyce Cary (*Mister Johnson*), Achebe started out as a reactionary and cultural activist who needed to tell the story of his people from an insider’s

point of view against the outsider's perspectives. Achebe felt thrust on him the responsibility to represent and re-present Africa to the rest of the world. It has been globally acknowledged that Achebe got the job done in *Things Fall Apart*. He continued the streak in *Arrow of God* though with different verve and fervor.

The novel *No Longer at Ease* like *A Man of the People* help in understanding Achebe's literary engagement with the emerging society and its unfolding socio-political realities. However, it does not poignantly capture the political perspectives and realities of the Nigerian society as does *A Man of the People*. Rosemary Colmer affirms this point when she notes that (Quis Custodies Custodiet? The Development of Moral Values in *A Man of the People*) Achebe is able to present a much more subtly analyzed picture of Nigerian society in *A Man of the People* than in *No Longer at Ease*.

Largely, themes and language of colonialization as well as the philosophy of decolonization loom large in Achebe's first three novels. It is as if one can still smell the white-men and that the colonial experience is still fresh and so its impact in the emerging new African States, particularly in Nigeria, the setting of the three novels. However, in *A Man of the People* the story is changed.

## **10.5 PLOT SUMMARY**

*A Man of the People* is a novel about Nigeria's halting first steps to form a post-colonial nation, told by Odili Samalu, a teacher turned politician, who takes on his former teacher, a now-corrupt member of the cabinet.

Odili Samalu needs to tell the story of how he leaves the teaching profession in a small village school and enters partisan politics as the opponent of powerful man, once his revered teacher. Odili resents having to stand in a reception line for Chief Nanga, with whom he has grown disillusioned since he called for the head of the Minister of Finance and denounced Western-influenced intellectuals. At university, Odili had hoped for a successful career, which his father, a wealthy and hated retired politician, identifies with government office. Odili and the old polygamist are currently observing a truce in their stormy relationship.

Nanga recognizes Odili at the reception and offers to help him get a scholarship to London, agreeing it has no strings attached. Odili has a girlfriend in the capital, and accepts Nanga's hospitality to make a meeting easier. Nanga arranges for Odili to meet important people and attend social events, one of which results in a brief affair with the wife of an American consultant to the government. Secretly, Odili is infatuated with a proper-looking young girl he first sees on the dais at Nanga's reception and learns is destined soon to become Nanga's second wife for display on occasions where his old wife is too "bush". First-wife goes home for Christmas, and Nanga swiftly brings in a mistress. Odili is allowed to bring his girlfriend home, but is so insistent the relationship is not serious that Nanga seduces her. Odili storms out, hurling unforgivable insults at the important man.

Odili seeks refuge at the home of an old friend, Max, who is a practicing lawyer. He is present when Max's fiance, Eunice, and other friends gather to establish a new political party dedicated to reform. Seeking revenge on Nanga, Odili tries to talk to his intended, Edna Odo, into leaving him; swiftly Odili becomes attracted to her and wants to win her for himself. The attraction is mutual, but Edna must obey her greedy father and marry the chief. Then another government scandal seems to make running candidates in the upcoming elections feasible, Odili and Max both announce their candidacy for seats in Parliament. Odili runs in Nanga's district. Edna denounces Odili as a wife-stealer and ungrateful thief.

Naively, Odili thinks to set up his campaign headquarters in Nanga's home village, but is blocked from holding a rally and fired from his teaching position in the village school. He moves to his home village of Urua, where he is joined by Max, who addresses the crowds in the family compound. Nanga shows up and bribes Odili to drop out of the race and is angrily rebuffed.

Max, similarly approached, has accepted the bribe with no intention of dropping out. The friends debate political honesty and expediency. It matters little, however, because Nanga's party controls the media and other key

positions. No one learns the new party exists. Odili's father is assessed new taxes and briefly jailed. His village loses the water system scheduled to go in until they renounce Odili. Utterly frustrated, Odili writes a cruel and unfair letter to Edna.

Odili foolishly disguises himself and makes his way to the foot of Nanga's stage at a mass rally. He is found out, mocked, invited to debate, and then beaten unconscious. He awakens in the hospital, and wavers in and out for days, believing he has seen his parents and Edna. Criminal charges are dropped, but Odili is maneuvered off the ballot. He learns of Max's murder on the Election Day only afterwards, and of how his fiancé had avenged him. Odili contemplates how popular cynicism has made Nanga's victory and exploitation possible. Edna, however, has left the old man and stands at his bedside. The violence spawned during the election spreads until the army steps in to restore peace. The army arrests Nanga and his colleagues and indicates they will be prosecuted. Edna's father agrees to talk about letting her marry Odili. Odili concludes Max is lucky, having suffered martyrdom because Eunice has loved him enough to murder his murderer, expecting no reward for the act. Everyone else is looking out only for himself. The title *A Man of the People* formally applies to Chief Nanga - doubtless at his instigation - but clearly belongs to Odili (or Odili and Max) for seeking to make Nigeria a better place rather than continuing its colonial rape.

## **10.6 DETAILED SUMMARY**

### **Chapter 1**

In an unnamed African country in the mid-1960s, a politician referred to as Chief Nanga makes a visit to his home village of Anata, to be feted at his hometown grammar school. He is "a man of the people". The Assembly Hall is overflowing as dance groups and the hunters' guild signal a great event.

The narrator of the book, a young teacher named Odili, remembers Mr. Nanga was his teacher many years ago. However, Odili now believes Mr. Nanga is corrupt, and Odili looks with contempt at the villagers who

are making a great fuss over Mr. Nanga's visit. Odili Samalu resents such extravagance in inflationary times and wishes people were less ignorant and cynical and able to see that Nanga is using his position to enrich himself. Odili makes fun of the school's principal, Mr. Nwege, who was trying to make a big deal of his support for Chief Nanga in hopes of being given a civil service position. In 1948, 16 years ago, a handsome, young Nanga was Odili's beloved teacher - and Odili was Nanga's favorite pupil. Odili took pride in Nanga's early political career, and was active in the student's branch of the People's Organization Party (POP).

Odili recalls how he had become disillusioned in 1960 when the Prime Minister of the country refused to cut coffee prices, a move recommended by economic experts for the good of the country, because it would make him unpopular with coffee growers. In 1960, however, Odili is disheartened when the POP government reacts to an economic slump that plays into the hands of its weak rival, the Progressive Alliance Party (PAP), not by adopting a recovery plan.

Chief Nanga also recognizes and remembers Odili. He invites him to come stay with him in the city. The corruption and the politics are introduced.

## **Chapter 2**

After Independence, it is who you know, not what you know that matters, and Odili cannot lick boots. He teaches in a small private school for the autonomy. The chapter offers background on Odili and Elsie, his friend with benefits. Also, his friend Andrew is introduced. Odili had applied for a scholarship to attend a post-graduate program in London. It does not cross his mind to seek help from Nanga in getting a scholarship for post-graduate work in London. Kadibe made the trip last year and learned much, just being in Europe. He says it never occurred to him to ask for the Minister's help in getting admitted to the programme. Though Odili is firm in his aspirations, he would work to keep his actions 'clean'. He will not stoop to cronyism to get the scholarship to London that he desires. There is a universal disdain among

politicians for education abroad, however, Nanga still looks forward to his upcoming honorary law degree from a small college in US. Mr. Nanga suggests Odili can come to the capital city and stay in his guest-room, and the Minister says he will see if he can help Odili study in London. Mr. Nanga is planning to go to the United States in two months, so he makes it clear he wants Odili to visit him as soon as the school term is over. When the Minister leaves, Mr. Nwege, the school principal, shows he is somewhat jealous and angry about the attention that Mr. Nanga gave to Odili. Odili understands, because Mr. Nwege was the one who made a big deal about the Minister's visit, but he doesn't really get the returns. The chapter also hints at the objectification and devaluation of women shown in anecdotes.

### **Chapter 3**

Odili goes to Nanga's and is welcomed warmly. The chapter offers a background on Odili's father, a district interpreter a powerful and hated man with five wives and 35 children. Odili's mother, his father's second wife, died at Odili's birth, which made the villagers consider Odili to be an unlucky child. So there's shame associated with this. His father's first wife, whom everyone called "Mama," raised Odili as her own. Before travelling to the capital city, Odili visits his home village, both to see his father and to take his house-boy Peter to his own home for the holidays. As Peter buys gifts for his parents, Odili thinks about his own family relationships. Odili's father was a District Interpreter, a powerful man who served as the link to the white people who were truly in power. People sought the father's favor, but he was also hated by many. Father's job is such that makes him a minor god to the people: powerful, wealthy, and hated. The children grow up knowing the world is full of enemies and obsequious friends. Odili also recollects his school days. While in secondary school, Odili is expelled from a friend's home when his father's identity is revealed. Only when Odili earns a scholarship to university does he dare stand up to his demanding father, who currently has five wives and 35 children.



Odili and Nanga visit Chief Koko, who handles education abroad, but they don't get a chance to discuss the scholarship. The chapter brings out the fact that after independence, the value of education becomes inverted. Proximity to power is most important. Corruption feeds and multiplies bureaucracy and vice versa. The OHMS (Our Home Made Stuff) is no longer used by the elite. The gap between power and previous life is so huge that it feeds corruption.

#### **Chapter 4**

Odili sleeps late the next morning, but the Minister is out of the house bright and early to go to his office. Odili dislikes waking early, but Nanga rouses him on his way out to work. During his brief stay, Odili happily learns that things in government are not as ugly as he has suspected since 1960. He busies himself browsing in Nanga's library and reading incongruous stories in the newspaper. One reports new statutes on excrement pails while Odili lives in a house with seven bathrooms. Most of his life he has used pit latrines, and his few experiences with pails are so revolting he avoids eating so as not to have bowel movements. That had been in Giligili, where he had lived as a houseboy for his half-sister's family. Mrs. Nanga gets ready and says she is taking the children home for a visit to her village for a few days. She does this at least once a year so that the children will be aware of their roots and not become too disdainful of the humble life in the country. The idea is to keep the past alive as a check upon going astray. Odili is pleased that Mrs. Nanga is going away, because this clears the way for Elsie to visit him at his guest suite, which he is sure she wouldn't do if his hostess were at home.

Americans John and Jean stop by. Jean flirts shamelessly with Nanga while her husband highbrows it with Odili. Jean and John work in public relations for Nigeria in their efforts with the U.S. Odili talks about the contrasts in his country. He is staying in a mansion with seven bathrooms, but reads in the newspapers there are very strict guidelines for toilet pails,

which are regulated by the City Engineer. The chapter gives good details about racism and lynching in the US to contrast with Nigeria's problems.

## **Chapter 5**

Jean does not let John's absence on assignment in Abaka interfere with plans for a dinner with Nanga and Odili. So both Jean and John, the American couple, invite Odili and the Minister to a dinner party on Saturday, the day Mrs. Nanga leaves on her trip. John is unexpectedly out of town for business, and the Minister has a last-minute visitor. Akilo arrives that evening after an 80-mile drive. The Akilos together practice law. Odili feels awkward in the presence of this sophisticated woman with whom Nanga doubtless will have sex tonight. She insists on staying in a hotel rather than Mrs. Nanga's bedroom, and they arrange to meet for dinner. Nanga is certain Jean will arrange transportation home for Odili after her party. So Odili goes to the dinner by himself. There are five other guests. Odili thinks the food is not so great, but the talk is enjoyable. The dinner is "nine pence talk and three pence chop". Odili's closeness to Nanga brings him attention, which makes him loquacious. He is a bit intimidated by the sophisticated guests at first, but is able to gain their respect when he explains an African woman's reaction to a new statue was not an angry one, but rather a sign of honour and respect. In the chapter, shaking the fist is a sign of offering great reverence. He digresses to note another incident in which he straightens out a French art critic's scandalous misunderstanding of a religious mask. The guests seem very interested in Odili then, and ask him many questions about himself. There is an American Negro (as he is called in the book) at the party.

After Odili goes to Jean's party, he ends up sleeping with her. He finds that he doesn't really like her but asks to see her again. For Americans, Africans are a novelty, one that they hold apart and distinct from the 'Blacks' back home. At the dinner party, Odili has a good time. Nanga never ends up going to the party because Mrs. Akilo, who had arrived at his home, is taken to bed by him.

## **Chapter 6**

Odili makes plans to meet his friend Elsie, who was an important reason for his trip to the capital city. The Elsie Odili comes to Bori to see is on night-duty but has two days off, during which she and a friend (for Nanga) will come to the house. Nanga's ministerial car has no trouble getting through the hospital gate, delivering Odili to a forbidden night time visit to the female nurses' quarters. Elsie is drowsy but desirable and desiring. The friend intended for Nanga is less pretty and very talkative. Odili hopes Nanga will not want to swap. He tells Elsie about the other Elsie he has met at a party and is glad to see her jealous. The chauffeur, who is ready to leave, interrupts their banter. Elsie is impressed by the Cadillac and proprietary as she says good-bye.

Odili had made arrangements for Elsie to bring a female friend with her during a planned visit to the Minister's house, with the understanding this would be something of a "double date" with the Minister. Odili and Chief Nanga had told each other stories of the women they had been with, and apparently Chief Nanga (despite being married) has had sexual relationships with quite a few women. Odili and the Minister go to the hospital to pick up the young women, but Elsie's friend is sick and can't go. On Thursday evening, Nanga is scheduled to open the first-ever book exhibition of a local author. They all go to a book exhibition, where Chief Nanga is to make a speech. Objectification of women again. Jalio wrote fictional Song of the Blackbird.

## **Chapter 7**

Nanga makes a good speech. Odili is surprised by Chief Nanga, who is basically ignorant about literature, is so well-received by the crowd at the book exhibition. Nanga is a born politician, able to get away with anything and sway anyone. He can say harsh things but hold no malice inside. He is so open and kind Odili cannot take him seriously. Nanga is applauded at the end of his speech when he prophesies Nigeria will soon have

world-class authors like the British and is asked for copies of the speech by Jasio and the greasy-looking editor of the Daily Matchet. Odili is present when a newspaper editor meets with Chief Nanga, who gives the editor money to prevent the newspaper from publishing a critical article. He comments that he likes Jasio after he sees various ambassadors fawning over the author. On the ride back to the Nangas' residence, Odili is anticipating a night of lovemaking with Elsie. They eat dinner. The Chief has made arrangements for her to stay in his wife's room since his wife is away, and Odili believes this is just a way to make it less obvious that everyone expects he (Odili) and Elsie will spend the night together. However, when Odili sneaks up to Elsie's room, he hears her talking and laughing with Chief Nanga. Odili tries to convince himself this is just an innocent conversation, but eventually he hears Elsie cry out in passion. Odili loses it when he hears them (she is screaming Odili's name in a perverse twist) and leaves the house at 4 AM. He comes back in the morning and curses out Nanga and heads to Maxwell's. A dash is a small loan or bribe, the chapter tosses up the question, this destigmatizes corruption.

## **Chapter 8**

Odili feels the night's humiliation only after Max leaves for court. He had been able to do nothing about it. He wonders if Elsie will spend another night and thinks briefly of placing an anonymous phone call. He wonders now whether all the trivial thoughts filling his mind had been a smokescreen for weighty decisions taking form. He recalls a teacher's recommendation he read all the questions on an exam and starts answering the easiest ones, allowing his subconscious to sort the others out. Odili settles in at Max's house, but he begins obsessing about the way in which Chief Nanga has humiliated him. He is particularly insulted because the Chief told him he assumed Odili had gone to his room because he was tired, and therefore Odili wouldn't mind Chief Nanga being with Elsie. Odili plots revenge against Nanga. Odili decides the way to get his revenge is to seek out Edna, the young woman Chief Nanga intends to make his second wife. Max returns

home. That evening, a few people assemble at Max's house to start a new political party, the Common People's Convention. Maxwell holds a meeting of the Common People's Convention (CPC). While the party has Communist undertones, Maxwell is quick to reject that label. He reveals that the CPC has an inside man in the current government. Odili asks them how they can represent the common people when they are all professionals, but they assure him they are just getting things started, and all will be welcome once the party is established.

However, all the politicians care for are women, cars, landed property. It's like a rap video today. Case in point: some in the older generation wish the white man had never left- "it is only when you are close to a man that you can begin to smell his breath."

## **Chapter 9**

Odili returns to the village of Anata and finds the villagers in an uproar. We hear the story of Josiah, the bar-owner who took too much. Josiah is a local shopkeeper who has tricked a blind beggar; Josiah gets Azoge drunk, steals his stick, and replaces it with a new one, thinking Azoge will not notice. Apparently the belief is that the stick can be used to make a medicine to increase people's desire to buy from the shop. The villagers are angry and disgusted with Josiah's greed. Josiah has barricaded himself in his shop, and Azoge is repeating his story for the menacing crowd. Among those raising their voices is a middle-aged Christian carpenter, Timothy, who says ominously, "Josiah has taken away enough for the owner to notice", meaning while the people would tolerate a little dishonesty, the shopkeeper has crossed a line and people will not forgive him. Everyone avoids Josiah's shop, which goes out of business in a few days.

Odili begins to follow up on his plan of seducing Edna, the young woman who is supposed to become Chief Nanga's second wife, or "parlour-wife". He goes to visit Mrs. Nanga and gets Edna's location and then visits her, saying that Nanga sent him to inquire after her mother (who

is in the hospital). He gives Edna a lift to the hospital on his bike but also crashes it, humorously.

## **Chapter 10**

At Christmas, details of major corruption (more than their fair share) break out in the media concerning current government. The CPC has Odili run against Nanga. Odili decides to visit Mrs. Nanga on Christmas because he learns Edna will also be visiting that day. A drunken relative has come to try to persuade Mrs. Nanga to give him money. Odili has to wait quite a while for Edna to arrive, and finally he has the opportunity to tell her he thinks she should delay her marriage and see more of the world. Edna tells him she feels obligated to marry Chief Nanga because he paid for her education and her father is pressuring her to marry. Odili tries to put his arm around Edna, but she pushes him away.

Things are changing rapidly in the country. The corruption of several major politicians, including Chief Nanga, is exposed by the press. The whole country is in turmoil. Odili goes back to the capital city to help with the beginning of the new political phase. Odili meets a lot of opposition in his campaign. It's important that he rejects Josiah's offer of support. We see a dash of four-story home! We also see that the wooden masks are now a game played by drunkards and children we see Odili enjoying the fear in another person—enjoying power- whereas a telegram might take 3 days to reach the country, rumour took a day or less.

## **Chapter 11**

Odili realizes that he has begun to care for Edna as a person, not just as a means of revenge against Chief Nanga. Odili considers the changes in the country and the changes in himself. When he first went to the University, Odili expected he would graduate and get a professional job and have a nice comfortable life. However, he became more radical while in college and decides to turn his back on middle-class privileges such as a car. Now he is driving the car given to him by his political party, and enjoying it.

Edna sends Odili a letter that basically says she feels that she must marry Chief Nanga. Odili tries to analyse the letter to figure out what Edna really feels about him. As Odili prepares to start his campaign, he realizes he is in danger and hires several armed bodyguards. The campaign gets vicious. Through it all, he pines for Edna (probably more than he cares about the CPC). Nanga approaches Odili's father and tries to buy off Odili with 250 pounds and a two-year scholarship. Odili firmly rejects this.

## **Chapter 12**

Odili's father gives Odili a hard time for not taking the bribe offered by Chief Nanga for withdrawing from the race. Max and the campaign team arrive with several new vehicles and decide to launch Odili's campaign right from Odili's father's home. Odili doesn't think Max's speech is persuading the townspeople to support their party. Max accuses the current government of corruption, but the people seem to expect that politicians will be taking something for themselves; as long as the people think that their own lives are improving, they don't seem to care too much about the politicians' growing wealth. In fact, one villager seems to be in favour of Odili's candidacy because he thinks having a local man in government will ensure the village gets a bigger share of money.

After Maxwell arrives from the city with his CPC staff to drum up support for Odili, he admits he took a bribe similar to the one offered to Odili, however, he insists that the bribe carries no weight and he just did it to take the money. When Odili approaches Edna, she angrily dismisses him. When the POP finds out that Odili's father indirectly supported his son's campaigning, they nearly jail him and levy convenient overdue taxes against him. Odili's home village loses their pipes for supporting him. Odili writes off Edna.

## **Chapter 13**

Odili's village announces it is totally in support of Chief Nanga, and some of the materials for the new water system are returned to the village. An official approaches Odili's father and asks him to sign a paper stating the

launching of Odili's campaign happened without his knowledge. To Odili's surprise, his father refuses to sign, even though he will have to pay additional taxes as a consequence. Odili questions whether he has been fair in condemning his father in the past.

Odili, wearing a disguise, goes to the big event designed to kick off Chief Nanga's campaign. There is a huge mob there. Josiah sees him and recognizes and then calls him out. He is pushed forward to the stage, where Chief Nanga ridicules him and Odili is badly beaten by Nanga's supporters. The only one who comes to his defense is Edna, though vainly. He wakes up in the hospital and ends up winning Edna. A military coup occurs in the country, overthrowing the government and suddenly Max is a martyr and a hero.

The corruption equated with "a warrior eating the reward of his courage" at throwing the White man out. The people had nothing to do with fall of government—it was unruly mobs and private armies. "But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless."

### **10.7 IMPORTANT EXCERPTS FROM THE NOVEL**

1. "For days after the Minister's visit I was still trying to puzzle out why he had seemed so offended by his old nickname—'MA Minus Opportunity'...When I first knew Mr Nanga in 1948 he had seemed quite happy with his nickname...Why then the present angry reaction? I finally decided that it stemmed from the same general anti-intellectual feeling in the country." (Chapter 2)

2. "The trouble with our new nation—as I saw it then lying on the bed—was that none of us had been indoors long enough to say 'To hell with it'. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us—the smart and the lucky and hardly the best—had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in and from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the



next phase—the extension of our house—was even more important and called for new and original tactics...” (Chapter 3).

3. “It all goes back to what others have come to associate us with. And let it be said that we are not entirely blameless in this.” (Chapter 5)

4. “Chief Nanga was a born politician; he could get away with almost anything he said or did. And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything.” (Chapter 7)

5. “A mad man may sometimes speak a true word,’ said my father, ‘but, you watch him, he will soon add something to it that will tell you his mind is still spoilt. My son, you have again shown your true self...” (Chapter 12)

6. “Then I remembered that last night as I thought about the offering I had been really angry again about it all. Not only about Max disgracing our party and yet having the face to charge me with idealism and naivety, but I couldn’t help feeling small at the inevitable comparison of the amounts offered to him and me. Not that it mattered; I would have still refused if it had been ten thousand. The real point surely was that Max’s action jeopardized our moral position, our ability to inspire that kind of terror which I had seen so clearly in Nanga’s eyes despite all his grandiloquent bluff, and which in the end was our society’s only hope of salvation. (Chapter 12).

7. “...a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man’s stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant—in such a regime, I say you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest—without asking to be paid. (Chapter 13)

### **Important Quotes from the Novel**

1. I was in the public gallery the day the Prime Minister received his overwhelming vote of confidence. And that was the day the truth finally came

out only know one was listening I remember the grief stricken figure of the dismissed minister of Finance as he led his team into the chamber and was loudly booed by members and the public. (Chapter 1)

2. I cannot now recall exactly what my feelings were at that point I suppose I thought the whole performance rather peculiar you must remember that at that point no one had any reason to think there might be another side to the story the Prime Minister was still talking then he made the now famous on in famous Solman declaration from today we must watch and God are a hard one free. (Chapter 1)

3. A Common saying in the country after Independence was that it didn't matter *what* you knew that *who* you knew. And, believe me, it was no idle talk. For a person like me who simply going to store to lick any Big Man's boards it created a big problem. In fact one reason why I took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city with car, free housing, etc., was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy. So when I told the minister that I had applied for a scholarship to do a post-graduate Certificate of Education in London it did not even cross my mind to and list his help. I think it is important to stress this point. (Chapter 2)

4. Of course as soon as I grew old enough to understand a few simple pro verbs I realized that I should have died and let my mother live. Whenever my people go to console a woman who is baby has died at birth or soon after, they always tell her to drive her eyes because it is better the water is spilled than the pot broken. The idea being that does sound port can always return to the stream. (Chapter 3)

5. There was an ironic twist to the incident which neither of the ministers seems to notice. OHMS—Our Home Made Stuff—was the popular name of the gigantic campaign which the Government had mounted all over the country to promote the consumption of locally made products. Newspapers, radio and television urged every petrol got to support this great national effort which,

they said, held the key to economic emancipation without which are hard-won political freedom was a mirage...In the language of the ordinary people these cars, and not the wares they advertised, became known as OHMS. It was a princely for one of them the cook had bought the coffee that had nearly cost him his life. (Chapter 3)

6. 'You see what it means to be a minister,' said Chief Nanga as soon as his visitor had left. His voice sounded strangely tired and I fell suddenly sorry for him. This was the nearest I had seen him come to despondency. 'If I don't give him something now, tomorrow he will go and write rubbish about me. They say it is the freedom of the Press. But to me it is nothing short of the freedom to crucify innocent men and assassinate their character. I don't know why our government is so afraid to deal with them. I don't say they should not criticize— after all no one is perfect except God—but they should criticize constructively...' So that other afternoon when the journalist him forward to get a copy of the speech and shouted: 'First-rate sir; I shall put it in the front page instead of a story I have promised the Minister of Construction,' I just wondered if he ever suspected where he and his stories would be if Chief Nanga had his way. (Chapter 7)

7. How important was my political activity in its own right? It was difficult to say things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl. And perhaps it was just as well that my motive should entangled and reinforce one another. For I was not being so naive as to imagine that loving it now was enough to wrench her from a minister. True, I had other advantages like youth and education but those were nothing beside wealth and position and the authority of a greedy father. No. I needed all the reinforcement I could get. (Chapter 11)

## **10.8 ODILI SAMALU'S CHARACTER AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS**

Odili is a young teacher who has become disillusioned with the current government of his country. While he was a university student, Odili realized

that the politicians who ran his country were corrupt and interested only in increasing their own wealth, not in helping the people. At the start of the book, Odili is politically idealistic, and he truly wants to help improve the lives of the people in his country. However, he is also a young man who is full of lust and pride. He sometimes manipulates other people and wants to impress others. He is thoughtful and well-educated, but sometimes he is blind to his own shortcomings. Over the course of the novel, he matures and changes. His idealism is tested and he discovers that personal integrity and courage are of great importance.

Chinua Achebe's novel, *A Man of the People* focuses on Odili, a teacher (who took the job when he refused a government job and all the "politics" that went with it). He is the lead male character and also narrates the story—a typical young man who still has a great deal to learn about life and himself. He is naive (at first taken in by Nanga, a corrupt man), but is also egotistical and "self-congratulatory." Here is a person who speaks first and thinks later.

Odili is not fond of his father as the story begins. With five wives and thirty-five (wow!) children, the elderly man only has a government pension, and with so little, is unable to support his younger wives and their children. As he gets to know his father better, however, Odili's opinion of his father changes. Later, by comparing his father with Nanga, Odili realizes his father is a man of integrity.

Another character in the story is Chief Nanga (a tyrant)—he is a man who seems to do whatever he wants: one of those things is seducing Odili's girlfriend, Elsie (a nurse). More distressing than Nanga's behavior with Elsie is Odili's realization that there is nothing he can do about it. Nanga is the "bad guy" in the story—his charm is easily discernible by the reader. He is good at making people believe the best of him, regardless of the immoral behavior he engages in. He is a force to be reckoned with.

Dogo is Nanga's one-eyed assistant. Simon Koko is also in league with Nanga. He can be extremely fearful, and perhaps even foolish—as

seen when he thinks his coffee has been poisoned. (Actually, they have just switched coffee brands.)

In terms of women, Odili is a chauvinist. When looking at Nanga's wife, Odili has a hard time reconciling her beauty with her intelligence: as if a female cannot be both (in his mind). Edna, not very sophisticated, but an extremely intelligent woman, is another character, and she is sharp enough to avoid being seduced by Nanga. She nurses Odili back to health when he is beaten up at the end of the story. One more very strong woman in the story is Eunice—a lawyer and Max's wife. Eunice is strong and brave, it is she who kills Koko after Max is murdered.

Another character is Odili's friend Max. Max generally has more self-control than Odili; he is more mature and "committed to political action," where Odili tries to avoid politics. Max acts as a foil for our main character: by studying Max the reader can gain a clearer understanding of Odili.

While Max is generally a wise and moral person, he takes a bribe (which deeply worries Odili, showing that he does have a "moral compass"). Max is eventually assassinated as he attempts to keep local politics "clean."

Achebe is able to weave his story with colorful characters that surround Odili as he changes through the course of the book, even developing a more positive relationship with his father. Odili learns to see the world and the people around him differently. He matures through the course of the story, becoming a better man in the process. For example, while he realizes that Nanga is deposed not because he was morally corrupt, but because the people wanted power for their children. There is a sense of hope at the end when Odili marries Edna, that people can "oppose tyrants," and the once politically-isolated Odili might be helpful in this regard.

## **10.9 CHARACTER SKETCH OF CHIEF NANGA**

Chief Nanga is an ex-teacher, turned politician: Minister of culture. Politics changed his moral stance on certain issues. Such personal change

was necessary at the time to maintain his political influence and the accompanying lifestyle. The book satirizes political happenings in post-independence Nigeria through the eyes of Odili, a young school teacher who ventures into politics as both a response to his disgust at the conduct of politicians and to spite his, once admired teacher, Chief Nanga, who slept with a girl, Odili had penciled down for himself.

The Chief Nanga is an embodiment of the ambitions and failings of the people. He is a shrewd, opportunistic Machiavellian politician. He represents extreme individualism damaging the African character.

He is a fraud not only in political and commercial terms but also culturally attacks those Africans who have received western education. He starts a campaign of an authentic African culture, but he himself hankers after the western things and he fills his house with them.

In a discussion with an interviewer Achebe pointed out, “Nanga is very important he is the only character who has the title of the book. He is very clever and cunning. He knows what he wants to do in a way. It is the tragedy of our situation. Nanga uses such devices to destroy the society.”

Thus through the character of Chief Nanga the novelist stresses on individual’s materialism which has corruption strife and cynicism. Chief Nanga signifies the corruption of Nigerian society. He is the rogue in power. He is the man of the people (African natives).

#### **10.10 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Chapter 1 opens with Chief Nanga making an address at which school?
- (a) The Urua Elementary School
  - (b) The Anata Grammar School
  - (c) Cambridge University
  - (d) The University

- Q2. What is the name of the soloist mentioned in Chapter 1?
- (a) Voice box
  - (b) Grammar-phone
  - (c) Edna
  - (d) Elsie
- Q3. What guild causes a stir when it arrives at the Assembly Hall?
- (a) The Ego Women's Party
  - (b) The Seamstress' guild
  - (c) The Hunters' guild
  - (d) The Nigerian Pottery Guild
- Q4. What is Chief Nanga's previous occupation?
- (a) Carpenter
  - (b) Foreign Ambassador
  - (c) Teacher
  - (d) Lieutenant in the army
- Q5. In what year does Odili become disillusioned with the POP?
- (a) 1948
  - (b) 1957
  - (c) 1960
  - (d) 1964
- Q6. What are the dismissed members of the Prime Minister's Cabinet called in Chapter 1?
- (a) The Miscreant Gang
  - (b) The Elitists
  - (c) The Progressive Alliance Party
  - (d) The Daily Chronicle

Q7. What is the chief complaint of the Prime Minister against his dismissed Cabinet members?

- (a) They have betrayed their fathers
- (b) They are bloodthirsty
- (c) They are over-educated by Western thought
- (d) They are greedy

#### 10.11 ANSWER KEY

1. (b)            2. (b)            3. ( c)            4. (c)  
5. (c)            6.( a)            7. (c)

#### 10.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Write a note on the character of Odili Samalu.
- Q2. “And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything.” In light of this statement, discuss the novel, *A Man of the People*.
- Q3. Trace the development of plot in Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*.

#### 10.13 LET US SUM UP

Odili, the narrator and chief protagonist of *A Man of the People*, is like Louis Aladai a nationalist who has nothing but contempt for the traditions of his nation. He does not ‘care too much for our women’s dancing.’ He speaks as any foreigner might of the members of the hunters’ guild as ‘these people’, ‘bush’ is the nastiest epithet he can think of, and he scornfully dismisses the people with whom he works and whose children he teaches.

This novel takes place in 1964 and examines the institutions of Nigeria. Coming out of colonial times, the people have no sense of taxes or being taxed, especially the farmers (because the tax is just being wrapped into the purchase price). Originally published in 1966, during which there were two coups in



Nigeria. The first coup ended the first republic. After these two coups Achebe went to Biafra to join their independence movement. When Biafra lost that bid, Achebe headed to the US for an extended period.

Without understanding that Chief Nanga is a man of the people, the story does not work. In the novel, it's the people that drive the action. It's important that Nanga is the only character that talks to the people. Odili never talks to the people in the same manner. Even at Odili's rally, it's Maxwell who speaks, and he still doesn't speak to them in the way Nanga does.

#### **10.14 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Achebe, Chinua. *A Man of the People*. South Africa: Heinemann, 1966. Print.
2. Booker, M. Keith, ed. *The Chinua Achebe: Encyclopedia*. London: Greenwood Press, 2003. Print.
3. Wekesa, Bob. *Guide to A Man of the People*. Accra: Africawide Network, 2004. Print.

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**THEME OF POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN  
GENERATIONS & RACISM**

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives
- 11.3 Leaders, Voices and Motives
- 11.4 Theme of Power Struggle between Generations
- 11.5 Theme of Racism
- 11.6 Independence and After: *A Man of the People*
- 11.7 Self-Assessment Questions
- 11.8 Answer Key
- 11.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 11.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.11 Suggested Reading

**11.1 INTRODUCTION**

*A Man of the People* is a satirical novel that deals with corruption and the cult of personality in a newly independent African state. The two main protagonists are government minister Chief Nanga, 'the most approachable politician in the country', and his idealistic former pupil Odili, who narrates the story in a style characteristic of the author, effectively

blending African proverbs and pidgin English with evidence of the encroachment of Western mores.

## **11.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to discuss various facets of the novel. It explains the themes of the novel and also touches upon different theoretical issues on the basis of which the text can be interpreted.

## **11.3 LEADERS, VOICES AND MOTIVES**

### ***LEADERS***

In *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga, is referred to by the narrator, Odili, as a man of the people, and the most approachable politician in the country. He is the minister of culture and his speeches to the public represent everything that a politician should do and be. But as Odili tells the story, it becomes clear that Chief Nanga does not practice what he preaches. The money that is supposed to go towards helping his community he uses instead to build four-story buildings, which he rents out for his own profit.

Chief Nanga is supposed to be standing up for the traditions and beliefs of the pre-colonial African culture by defending the common man and opposing the European-oriented post-colonial intellectuals. This notion of defending the unique and colorful African culture is evident in another book of his called *Arrow of God* where he explains in detail the various rituals, artistic creations, clothing, beliefs, politics, and a sense of community and disagreement among tribes in Africa. However, in *A Man of the People* Achebe focuses more on the politics of West African communities. Achebe shows the switching of power between the old and new styles of politicians and how the old style bush politician, Chief Nanga, is becoming more and more greedy as he learns the political system.

The politicians in this novel stand as an intermediary between the government and the common people but are portrayed by Achebe as the evil side. Chief Nanga learns to be greedy and learns how to win elections through

the corrupt system of politics he was against in the first place. The important thing for Chief Nanga is that the people trust him. He relates to them more, because he considers himself closer to the common man and far away from the intellectual, who represents a more European style of living and thinking. By representing his country after colonialism he has the incentive to stay as far away from the European style of life and politics as possible. As Odili explains the story, however, Chief Nanga only tells the people what they want to hear about defending their culture and way of thinking, and Nanga acts in a voracious way to obtain what he wants in his personal life; money, power, and women.

Chief Nanga's corrupt way of leading the people by telling them one thing and doing another is what eventually brings his reign to an end. Nanga taught Odili when he was young and Odili respected and liked him as a teacher. He learned many things from him and was happy when he heard he was first elected. But as Nanga grew more powerful within his office and country Odili began to grow smarter and he became more aware of the corrupt reality. It was not finally realized though, until he actually had the chance to live with Chief Nanga and witness how Nanga abused his money and power by over-spending his money and having his way with the women he desired.

Odili gives his insight on this situation when he narrates, "We ignore man's basic nature if we say, as some critics do, that because a man like Nanga has risen overnight from poverty and insignificance to his present opulence he could be persuaded without much trouble to give it up again and return to his original state. A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors the whole time. The trouble with our new nation as I saw it then lying on that bed was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say, to hell with it. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday".

He goes on to talk about his group of people as the smart and the lucky and how they had scrambled to the one shelter their former rulers left and taken it over. The metaphor here is very powerful and it really makes it clear the point Achebe is trying to explain. The point is that a person who goes from having nothing (Nanga) to having everything is going to be more reluctant to go back to having nothing compared to someone that has had everything the whole time, thus making him more greedy to gain power and more defensive against giving up this power. Odili emphasizes that the new nation was never indoors, but together in the rain, and they desperately needed to experience a little shelter.

### **Voices**

A voice is a powerful source for spreading beliefs and enforcing laws. In the political voice of *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga tells his fellow citizens only the things that he feels they need to hear. His motivation is to gain the approval of the people through the things he says and he persuades them to think that his one voice will represent everyone's voice. He is not only a man of the people, but also a voice for the people. The only side of Chief Nanga the people hear, however, is his politically persuading west African voice that is heard as a voice that will defend and protect against the European style of living and colonizing while representing the African culture. His methods work to not only persuade the people to vote for him, but to believe he is doing everything he can to help them. The people are in a way puppets being controlled by Nanga and his thugs.

In the novel *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad, the voice of Mr. Kurtz plays a huge role in the actions of his followers and the people seeking to meet him. People trust his voice as a powerful sound and that sound echoes through their minds like a drum pounding in the African jungle. His voice, like Chief Nanga's, is heard as the voice of the people. Both voices in each novel are listened to as though it is a gavel striking down upon the table. What is heard by the people to do is what is done. Both

men use their voice to enforce laws and actions. Kurtz is in charge of a huge ivory production line that is meant to make him and his home country a fortune. Nanga is in charge of his country and is the Minister of Culture, and his thugs do whatever he needs done to ensure he keeps winning elections. In this story, Odili sees a different side of Chief Nanga that the people do not see. He sees the greedy and gluttonous Chief Nanga and he sees the lust and passion driving Nanga to have his way and to have women bow down to him.

This evil side of Nanga that no one ever sees due to his power and way of hiding the truth and having his way with women is seen by Odili as a powerful enough reason to run against him in the upcoming election. This dark and empty side of Nanga motivates Odili to seek a friend he has not seen in quite sometime, Max. Together they split away from the two political party systems in west Africa that they see as corrupt and self-centered and they form their own political party that is meant to represent the common man. The argument Nanga uses against Odili is that Odili is an intellectual who has a European style of education and thus is farther away from common man. This is a good argument, but coming from the mouth of Nanga, it is hypocritical and untrue. Nanga finds a way to take the woman that Odili has feelings for away from him, and thus Odili seeks revenge as he is determined to defeat Chief Nanga in the upcoming election and win back the woman he desires.

A voice is so powerful; people fail to realize this until they think of voices that stand out in history and the meaning of the voice. The voice of Martin Luther King Jr. has touched so many and made such a huge impact on the world. He is one man with one voice and it really makes one realize the influence that one man can have on the world. Adolf Hitler on the other hand, used his voice to kill millions of Jews while attempting to spread his view on what the world should look like on the outside. Jesus Christ used his voice much like Martin Luther King Jr. as he spoke without using his fists or guns to spread his message. He touched so many people with his one

voice that it is hard to believe the largest religion in the world originated from one man. Muhammad's voice played a huge role in the history of the world as he started a religion known as Islam that is the fastest growing religion in the world today. The power of one voice, as one can see, is incomparable to anything else in the world. In the novels, *A Man of the People*, and *Heart of Darkness* the power of the voice is evident and plays a crucial role in the behaviors of the people listening.

### **Motives**

In the novels *A Man of the People* and *Heart of Darkness*, the characters are motivated by different underlying factors that ultimately control their behavior. The motives of each character determine what methods each uses to achieve his goal. Violence, discovery, power, curiosity, greed, money, lust, and revenge are some of the different variables controlling the behaviors of the characters in these two novels.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's motive for travel and exploration is curiosity. He simply loves every bit of discovering new places and seeing things of the first time. Marlow wants to find new sights and sounds, and he wants to explore for the sake of exploring, not for the sake of colonizing and overtaking. Unlike Marlow, the other main voice in the novel, Mr. Kurtz, explores to seek money and power. Each man has the urge to travel and explore, but each man has a different motive driving him to behave in different ways.

In *A Man of the People*, Odili's motives for running against Chief Nanga in the election is to seek revenge and to prove that he is closer to the common man than Nanga. Odili is upset and jealous of Chief Nanga as he wins out both the girls Odili attempts to have relations with. Nanga wants to prove that no matter how old he is, his political power, money, and charming good looks will always win over the younger less powerful intellectual.

When asked if he (Odili) was serious about Elsie from Nanga, Odili played it off like he did not care and told Chief Nanga that he was not serious about her. It was not until one night that Odili had the intentions of sneaking up to Elsie's room when he realized Nanga has beaten him to the spot and the competition begins. Nanga justifies his actions by explaining to Odili that the reason he (Nanga) asked him about whether or not he was serious about Elsie was to find out whether she was spoken for. Elsie screams Odili's name, but Odili does not care enough about her to react. If he did care he would have responded. Instead he packs his bags and leaves, and is only mad at Nanga for competition's sake.

This creates a motive for Odili to find his old buddy, called "cool" Max, and to start a new third political party in an attempt to undermine Chief Nanga. However, as Odili becomes more involved in politics he begins to see the corruption within the whole political process. His father is very much against him for attempting to run against the honorable Chief Nanga, and this creates a controversy between the two men. At one point when Odili has established himself as the voice of the new party, Nanga tries to bribe him to drop out of the election, and Odili refuses. This episode takes place in front of Odili's father and is a two vs. one-person debate. The two being Nanga and Odili's father team up against Odili in the argument about whether or not Odili should accept the money and drop out of the election. Nanga tells Odili that his friend Max accepted money and Odili couldn't believe it. He later finds out that Max accepts the money to help fund Odili's campaign.

Chief Nanga has motives to obtain as much power as possible and he uses violent and greedy methods to obtain this power. He lives in a fabulous house, constructs big building to rent and profit from, and has hired thugs to kill or arrest the person he needs killed or arrested. He arrests Odili's father at one point, bribes Max and eventually has Max killed, wins out the two girls Odili is after, tries to bribe Odili, and at the end tries



to exploit Odili in front of the mass of people gathered to listen to his (Nanga's) campaign speech. Nanga stuffs ballot boxes and does everything he can with the power he has to suppress Odili's attempt to overtake his position.

Motives can play a crucial role in determining the methods a person uses to acquire the things he wants in life. Many men have the same motive, to spread their beliefs and thus to have people listen to them and respect them. The modes of spreading one's beliefs will determine the fate of the world. If a man believes he is doing the correct thing based on his beliefs there is always going to be a controversy. Politicians have to persuade the people that their beliefs will not only come true, but will benefit everyone. If a politician has a powerful enough voice, most often, that man will persuade his listeners to believe in him. Nanga makes the people believe that they are so much better off than they would have been under European control that they do not even question what Chief Nanga is doing with all the power and money he has. Odili realizes that the country could be made so much better if the people just knew the facts, but in order for him to gain the faith of the people he must go up against the man known as "a man of the people".

#### **11.4 THEME OF POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN GENERATIONS**

Odili is a naive character who has refused a government post in favour of a teaching job in the "bush", a rural area, in order to escape boot licking of the politically connected. Ironically, he gets drawn in, starting with an elaborate reception hosted by Nanga, followed closely by an invitation to spend holidays with him at the Minister's mansion in the capital. His own father's relative poverty in recent years, because of his many wives, seems to foster Odili's susceptibility to Nanga's overtures. Knowing about Nanga's harsh treatment of the Minister of Finance, he should have known there would be strings attached. While staying at Nanga's place, Odili brings a girl, Elsie, and Nanga in a sense cuckolds him, stealing into her bed during the night. Odili does not care.

Money is a prerequisite to power and Micah Nanga was used as the symbol of corruption. He was a man of the people because he had money so even though in the people completely knew him as a fraudulent man, they continued to worship him. In the story, money holds women, people and choices. To give further justifications: On the first phase of the story, people were simply celebrating upon the anticipated arrival of Chief Micah Nanga, the most approachable politician and who was known to be a man of the people. Odili Samalu, a former student of Nanga and the protagonist of the story reminisced some of events that happened in his life involving Nanga and some reasons why he has always disliked Nanga. Surprisingly, Nanga was still able to remember Odili's name, offered Odili a scholarship, and claimed that he wants to see Odili again, as the line goes: "He slapped me again on the back and said I must not fail to see him... I became a hero in the eyes of the crowd". The people knew Nanga had money so it was easy to pretend since money can simply put anyone who stands in Nanga's way (as it is in the case of Max).

When Nanga was talking on the phone to T.C. Kobino and was presumed by Odili to be the minister of public construction, Nanga was telling him about the tarring of the road which involves money and he won't be able to tell T.C. Kobino: "What? Don't worry about the Press. I will make sure that they don't publish it..." if he has no power, if he had no money.

Money controls even the press, the media and in this case, Nanga was definite about how money is able to make his name more appealing to the public:

"He drank two bottles of beer, smoked many cigarettes and then got a "dash" of five pounds from the Minister".

One of the most interesting lines that would further establish my strong argument is the case of Edna. She was suppose to marry Nanga because of money and because her father, Odo insists her so. Nanga had

the money, and that's what exactly Odo needed for himself. He needed money to suffice his personal desires, he needed money and that's what made him want Nanga for Edna.

Edna didn't want to marry Nanga, but as she claimed, "He paid for me to go to college".

Additionally, to further strengthen the argument that Odo indeed does want money, when he talked to Odili about running against Nanga, money would be a tool of his win of course, hence he told Odili:

*'To hear that they have given you much money to use in fighting against my in law; if you have a sense in your belly you will carry the money into your bed chamber and stow it away and do something useful with it. But if you prefer to throw it away why not ask me to help you?' –Odo.*

Last but not the least, is one of the most disappointing thing about Maxwell, a lawyer who aims to fight the ongoing fraudulent system is that he accepted money from Nanga's party.

He resulted to bribery so that his party would be able to pay for the minibus. This act violates two aspects of morality one is the intention and two is the content. The intention of Max to receive the money is just so to be able to pay for the minibus and because his party needed funds; this already specifies deception and dishonesty to the public figure, for the reason that, there are a lot of other ways to earn money not just accepting something from the other party.

Another as it involves context; from the beginning, Odili has understood that Max wanted a clean fight, but why did he result to one immoral act; hence the fight will not be clean at all. He confirmed so himself, that the world is indeed manipulated by money. Maxwell knows that you can't fight without money. 'I consulted the other boys and we decided to accept... it paid for the minibus...'; 'Now you tell me how you propose to

fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands just a little. Just you tell me,' – Max.

To conclude, one of the most powerful revelations of the novel is that politics and power requires a lot of money, this is exposed from the story to the world and it is in fact a still living reality.

### **11.5 THEME OF RACISM**

When thinking about different cultures from different parts of the world one cannot help but to think of colonialism and racism and the whole meaning behind the two. Slavery is a broad term that does not give a clear view from different perspectives of what racism is. Do not get me wrong, slavery in the United States was based mainly on racism, but in order to understand what racism is, reading literature is a great way to learn about it.

Colonialism and racism can be used interchangeably. What is racism? A person or group of persons that feel they have more rights, better beliefs, and more power to expand these beliefs by physical or verbal force, over another person or group of persons, based on skin color. I think that is a decent definition, but it needs to go beyond just skin color. I feel there is religious racism, political racism, ethnic racism, and gender racism that involves one group having a feeling of ethnocentrism as these people think they are meant to have the most power in the world. I think I would define colonialism very closely to racism. Colonialism involves the expansion of one group over another based on beliefs, religion, land, money, power, and race.

In order to eliminate racism there has to be more voices like Martin Luther King Jr. There has to be more voices like Jesus Christ. There has to be more voices like Mother Theresa and more voices from people fighting for equality among different groups of people. Achebe and other literary writers play a big part in speaking for the country they are from. Literature

in itself is a strong voice that must not be overlooked. Teachers can play a huge role in helping their students learn about racism. In my high school we never talked about racism or colonialism and the repercussions they create in the world. I came from a small town and all the people consider themselves the same race. This environment can really cause people to focus on just at the bad points of a single race and develop a stereotype about that race. Especially, when teachers are not teaching anything about racism and colonialism, let alone pieces of literature that are from anywhere but England or the United States.

It is crucial to introduce to students pieces of literature from all different parts of the world. This will at least allow them to think about the world from different eyes, if only for a moment, that moment is so beneficial to a person and his or her ability to relate to the world. The world is controlled by humans and we as an organization or community need to realize that the world is continuing to grow smaller and smaller in terms of space left for humans to occupy. Before long people are going to have to either respect their neighbor's property or fight with their neighbor for their property. With all hope, we can learn to respect each other before it is too late. Unless one knows the history of the United States, for the most part, one that is born in the U.S.A. is oblivious to what it really means to be an American. Some kids growing up have no idea what America was founded upon and why so many people from so many parts of the world came to America. They all had a common dream in their mind, opportunity. People that move to America today from foreign countries still have that dream. To escape whatever aversive factors are pushing them out of their own country and to seek favorable factors pulling them into the U.S.A.

Kids in America need to be taught why America is the most powerful country in the world. Children and young adults need to be informed that America is the most diverse country in the world. They need to be taught that in order to have a well-run and developed house, community, country, or world, people need to come together with a common goal. Kids need to be taught that America is only 227 years old, and only colonized around 400

years ago. They need to be taught how it was colonized and they need to know the literature that went along with it. They need to be taught the true stories of colonization and of the Native Americans. Kids need to learn that to be racist in America is like being racist against one's own blood.

Students need to understand that America has the most technology and the strongest military in the world because of the ideas that created them. They need to understand these ideas derived from, not one single race, but from cultures all over the world. How better to learn about the lifestyle of another country than to actually talk to a person from that country? Imagine a huge group of diverse people mixed together with the same goal in mind. This was the reality for newcomers coming to the U.S.A. during the last four centuries. However, some children today are never taught these things, the true meaning of America and how lucky he or she is to be living in a land so diverse and so advanced. They need to understand that these ideas and advancements did not come from one man or one race, but from millions of men and women and hundreds of different cultures.

Malcolm Wells writes in an article called *A Jigsaw Puzzle*, "Still at 62, it's hard to convince myself that this is not the country I was taught to love. It's painful to look at the truth. My grade-school indoctrination was so effective I still want to believe it all, from the home of the brave to the purple mountains majesty. I'd been told about slavery, about the great buffalo massacres, and about the Indian wars, but they had all been presented in such a rosy light each page of the nation's history seemed justified, almost sanctified, when seen against the grand tapestry of our progress across this shining continent. Waving field of grain, great heroes, American know-how. . . I bought them all. That we had stolen this shining continent from its native people bothered me not in the least" (Whole Earth Review, 24). These beliefs come from the ways Wells was taught growing up as he was oblivious to the problems that stem from America and was only taught about America the beautiful.

He goes on to say, “Before I looked in the mirror, however, I looked everywhere else, blaming racists, the military, politicians, hunters, developers. When I finally saw my reflection I said Oh my god, and saw that he too had been part of the myth. I wanted to go back and start over, to undo all I’d done. When we see the whole picture we may stop all this brutality and cruelty and get ourselves together just in the nick of time”. (Whole Earth Review, 25).

## **11.6 INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER: A MAN OF THE PEOPLE**

Nigeria attained its much-awaited independence in 1960 but political freedom did not fulfill the long-standing promises that it held forth. Post-independence Nigeria witnessed squandering of the opportunities of freedom, rampant corruption, utter lawlessness, a near total absence of civilian rule and numerous military coups. Nigeria had become a free nation but the change was only a nominal one: it remained a victim of colonization like many other Third World countries where colonialism did not end with independence but continued in other guises. Nigeria’s case was complicated by the fact that its economy continued to be dependent on western countries and other foreign players. The novel is set during times of political, social and economic unrest. The prevailing mood of bitterness and disappointment form the backdrop to the struggle of the characters for a cohesive identity as the destinies of postcolonial African societies are apportioned. In the midst of political upheavals it was the common man who suffered the most in his attempt to preserve his self. The stories of the nation are the stories of those who survived the onslaught on the mind.

Chinua Achebe presents a view of a society riddled with greed, violence and ignorance from which there is no apparent escape. He paints a bleaker picture of African society in these novels than the earlier novels where the same society is depicted at the time of transition from colonial rule to independence, but never in such bleak terms. Achebe takes the old symbols from the folk traditions and recontextualizes them in the new political

and cultural context of Nigeria, and engages with them to construct a political and cultural context. The problems are played out in dramatic and forceful terms so as to draw attention to them. Achebe's narration of his nation after independence does not end at nation building but moves beyond to depict situations of unjust power relations, role of women and the press and freedom of expression. Achebe does not castigate colonization and blame all ills on it. He highlights the faults and fissures within.

Achebe's narratives enable one to see the conditions prevalent in post-independence Nigeria and in his role of the novelist as teacher he draws attention to the problems. This is why it is possible to contend that Achebe provides alternative ways of narrating the nation. The construction and contestation of the nation is a major concern with many writers of the Third World. Their idea of a nation was generated by the anti-imperialistic struggles. The nation for the postcolonial writer goes beyond the political to embrace the cultural construct, where it expresses other concerns also, such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, tribe, ancestors, region, imperialism and so on. The idea of the nation must be seen as a continuous narrative emerging out of the past. Hence, Achebe's narration of the nation in terms of people and not states calls for a closer look at the changing concepts of the nation.

Achebe's narration of the nation in terms of people and not states covers the entire period of Nigeria's transition from colonisation to national independence. In his narrative of the times before the coming of the colonisers, he had used myths of creation, folktales and evoked the vibrant Igbo culture. After Nigeria's independence there were numerous attacks on the Igbo community. Not only were they marginalized in politics but there were cases of ethnic killings to target them. Finally, they had to suffer the ravages of the Biafran war. Achebe's novels not only trace their sufferings but also show how the Igbo community remained together through the turmoil. The sufferings of the ordinary Nigerians after independence are brought out by Achebe in poignant terms.



A brief recapitulation of the history of Nigeria after independence would help to understand the unstable times in which the novel, *A Man of the People*, is set. It would also show how closely Achebe observed the political scenario of Nigeria and how truthfully he represented them. Finally, it would show how powerful stories might be, sometimes even prophetic of things to come like the coup immediately after the release of *A Man of the People*.

Nigeria became independent on the 1st of October 1960 and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became the first prime minister. In 1961, the Cameroons territories were divided with the northern part joining Nigeria and the Southern part joining the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Sir Abubakar served as Prime Minister upto 1966, his tenure marked by regional and ethnic tensions, trial and imprisonment of leading opposition politicians accused of treason and a violence-marred election in 1964. He was killed in a revolt by army officers in 1966 after which Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo and the Commander of the army emerged as the country's new leader. Achebe's *A Man of the People* ends with a military coup similar to the real-life coup of Ironsi that came shortly after the novel was published. Achebe's work appeared prophetic and military personnel suspected him of having foreknowledge of the coup.

Ironsi suspended the constitution and announced that many public services which were controlled by the regions would henceforth be controlled by the federal government. Ironsi was assassinated in a countercoup and replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon. The coup was followed by the massacre of thousands of Igbo in the northern region of Nigeria. In May 1967 Gowon announced the creation of a new twelve-state structure. The Igbo populated Eastern Region was to be divided into three states of which two were dominated by non-Igbo groups. The division was to sever the vast majority of Igbo from profitable coastal ports and oil rich fields in the Niger Delta. The government policies and the attacks on

the Igbo were seen by leaders of the Eastern Region as official attempts to push the Igbo to the margins of Nigerian society and politics. The region's Igbo dominated assembly authorized Lieutenant Colonel Odemegwu Ojukwu to declare independence as the Republic of Biafra.

The Biafran Civil War was precipitated by the attempts of the government to lessen the political powers of the Igbo. The war devastated Biafra when Nigerian forces moved south and captured the university town of Nsukka. The bitter war was prolonged by France's military support for the Biafrans. The better equipped Nigerian army defeated the Biafran forces in 1970.

The restoration of peace and the reintegration of the Igbo into Nigerian life was remarkably rapid. The booming oil trade of the mid-1970s when Nigeria was the world's fifth largest producer of petroleum added to the nation's progress. But very soon the country faced problems of shortage of key commodities, congestion in the ports, high prices, growing corruption, the government's failure to address several ethnic issues and demands for redistribution of wealth. In spite of a national development plan, the bulk of Nigeria's income remained in the hands of a few. At such a time Gowon announced that the return to civilian rule would be postponed indefinitely. On the 29th of July 1975, Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammed overthrew Gowon in a bloodless coup.

The central concern in the novel is to depict the cynicism of both the politicians and the people with regard to the electoral process which eventually invites army intervention. In the novel Chief M.A. Nanga and Odili contest to be "man of the people" while an army coup changes the history of the nation. As individuals like Odili and Max try to make a difference without any popular support, those in power appropriate the wealth of the nation and things fall apart. Achebe examines the underlying structural weaknesses of the new society which cannot stand the political changes, and renders a true picture of the cruel reality as a truthful

witness. He interprets the present in satirical terms. He begins thus: “Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people.” He is also described as the politician “who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation”. He “don’t care two hoots about the outside world. He is concerned with the inside world, with how to retain his hold on his constituency and there he is adept ...” (23). He is a “born politician ...could get away with almost anything he said or did. And as long as men are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads the Chief Nangas of this world will continue to get away with anything” (66). And this is what he does when he as the Minister of Culture announces in public that he has never heard of his country’s famous novel and prophesizes that his country would produce great writers: “He had that rare gift of making people feel – even while he was saying harsh things to them – that there was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame” (66).

The country is in the hands of politicians like Nanga whose lives of great luxury is shown to be in sharp contrast to the lives of the masses. “The surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible. Here was I in our capital city, reading about pails of excrement from the cosy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming silent action, water-closets!” (41). Politicians like him are part of the government which is out of step with the aspirations of the people, who in order to reign over the country engage in political activities which create unrest. The unstable government disturbed the stability of the whole nation.

The country was on the verge of chaos. The Trade Unions and the Civil Service Union made loud noises and gave notice of nation-wide strikes. The shops closed for fear of looting. The Governor-General according to rumour called on the Prime Minister to resign which he finally got round to doing three weeks later (101).

With lawlessness and corruption having spread everywhere, Achebe shows how far it had reached through the example of a local councillor. He was at the moment very much involved in supplying stones for our village pipe-borne water scheme and was widely accused (in whispers) of selling one heap of stones in the morning, carrying it away at night and selling it again the next day; and repeating the cycle as long as he liked (124-125).

The effect of such incidents of corruption on the masses was that they appeared bewildered by the events and resigned to their fate, “They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you ... if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth” (2-3). They also know that by bribing they can get things done, “If our people understand nothing else they know that a man who takes money from another in return for service must render that service or remain vulnerable to that man’s just revenge. Neither God nor juju would save him” (127).

This was one side of the blighted new nation that Achebe wrote about. The other side of the story has the Students’ Union raising its voice against the traitors of democracy, the writings in newspaper editorials and the attempts of individuals like Odili and Max to fight against the prevailing disorder. Their first step is to launch a new political party, “Max and some of his friends having watched with deepening disillusion the use to which our hard-won freedom was being put by corrupt, mediocre politicians had decided to come together and launch the Common People’s Convention” (78). Max tells the story of a hunter and the vultures to his supporters during his election campaign perhaps because he knows the power of the story in shaping people’s lives. Max’s story of how a hunter shot two vultures who were fighting over the carcass of what he had killed is told to inspire the voters to “wipe out the dirty thieves fighting over another man’s inheritance” (126). The “dirty thieves” according to Max are the political parties “P.O.P and P.A.P” (126). Odili interpreted the trouble with the nation as:

*A man who has come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation ... was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say "To hell with it." We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in (37).*

The leaders proclaim: "We must watch and guard our hard- won freedom jealously. Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to the hybrid class of Western- educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage"(6). But the common saying after independence was, "...it didn't matter what you knew but who you knew" (17) because the country lacked dynamic leaders.

Achebe also brings up issues like ethnicism, neo-colonialism and the threats to the continuation of traditional ways in his narrative. In a country consisting of many ethnic groups, independence opened up job opportunities which everyone wanted to avail. And as each group wanted someone of their own in important positions, it gave rise to feelings of ethnocentrism. Chief Nanga tells Odili, "I want you to come to the capital and take up a strategic post in the civil service. We shouldn't leave everything to the highland tribes. My secretary is from there; our people must press for their share of the national cake" (12). This feeling is also seen during the elections as the village of Urua decides whom to vote for: "the village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it; if the very herb we go to seek in the forest now grows at our very back yard are we not saved the journey?" (127). In the events that follow, it is in a quick flash that the inevitable changes take place. The rigged elections, thugs disguised as police who kill Max, and his wife Eunice firing at Chief Koko are the events which, we are told "lit the tinder of discontent in the land" (144). A reign of terror begins with rampaging of markets by

bands of marauders even as the government said that it was “as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar” (144) and that the country had “never been more united or more stable than it was today” (144). The people watched helplessly and seemed reconciled to the things:

*Let them eat, ... after all when white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide? Of course not. And where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing then is to stay alive; if you do you will outlive your present annoyance. The great thing, as the old people have told us, is reminiscence; and only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive, who knows? It may be your turn to eat tomorrow. Your son may bring home your share. (145)*

As they tried to suit the old wisdom to the changed times and watched the mayhem, an army coup changed the course of the nation’s history.

...the army obliged us by staging a coup at that point and locking up every member of the Government. The rampaging bands of election thugs had caused so much unrest and dislocation that our young Army officers seized the opportunity to take over. (147- 148).

Max is made a hero of the revolution and Eunice is released from prison. There is a flicker of hope even though the future is uncertain. Odili’s marriage to Edna typifies this hope just as Max’s life is an inspiration to the momentary patriotic phase. The reaction of the people to these changes is described as: *Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government: newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants – everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise-singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief*

*and a murderer, while the people who had led him on – in my opinion the real culprits – took the legendary bath of the Hornbill and donned innocence (149).*

The nation's affairs remain mired in trouble. This first novel of Achebe on post- independence Nigeria paints a picture of how things stand, without attempting to gloss over the harsh realities. There are no attempts made to show that having received power in their hands, the Nigerians were capable of transforming the conditions of their country and people. Achebe appears to have moved beyond the stage of blaming all ills on colonisation. Instead, he looks within his own people and shows that power can be misused by anyone and the oppression by those in power is more difficult to withstand and to oppose. Achebe also discovers in fellow humans the ability to adapt to changes, in spite of continuous sufferings, either on account of alien rule or misrule by fellow Nigerians. In their ability to accept things which they cannot change, Achebe shows the resilience of his people to also indicate that stories are told of those who oppose injustice and attempt to bring about changes.

### **11.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- Q1. What does Odili do when he realizes that his host has shamed him?
- (a) Kicks in the door
  - (b) Packs his suitcases
  - (c) Weeps uncontrollably
  - (d) Sets the house on fire
- Q2. When does Odili's mother die?
- (a) She is still alive
  - (b) When he was 1
  - (c) When he was 3
  - (d) At childbirth

- Q3. What does Odili ultimately think of Jean?
- (a) She is attractive
  - (b) She is a bigot
  - (c) She is unintelligent
  - (d) She is insensitive
- Q4. For what does the young man apply at Chief Nanga's house at the end of Chapter 4?
- (a) To be a security guard
  - (b) To be a chauffeur
  - (c) To be a gardener
  - (d) To be a cook
5. To what room in Chief Nanga's house are Elsie's bags taken?
- (a) Mrs. Nanga's room.
  - (b) Chief Nanga's room.
  - (c) The guest room.
  - (d) Odili's room.
6. How many wives does Odili's father have?
- (a) One
  - (b) Seven
  - (c) Three
  - (d) Five
7. How many children does Odili's father have?
- (a) five
  - (b) ten
  - (c) thirty-five
  - (d) twenty-one



8. What is the name of Chief Nanga's second wife-to-be?
- (a) Jennie
  - (b) Jean
  - (c) Elsie
  - (d) Edna
- Q 9. Why does Odili have his present teaching job instead of a civil-service job?
- (a) Autonomy
  - (b) A girl
  - (c) Money
  - (d) Under-qualification
- Q 10. What is Chief Nanga's previous occupation?
- (a) Teacher
  - (b) Carpenter
  - (c) Lieutenant in the army
  - (d) Foreign Ambassador
11. When Odili returns to Anata after first meeting Maxwell and his friends, where does he find a large crowd?
- (a) Outside Josiah's bar
  - (b) Outside the grammar school
  - (c) Outside his house
  - (d) Outside Edna's house

### **11.8 ANSWER KEY**

- 1. (b)      2. (d)
- 3. (b)      4. (d)
- 5. ( a)     6. (d)

7. (c)      8. (d)  
9. (a)      10. (a)  
11. (a)

### **11.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Odili shows both strengths and weaknesses in his character. What are his greatest strengths? What are his weaknesses?
- Q2. Chief Nanga is described as “A Man of the People.” What does this mean? How does he represent the people in his country? What is his relationship with the people he represents?
- Q3. How does Odili perceive Chief Nanga at different points during the book? What do they have in common? How are they different?

### **11.10 LET US SUM UP**

Odili, after having been invited to stay with Chief Nanga, finds himself in an unfamiliar but seductive social world, where Nanga enjoys an opulent *arriviste* lifestyle while at the same time subscribing to traditional customs, including polygamy. Things take a turn for the worse for Odili when his sometime girlfriend succumbs to Nanga’s charms, leaving Odili smarting with resentment and hatching plans for revenge. He sets out to influence Nanga’s intended second wife, Edna, away from Nanga though in the process he begins to value her qualities. At the same time Odili, on behalf of a dissident political party, decides to contest Chief Nanga’s seat at the coming election, and the repercussions have adverse effects not only for Odili’s friends and family but for his whole village. The two rivals clash publicly and physically at Nanga’s inaugural campaign meeting, as a result of which Odili is hospitalized and briefly arrested on a trumped-up charge. Although Odili’s political ambitions come to an abrupt end, and Nanga is re-elected, by the end of the book the corrupt government—‘a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut’—has fallen, and Odili has won Edna.

### 11.11 SUGGESTED READING

1. D. Carol. 1975. *Chinua Achebe: Novelist, Poet, Critic*. London: Heinemann
2. M. Culross. 2007. *Chinua Achebe's Biography and Style*. (Online)
3. D. Duerden and C. Pieterse. 1972. *African Writers Talking*. London: Heinemann

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**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NOVEL *A MAN  
OF THE PEOPLE***

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives
- 12.3 Sense of Disillusionment
- 12.4 Significance of the Title
- 12.5 Political Apathy and Rule of the Military
- 12.6 Prevailing Aura of Corruption
- 12.7 Representation of Women
- 12.8 Aspect of Realism
- 12.9 Self-Assessment Questions
- 12.10 Answer Key
- 12.11 Examination Oriented Questions
- 12.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.13 Suggested Reading

**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

*A Man of the People* (1967) is Achebe's fourth novel. Achebe's sincerity in writing about the African social and political landscape is evident to the reader. Along with his other novels, *A Man of the People* can be

classified as realistic. The characters are constructed within a particular environment and in a particular historical phase; they recreate their own history, whether living in a traditional community or resisting European colonialism.

## **12.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to help learner get a grasp of the novel and its various themes. Through the study of this lesson, not only will it become easy to comprehend the literary text but also analyse it within theoretical framework.

## **12.3 SENSE OF DISILLUSIONMENT**

According to a Nigerian proverb, it is only proper to rebuke and see off thief, before apportioning blame to the careless farmer. Achebe, like many other African writers, as a part of his literary endeavour, feels the need to look inwardly after criticizing the colonizer in his earlier works. Having vigorously teamed with the nationalist movements and freedom fighters to pursue the usurping Europeans, it was perhaps time to confront demons within—their ‘brothers’ who have replaced the Whiteman symbolically. The African writers could see the people being swayed by the wave of second colonialism, not neo-colonialism per se, but rather internal, home-grown and familiar colonialism effected and organized by their fellow Africans.

The novel *A Man of the People* then marks a shift from African romanticism and scathing writings of decolonialization to a more derisive and sardonic satirization and problematization of re-formulated and re-configured societies of Africa. Moving away from the traditional and cultural backdrops, the essence of which had already started to wane from the lives of the people, Achebe in *A Man of the People* hurls a deep reflection on the emerging modern Africa with its varied and assorted challenges and experiences of progression and erosion. It was his initiation of fire and stirring to a socio-political consciousness leading only to disillusionment.

In *A Man of the People*, the novelist cast off his teacher's robe and transforms himself into the role of a social commentator and political activist. The novelist here attempts to look at the problems with Africa, what was going wrong with the people of Africa. He began to take note of, comprehend and then come to lament social problems prevalent in new African society. Then satire comes to play and Achebe becomes a prophet to expose unabashedly the ills of his society and poignantly predict and point to its future. As the novelist evolves into a teacher, a new segment of political activism opens up to take the journey forward. It is a departure from the traditional role of the artist/novelist as teacher of history, custodian of culture and heritages to a determined fighter for the survival of societal soul; political activist who must liberate society from itself on its path to self-destruct.

The publication of *A Man of the People* was another turning point. It can be regarded as the first novel of disillusionment published in Anglophone Africa. Ngugi Wa thiong'o, in 'The Writer in a Changing Society', is also of same view as he notes of Achebe's intent:

*...What Achebe has done in A Man of the People is to make it impossible or inexcusable for other African writer to do other than address themselves directly to contemporary social realities of their audience in Africa and to tell them that such problems are their concern...*

*(Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics, London: Heinemann, 1972, p. 54).*

The novel has rich political elements of an independent African nation struggling with its new democratic privilege and experience. It can be argued that Achebe satirizes the democratic practices that come to take shape in Africa society after its independence. In *A Man of the People*, one sees the unfolding of Achebe's socio-political consciousness and the launch of his political activism. Achebe began a new journey into the world of African

politics through a masterly wrought, pure, satirical work that captures and projects the sardonic irony of Africa's democratic experience at the post-independence period.

#### **12.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE**

If a book were to be interpreted only by looking at its title then a first glance at *A Man of the People* would provide a clear understanding of what the novel is about or what Achebe is trying to achieve with it. The title "A Man of the People" tells a lot about the context and content of the novel. A pure satirical work with sarcastic and terse irony, *A Man of the People* satirically presents a man of Africa (a unique and different man) and the people of Africa.

In understanding the novel through its title, it is important to take note of the indefinite article 'a' – this word determines or qualifies Man in the title. An inquiring look at the word 'Man' and its usage is also important, as well as the people. In essence, one seeks to know why the title has 'A Man' and not 'The Man'.

The reference indicates the writer's particular interest and reference to the 'Man' in *A Man of the People*. Obviously, it does not point to aristocracy or a man of high character. It rather smacks off as some unknown or unfamiliar man. It tosses up the question: what manner of man of the people? It comes across as some man with dubious characters, questionable credentials and rather a disagreeable man. But in this kind of 'A' man, the novelist situates the 'People'. Here lies the paradoxical irony of the novel's title. A Man of questionable and disagreeable character, being linked with the people, who are generally or fundamentally supposed and/or expected to be good masses, the majority of human populace – a great number of law-abiding citizens who are usually at the lower rungs of societal ladder.

With the indefinite article 'a', one sees the alienation of the people from a man, whom they supposed to be his people and he; their man. With this title, and right from the colorful cover page of the novel, Achebe unfolds

an agenda that takes his audience into the pulsating journey of curiosity, exposure, exposition and discovery of who is a man of the people? Who are the people? What relationship exists between the two of them? Why is he a, and not, the, man of the people?

‘A’ rather than ‘the’ man of the people opens up from the very beginning the dominant theme in *A Man of the People*. It tells of the relationship between the people and ‘the’ man. It indicates wide gulf of distance between ‘the’ man who is of the people and the people that is identified with him.

A Man?

Who is the man in *A Man of the People*? Why ‘a’ not ‘the’ Man of the People?

It is clear from the tone of the title through the novelist’s use of ‘a’ that the author did not use ‘a’ in a numerical sense of singularity, but as a satirized coloration of a ‘man’ which, on a closer study of the novel, is representative of ‘some men’ or a particular group of individuals with homogeneous identity and behavioral patterns.

First, it can be argued that ‘a’ man of the people in the novel’s title refers to the villain of the story and one can be at liberty to accept the sincere use of indefinite article ‘a’ by the author to simply mean a numerical reference to singularity of the person, i.e. one man. In this instance, the villain in the character of Chief Nanga fits the mode and description of ‘a’ man who is the man, but who is to be seen, known and accepted religiously as ‘a’ man of the people. Achebe puts the man – ‘a man’ in the mix, and thereby notifies his audience, from the onset, the conflict between him and the people.

From another angle, the use of ‘a’ represents masking of the ‘man’ in context of the novel and the story that plays out. In this regard, a man becomes generic of other men with similar characters in and out of the novel. Therefore, it is not just all about the villain Chief Nanga- for he is just a tool or human perspectives from which the story of ‘the man figure’ is told and represented.



Thus, 'a man' in *A Man of the People* becomes a symbol representing many things as shall soon be discovered.

Furthermore, there is something unusual about the people in *A Man of the People*. It is the fact that they have been purposely linked with 'a man'. Traditionally, the concept of one man being for a people indicates the parallelism between a liberating hero and an adulating people. It is ominous therefore, that the people were linked with 'a' man. It suggests a rather unfortunate people, the people at the mercy of unknown, unfriendly, uncommon man; a man the people do not want or need. They do not have 'the' man, but 'a' man. Again, here lies the conflict and paradoxical play of irony between the people rightly and clearly identified and introduced, and 'a' man inconspicuously and incongruously identified and introduced.

However, since the novel was set in a fictional African country with closest resemblance to Nigeria, one can unmask the people in *A Man of the People* as the Nigerian people and by direct association and relation, the people of Africa. With 'a' man – unknown, unfriendly, disagreeable, of questionable characters on one hand, and unfortunate, helpless and hapless people on the other, tells the story of a nation or society at war against itself like the mother hen that drinks up its eggs and eats its chicks.

The novel provides deep insight into plights of a hapless people who are defenseless against the onslaught of their supposed hero, leader or 'man', while at the same time analyzing and exploring the degenerative impacts of the supposed leaders of the people. *A Man of the People* is a classic case study of leadership in Africa.

*A Man of the People* ironically mimics the time-honored definitions of democracy by Abraham Lincoln as a government of the people, by the people, for the people. Unfortunately, *A Man of the People* exposes how the practice of European democratic system by African political elite is turned on its head, upside down, to: "...a government of the people not by the people and not for the people, but for 'a' man (men) of the people..."

In this analysis, one finds a deeper and clearer answer to the question who is the 'a' man of the people- the one behind mask? It is the government! But in this case, the government is different and separated from the people— it lacks the constituent part of it which is the people, because, it is a government of 'a' man, some unknown men, or known men who do not know the people, who do not care about the people. It is the height of democratic irony!

## **12.5 POLITICAL APATHY AND RULE OF THE MILITARY**

The novel *A Man of the People* shows the people in the lull; who have lost their will and power to fight and resist any form of oppression, having been distanced and cut off from the center of power geographically and systemically. They have become like the proverbial lamb being led into the slaughter house. The apathy of the people emboldened the politicians and fuelled the fire of corruption among the political class.

Also evident in the political landscape is the failure of the middle class – the educated and those are not involved in politics, but have been called to duty to rescue their nation from unscrupulous leaders; to offer a viable option and alternative to politics of corruption. Achebe also points to disillusionment among this group of hopefuls, the Odilis and the Maxes of Africa who could not live up to the expectations of the people, rather they let the opportunity of redemption slip off their hands by corrupting power of material wealth and opportunity of personal fortune. Ideological positioning and their high moral ground collapsed at the contact with political corruption of Chief Nanga and its likes. CPC, the party formed by Max and Odili, became stillbirth and could not live up to its billing. Not even the enlightened; the educated could be the man of the people.

The actions of Max and Odili raise the question: where is the political party will be of the people and be “the man of the people ? CPC lacks firm ideological base and it is founded on foundation of straw and rooted in fiscal indiscipline as typified by Odili using party funds, Max colluding with ruling party, collecting money from Cabinet Minister and compromising his ideological

stance and standard, setting up double standard and himself eventually losing his life. These political characteristics features are theorized by Achebe in *A Man of the People* a bane of African politics till date.

On the other hand, the novel also throws up the idea that it is the power of privilege and position and money that is corrupting, as exemplified by Max. This underscores the idealistic and grandstanding philosophy of African intellectuals—whose stances no matter how strong will soon give way in the face of material temptations.

It can also be inferred that *A Man of the People* has clearly shown that formation of political parties is not the direct solution to political impasse in Africa. The answer, according to Achebe, lies somewhere beyond the grasp of African politicians and intellectuals. Achebe presents military intervention as the viable solution and alternative to the political Armageddon of post-independence Africa and the military strikes.

*A Man of the People* ends on a very bitter, but poignantly prophetic way- the first coup d'état in Nigeria. A return to the real life mirrored in *A Man of the People* shows the relevance of literature and particularly the novel to society; especially, the society which it reflects, the Nigerian society and by extension African society. For in less than 6 months after the publication, the military struck in Nigeria- it was as if the coup d'état jumped out of the novel and became a living experience. Or the novelist, through, the novel subtly, but suggestively invited the military. Thus, enter into the African social psyche, the concept of militiocracy through coup-plotting by a class of people who has no business in governance.

Africa politicians have sown turmoil, they must therefore reap whirlwind. The end of the novel indicates the anticlimax that has become the African dream; a comedy that metamorphosed into tragedy, and a song of celebration became a dirge. The Africa child is a stillbirth; dead on arrival. It is another things fall apart, in this case, the contest is between Africans and Africans.

*A Man of the People* is both historical in the context of political development in Africa, but it is also, a testament to the ever-present socio-political realism of the continent. With its masterly grasp of issues in post-colonial Africa and its prophetic engagement with the immediate political future of Africa, the novel *A Man of the People* has entered the threshold of the African classics. It has become a reference in historical study of African politics especially the post-colonial and independence period. It is like the reference to an Ibo proverb in the novel- *A Man of the People* helps us to know where the rain began to beat us in, and then we can begin to know where we dried our body.

## **12.6 PREVAILING AURA OF CORRUPTION**

In *A Man of the People*, Chief Nanga amasses wealth and power as the Minister of Culture when his country is granted independence from white rulers. But, Chief Nanga is not as just and good as he claims to be. Rather, he uses his wealth to bribe others and garner more political power. Likewise, he uses his political power to acquire more wealth, which he then uses to repeat the cycle. With these actions, we can see clearly how easy it is for power to corrupt and for a single person who is given too much power to then use that power to corrupt others. A pointed contrast to Chief Nanga is the protagonist and narrator, Odili, who later leads an opposition party against Chief Nanga's corruption.

The struggle for power and menace of corruption can be seen through both politics and through generations. In regards to politics, Odili has avoided the influence of the powerful Chief Nanga. However, he is slowly enticed to Nanga's side through parties, vacations, and other bonuses. In regards to the generational struggle for power, one needs to look no further than to Odili and his own father. The father lives in poverty due to the influence and actions of his many wives. Odili wants more for himself than this poverty, but the irony is, it seems that the way out of poverty is the connection with Nanga that Odili has always avoided. It isn't long before he finds out that there are strings attached to every loyalty.

In regard to the theme of greed, there is no doubt that Odili wants more than the poverty of his father. Even though Odili is disgusted by Chief Nanga at the beginning, he is slowly seduced by the wealth involved. Being invited to ostentatious receptions and parties and mansions truly call to Odili. Odili's greed is ignited. After independence from white rule, the country divided its natives into two groups: the majority were poor, but there was a tiny minority who would serve the whites and, therefore, became rich. Bribes are prevalent. People (even those with government sanctioned jobs) are paid to turn their back on injustice. What beckoned to this select few who have more than enough? Greed.

Finally, connecting the two themes above is the theme of corruption. Note this pithy statement:

[Nanga is] bloated by the flatulence of ill-gotten wealth, living in a big mansion built with public money, riding in a Cadillac, and watched over by a one-eyed, hired thug.

There is corruption in government (due to bribes and injustice and racism) and there is corruption in financial matters. Look at the corruption of Chief Nanga: he continually uses deceitful practices and distribution of wealth to gain followers. Lavish parties and visits to mansions are the norm for those that give in. Jobs teaching the poor of the "bush" are what remain if you don't give in. Closely connected to this is the corruption in finances. Only those connected with the white ruling class (before and after independence) have money to throw around. Everyone else is either poverty stricken or just scraping by.

## **12.7 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN**

*A Man of the People* (1966) foregrounds a taxonomy of women contesting multiple forms of subordination. Achebe's novel engages with women's subordination in reverse: it demonstrates a preoccupation with leadership cultures that sprang up in response to colonization and continued

into the postcolonial nation-state, but, in the process, undervalued women's experiences in the process of decolonization. *A Man of the People* dramatizes the material conditions of such reduced opportunities. Through its spectrum of plainspoken, self-possessed women, the novel rehearses divisions within the empirical category of women as well as women's comprehension of their multifaceted subordinations and the manners in which aspiring hegemonic male figures obstruct women's political participation. The foregrounded homosocial contest between Odili Samalu, the narrator protagonist, and Chief M. A. Nanga, his political antagonist, displaces central preoccupations of the novel: an elaboration of the aesthetic cultures through which women are misapprehended and how their participation in national politics is diminished.

In response to gendered omissions and obstructions, Achebe's female characters marshal a range of counter-measures that interrupt male attempts at hegemonic control. Gayatri Spivak, notably, describes the subversions of subject positions and ideological formations as patterns of critical interruptions. Interruption as a critical and ethical task recurs in Achebe's novel in both figurative and quite literal terms; in fact, understanding the novel's unending series of interruptions is essential to grasping Achebe's representation of women. Whereas women may not be able to usurp control of the nation-state, they critically interrupt the discursive constructions of woman and the male-driven false sense of national and global affairs.

Certainly, Achebe's preoccupation with women in *A Man of the People* has been documented by critics such as Beth Kramer and Kwado Osei-Nyame. Both use Anne McClintock's study of nationalism's contradictory constructions of women to analyse the novel. While the former focuses on the function of women in the homosocial contest between the protagonist and his sponsor, the latter addresses the imbrications of nationalism and gender politics in the novel. Kramer examines the homosocial contests between men but,

unfortunately, selects the only female character that fits the model while neglecting all others that undermine it. Likewise, Osei-Nyame begins a materialist reading of the forms of dispossession and exploitation in the novel, but he selects one character as “the most qualified individual to relate these topical issues and to persuade us to reflect on them” and does not attend to the multiplicity of women’s positions (2001, 257). In so doing, he misreads one character’s utterances as transparent enunciations of all women’s oppression.

Since no single woman can reflect the multiplicity of women’s positions, critiques focalized through one single character or remedy cannot illuminate the complexity of women’s struggles in *A Man of the People*. Because Achebe is preoccupied with the aesthetic and political representations of women, he presents a kaleidoscopic taxonomy of female characters that fall into some basic typologies. The characters include American women such as Jean and Elsie Jackson; highly educated, professional Africans such as the lawyer, Mrs. Akilo, and the economist, Eunice; businesswoman such as Mrs. John; poorly educated women in rural communities such as Edna’s mother and the wives of Odili’s father; and, lastly, young women such as the first Elsie and Edna who have some education but are in search of social mobility. The appearance of two women named Elsie underlines the reflexivity within Achebe’s taxonomy. Elsie one and two occupy polar ends on a scale of sexual liberation; while the former is a sexually active, calculating young African woman, the latter is a white American who is sexually dissatisfied with her husband. Similarly, the American Jean and the Africans Mrs. Akilo and Eunice are much closer to each other in their relationships to men than are the latter to women within the customary marriage system. All these characters illuminate women’s contradictory global and national positions in the mid-century.

The novel’s emphasis on women’s political subordination and aesthetic misrepresentation emerges early as a politicized event. When Chief Nanga summons the metaphor of the national family and the vocabulary of citizenship to impose coherence on the clearly heterogeneous national community, it is

evident that the polity is riven with multiple fault lines, each providing a particular optic of analysis (Achebe 1967, 13). The polity is especially fractured by sexual and gender politics predicated upon exogenous and endogenous patriarchal cultures that foster male children and, later, elevate selected men to hegemonic status. Chief Nanga crystallizes this gender discrimination when he introduces all members of his large entourage to the audience, but omits his intended second wife, Edna (16). However, he re-introduces his former pupil, Odili, to villagers and schoolteachers with whom the latter is already acquainted. The juxtaposition of a woman's omission and a man's public introduction underscores the latent examination of gendered discriminations in the novel. For Odili, the narrator, the moment of public recognition creates a sensation of de-realization, experienced almost as a heroic transfiguration, such that when he re-collects himself, he begins to apprehend and focalize the world through the warped lens of the anointed heir to Chief Nanga's heroic persona.

While Chief Nanga sponsors Edna for just enough education to prepare her for life as his parlor wife, he adopts Odili as a protégé fit for higher education. Edna is destined to become a second wife married according to native law and custom. In this case, women's subordination also means that they are relegated to the jurisdiction of the customary that the new state seeks to leave behind. Edna's public omission and removal to the repertoire of the customary inaugurates Achebe's use of the omitted person plot. In such plots, a person is omitted from inclusion in certain privileges to insure an order of succession or to assure the operations of an order of discourse, but the contestation of the omission generates plot fault lines that eventually disclose the violence of the initial omission. In Achebe's variation, omission and inclusion shadow the gendered order of discourse. The ensuing contestations reveal the violence in representations of women in the gender operations of political discourse.

Whereas Chief Nanga omits women from public discourse, Odili, as a writer and narrator, rehearses the codes through which women are pressed



into specific pre-formulated aesthetic schemes. He exemplifies the practice when he describes one woman, Edna, as a “convent girl” and another, a female politician, as a loose woman: “Mrs. Eleanor John [was] an influential party woman from the coast who had come in the Minister’s party. She was heavily painted and perfumed and although no longer young seemed more than able to hold her own if it came to that.” In keeping with his binary scheme of omission/inclusion, he describes a simmering antagonism between the two women. When Odili classifies one woman as a prostitute and the other as a convent girl, his clichés identify the pre-made typologies for women (Achebe 1967, 14). At the same time, his observation that the two women do not acknowledge or speak to each other underlines the impossibility of any pre-given trans-historical solidarity between all women.

Taken together, Chief Nanga’s synecdochic omission and Odili’s narration begin dialectical constructions of women across multiple terrains of subordination and contestation.

## **12.8 ASPECT OF REALISM**

*A Man of the People* can be classified as realistic. To achieve a realistic effect, Achebe created the protagonist, Odili Samalu, as an ordinary, sensitive young man who teaches at Anata Grammar school. Most of the other characters are middle-class and tend to have a rather dull and frequently unhappy existence with only occasional glimpses of beauty and joy. The novel is set in a post-independence environment, after a period of colonial-style social and economic development has resulted in a conflicted situation between the emergent elitist middle-class and the general population. The Europeans had been replaced by a ruling class of politicians, most of who were corrupt and controlled everything. Achebe’s *A Man of the People* reflects his distaste for post-independence Nigeria as a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after attaining power, and sacrificed their country in exchange for middle-class comfort. Odili Samalu, the protagonist, mediates Achebe’s vision. *A Man of the People* delineates the conflict between morality and corruption by

contrasting the protagonist Odili with his opposite, the Minister of culture, Chief Nanga. These characters are worlds apart, with radically different ideologies. Odili is an idealist who has experienced the pain and suffering of his fellow citizens and has observed how the entire system supports corrupt politicians and the wealthy. Despite the fact that his country is now free from colonial rule, he has witnessed the continued exploitation of the general population in a new form. The imperialists have been replaced by new rulers, and the general population has no choice but to suffer and wait for a new government. Throughout the novel, Odili condemns this state of affairs; his disillusionment comes through by means of a detached first person perspective.

Nanga, the villain, acts as a foil to Odili. Nanga is a politician who is a realist with an instinctive grasp of what the electorate wants; he has a genuine rapport with the people whom he represents. Not only does he claim their 'primitive loyalties', he also exploits them to a great extent. During the election campaign, Odili realizes that, ironically, in some ways, Nanga represents government 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' The relationship between Odili and Nanga mediates the ethos of public and private morality in a society that has forgotten its past and seeks only material rewards in its future.

In his novel, Achebe incorporates not only national issues but also the clan and village loyalties that are an integral part of Africa; the incident of Josiah and the blind man's stick is a good example. Nanga frequently exploits these minor loyalties, while Odili examines them in relation to a national consciousness. He concludes that, under current conditions, European political concepts may be meaningless to the national structure, which is divided into numerous tribes and clans. He also fears being labeled as one of the snobbish intellectuals, with ambition, and a desire for post-graduate diploma from London. Odili's political views are inseparable from his character. His opinion of his girlfriend Elsie is also significant in revealing his character; he thinks that he has been unlucky in love, but Elsie is different:

“Elsie was, and for that matter still is, the only girl I met and slept with the same day – in fact within an hour ... I can’t pretend that I ever thought of marriage ... Elsie was such a beautiful, happy girl and she made no demands whatever.”

Achebe presents his foil Nanga as a political opportunist. Nanga has no concept of political morality; he has become rich through bribery, corruption, and intimidation, and knows how to work these things to his advantage. In the story, as in reality, Nanga and many others pursue self-interest with false promises of sharing with everyone. Odili is totally disillusioned at seeing such a debased form of politics in his country. Nanga begins his speech at Anata Grammar school in pidgin English; by expressing local values and hopes, he appears to be a man from the grassroots and, ironically, ‘a man of the people’. He denounces the ‘western-educated’ Africans, claiming that “a university education alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture”. As Minister of culture, Nanga uses his privilege to attack the educated class in Africa, obviously vital to any country’s development, but the villagers are far from understanding this fact. Along with his cunning manipulation, his friendly demeanor has an infectious effect on the villagers. In spite of his early admiration for Nanga, Odili’s brief stay at his house is an eye-opener; Odili has the opportunity to watch Nanga closely.

In fact, through the novel, Achebe makes it clear that there are difficulties involved in an individual’s interpretation or judgment of a culture, especially one that he or she has not experienced directly or intimately, and that nobody has the right to remark on an alien culture without serious analysis. Achebe has suggested that if a nation is to progress, it must take proper care when selecting leaders, otherwise corrupt politicians will always get their way and citizens will simply be a means by which they can fulfill their corrupt goals. An electorate needs to be strong enough to withstand the opposing pulls of private and public pressures; as Achebe has noted that for a society to function properly its people must share certain basic

tenets of belief and norms of behavior. National interest must be given supreme importance as opposed to self-interest, which has the power to corrupt leaders. Achebe successfully projected his own ideals through Odili, the protagonist of *A Man of the People*. This has been the goal of many African writers writing about their own pasts and their nation.

### 12.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Q1. Who resents Odili's favor with Chief Nanga?
- (a) James.
  - (b) Mrs. John.
  - (c) Andrew Kadibe.
  - (d) Principal Nwege.
- Q2. For what does OHMS stand?
- (a) Our Humbly Made Stuff
  - (b) Our Hospitably Maintained Services
  - (c) Our Home Made Stuff
  - (d) Old Home Made Stuff
- Q3. What is the name of the soloist mentioned in Chapter 1?
- (a) Elsie
  - (b) Voice box
  - (c) Grammar-phone
  - (d) Edna
- Q4. What is the title of the president of the Writer's Society's book?
- (a) *Africa's Prince*
  - (b) *The Odiliad*
  - (c) *The Freedom of Nigeria*
  - (d) *The Song of the Black Bird*

- Q5. Why does Mrs. Nanga bring the children to Anata?
- (a) To educate them
  - (b) To celebrate the holidays
  - (c) To visit their relatives
  - (d) To retain their heritage
- Q6. What is Odili's father's first name?
- (a) Ezekiel
  - (b) Onata
  - (c) Josiah
  - (d) Hezekiah
- Q7. What does Odili do after awaking at 4 a.m.?
- (a) Takes the bus back to Anata
  - (b) Wanders the streets of Bori
  - (c) Kicks Elsie out of the house in tears
  - (d) Reads the newspaper
- Q8. Who arrives at Chief Nanga's house at the beginning of Chapter 5?
- (a) Mrs. Akilo
  - (b) Jean
  - (c) Chief Kobino
  - (d) The Prime Minister
- Q9. Why does Chief Nanga seek a second wife?
- (a) He wants a pretty, younger woman
  - (b) His first wife is barren
  - (c) His first wife is not cultured enough
  - (d) His first wife is lazy and does not cook or clean

- Q10. What are the dismissed members of the Prime Minister's Cabinet called in Chapter 1?
- (a) The Daily Chronicle
  - (b) The Elitists
  - (c) The Progressive Alliance Party
  - (d) The Miscreant Gang
- Q 11. On what date does Odili return to Anata after first meeting with Maxwell and his friends?
- (a) Jan. 1
  - (b) Dec. 23
  - (c) Dec. 18
  - (d) Dec. 25
- Q 12. How does Odili initially plan on getting his revenge?
- (a) By sleeping with Edna
  - (b) By starting a revolution
  - (c) By exposing Chief Nanga to the press
  - (d) By sleeping with Mrs. Nanga
- Q 13. What does Maxwell see Chief Nanga as an example of?
- (a) A charming leader
  - (b) What happens when an intelligent man has too much power.
  - (c) An insignificant buffoon
  - (d) Why intelligent people should not abandon politics?
- Q 14. What does Chief Nanga say a man ought to do if someone offers to make him a minister?
- (a) Slap him in the face
  - (b) Run away

- (c) Accept immediately
- (d) Think about it long and hard

### 12.10 ANSWER KEY

- |         |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (d)  | 2. (c)  | 3. (c)  | 4. (d)  |
| 5. (d)  | 6. (d)  | 7. (b)  | 8.(a)   |
| 9. (a)  | 10. (d) | 11. (b) | 12. (a) |
| 13. (a) | 14. (c) |         |         |

### 12.11 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that *A Man of People* is a realistic piece of work? Discuss.
2. “It’s a sad truth of our nature that man becomes too easily brutalized by circumstance”. Referring to the context, discuss the theme of *A Man of the People*.
3. Discuss Achebe’s novel *A Man of the People* within a feminist framework.
4. What are the different themes handled in the novel, *A Man of the People*?

### 12.12 LET US SUM UP

*A Man of the People* aptly stages two of the most memorable characters in the African literature of the second half of the 20th century: the antagonist Chief Nanga, a Minister of Culture, and the narrator protagonist Odili Samalu, a grammar school teacher. *A Man of the People* represents for Achebe, a reappraisal of what has been made of independence. In one sentence, *A Man of the People* is an indictment of post-colonial Africa political system.

### 12.13 SUGGESTED READING

1. C. Heywood (ed.). 1975. *Perspectives on African Literature*. London: Heinemann.

2. G.D. Killiam (ed.). 1973. *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann.
3. B. Lindfors. 1970. Achebe on commitment and African writers. *Africa Report*, March 3. Pp. 6-8.
4. G. Moore. 1962. *Seven African Writers*. London: OUP.
5. Ngugi Wa thiong'o. 1975. *Homecoming (Second Edition)*. London: Heinemann

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## **KHALED HOSSEINI: LIFE AND WORKS**

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives
- 13.3 Historical Background
- 13.4 Author's Biography
- 13.5 Author's Works
- 13.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 13.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.8 Suggested Reading

### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

Since the events of 11 September 2001, international attention has been focused on Afghanistan and its political situation. This novel gives an insight into the path that has led to Afghanistan's current position and attempts to explore some of the less-well-known aspects of the country's cultural life. Although large sections of *The Kite Runner* are set in the USA, the novel is intimately tied up with the culture of Afghanistan and its ethnic and religious groups, both as they exist in Afghanistan itself, and also as they exist in the wider world where Afghan refugees have congregated.

### **13.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to introduce the learner author Khaled Hosseini, his background and his works.

### **13.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Afghanistan has historically been the link between Central Asia, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. It is, therefore, a nation that has been through innumerable invasions, experienced migrations and has been influenced by many cultures. Within its borders there are at least a dozen major ethnic groups – Baluch, Chahar Aimak, Turkmen, Hazara, Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Nuristani, Arab, Kirghiz, Pashai and Persian. Historically the Pashtun nationality has been the most dominant, with 50 per cent of the total population, including the royal families of the country, while Tajiks come in second with 25 per cent. The rest make up considerably smaller percentages. Within the country there are tiny Hindu, Sikh and Jewish communities. But the vast majority is of Muslims and, in fact, many ethnic groups consider Islam to be one of the defining aspects of their ethnic identity.

Islam, it is believed, was brought to Afghanistan during the 8th and 9th centuries by the Arabs. Prior to that, the nation had been ruled by various Persian, Greek, Sassanian and Central Asian empires. Following a subsequent break down in Arab rule, semi-independent states began to form. These local dynasties and states, however, were overwhelmed and crushed during the Mongolian invasions of the 1200s – conquerors who were to remain in control of part or all of the country until the 1500s, despite much resistance and internal strife. Following the collapse of Mongol rule, Afghanistan found itself in a situation much like what has continued into modern times – caught between the vice of two great powers. During this time it was the Mughals of northern India and the Safavids of Iran that fought over the mountains and valleys of Afghanistan. Armies marched to and fro devastating the land and murdering the people, laying siege to city after city, and destroying whatever had been left by the invading army that preceded it. It was not until 1747 that Afghanistan was able to free itself. This was the year that Nadir Shah, an empire builder from Iran, died and left a vacuum in central Asia that a former Afghan bodyguard, named Ahmed

Shah, was able to fill. Ahmad was a Pashtun, and his Pashtun clan was to rule Afghanistan, in one form or another, for the next 200 years.

Ahmad was able to unify the different Afghan tribes, and went on to conquer considerable parts of what are today eastern Iran, Pakistan, northern India and Uzbekistan. His successors though proved unable to hold his vast empire together, and within 50 years much of it had been seized by rival regional powers. Within the country there were numerous bloody civil wars for the throne, and for many Afghans it meant little that their lives were now being uprooted and destroyed by ethnic kin, as opposed to foreign invaders. Beginning in the 1800s, Afghanistan's internal affairs became dramatically aggravated by the increasing intervention by two new imperialist powers – the British Empire and Czarist Russia. The two great powers essentially engaged in a race for Afghanistan, and their fiendish seizures of land, overthrow of indigenous nations and reckless interference into the affairs of the remaining independent states in the region became known as “the Great Game”. On two separate occasions, British armies from India outright invaded Afghanistan in attempts to install puppet governments amenable to British economic interests, and that would oppose the economic interests of Czarist Russia. The first, which became known as the First Anglo-Afghan War, took place in 1838. The British seized most of the major cities in Afghanistan with little resistance, but their heavy handed rule soon resulted in a popular uprising by the people which resulted in the massacre of the entire British army of 15,000. British outrage over the uninvited arrival of a Russian diplomatic envoy in Kabul in 1878 resulted in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. They did subsequently withdraw, but not before they set up a puppet ruler and forced the country to hand over control of its foreign affairs to Britain. Afghanistan would remain a British protectorate until 1919. Then, following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the wave of popular rebellions that rippled through Asia subsequently, the then king of Afghanistan, Amanullah, declared his country's full independence by signing a treaty of aid and friendship with Lenin, and declaring war on Britain. After a brief

period of border skirmishes, and the bombing of Kabul by the Royal Air Force, Britain conceded Afghanistan's independence. However, an outbreak of an uprising and civil war forced him to abdicate in 1929. Different warlords contended for power until a new king, Muhammad Nadir Shah took power. He was assassinated four years later by the son of a state execution victim, and was succeeded by Muhammad Zahir Shah, who was to be Afghanistan's last king, and who would rule for the next 40 years. Zahir Shah's rule, like the kings before him, was one of almost total autocratic power. In 1973, the king was overthrown by a prominent member of his own family, Daoud, who decided to title himself president instead of king, and a republic was declared. Daoud liberalization indeed took place but by and large whatever hopes and expectations arose among the people – little was done to satisfy them. Daoud had seized power with the help of an underground party named the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan – a pro-Moscow communist party. In 1978, the PDPA seized power from Daoud in a military coup. After seizing power they began a series of limited reforms, such as declaring, more or less, a secular state, and that women were deserving of equal treatment of men. They sought to curtail the practice of purchasing brides, and tried to implement a land reform programme. They quickly met with fierce opposition from many sections of the deeply religious population though. The PDPA's response to this was very heavy-handed, aggravating the situation. Soon several rural areas rose in open armed rebellion against the new government. At the same time, the party's long history of factionalism came to a bloody head as the more radical wing of the party sought to wipe out the more moderate leaning wing. Immediately following the PDPA coup, the Soviet Union took an active interest in the so-called socialist revolution unfolding in its backyard. Dismayed by the clumsiness of the radical faction of the PDPA, the Soviet Union invaded in 1979 and handed power over to a man named Karmal, who was the leader of the more moderate faction of the PDPA. Several Islamic fundamentalist groups sprang up and began waging guerilla warfare, many of them operating from camps set up by the CIA and Pakistani Intelligence within Pakistan, from which they could strike into Afghanistan, and then beat a hasty retreat over a guarded

border. For its part, the United States government initially paid little attention to the PDPA coup in Afghanistan; its attention was instead focused to the west, where a popular revolution has overthrown their most valuable Middle East ally, the brutal and autocratic Shah of Iran. This changed of course, once the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan. At that point the United States took an active interest in the Islamic fundamentalists waging war on the PDPA and the Soviets. The CIA began providing military training to the Mujahadeen – the name the Islamic guerillas came to be called. In 1989 the Soviets withdrew, leaving the PDPA government to fend for itself. The CIA soon lost interest in its mercenary forces now that they had accomplished their mission of bleeding the Soviets. The Mujahadeen factions began fighting as much with themselves as with the PDPA forces, resulting in increased suffering and bloodshed. It wasn't until 1992 that Mujahadeen fighters were able to topple the remnants of the PDPA government – ending the Stalinists attempts to bring revolution to the people of Afghanistan at the point of a gun. Different Mujahadeen warlords occupied different cities and regions of the country. The collapse of the PDPA government did not mark the end of Afghanistan's civil war. The Mujahadeen warlords continued to bring death and destruction upon the country as they fought over the spoils, and sought to enlarge their new fiefdoms at the expense of their neighboring rivals.

Seeking to end the civil war which threatened the stability of their own country – itself a prison house of many nationalities where Pakistani Intelligence aided in the creation of a new Islamic fundamentalist movement, the Taliban. The Taliban was born in the Islamic schools that had sprung up inside the Afghan refugee camps inside Pakistan. Its leadership and the bulk of its initial ranks, were made up of young religious students, primarily Pashtuns, motivated by the zeal of religion and the belief that they were ordained to bring stability and the ways of Allah back to their war torn land. They railed against the corruption, greed and factionalism of the contending Mujahadeen factions inside Afghanistan, and when they mounted a military push to conquer the country, they were initially well received by certain sections of the weary

population. In 1996 they captured the capital city of Kabul, and had forced most of the remaining warlords into a small pocket in the far north of the country. These warlords subsequently formed a defensive alliance termed as the Northern Alliance.

Once in power the Taliban sought to create a theocratic state based on their interpretations of the *Koran*. The country became politically and diplomatically isolated. Then, following the September 11 World Trade Center bombings, the United States accused Osama Bin Laden of the crime. Bin Laden, who had left Afghanistan following the defeat of the Soviets, had returned after falling out of favour in Saudi Arabia, and being pressured to leave his first nation of refuge, the Sudan. The US government demanded that the Taliban hand over Bin Laden. The Taliban's response was to demand proof of Bin Laden's guilt, and after receiving none, they refused to hand him over. Within a few weeks the United States began bombing the impoverished country, as well as providing active support to the Northern Alliance warlords. Following weeks of devastating bombing, and several failed offensives, the Northern Alliance succeeded in breaking out of its northern enclave, seizing the city of Mazar-E-Sharif, and then moving on to take Kabul.

#### **13.4 AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**

Khaled Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, on March 4, 1965, and was the oldest of five children. Just as he describes in *The Kite Runner*, Kabul was a cosmopolitan city at the time. Western culture, including movies and literature, mixed with Afghan traditions, such as kite fighting in the winter. Lavish parties were normal at the Hosseini family's home in the upper-middle class neighbourhood of Wazir Akbar Khan. Hosseini's father served as a diplomat with the Afghan Foreign Ministry, and his mother taught Farsi and history at a local high school for girls. Then, in 1970, the Foreign Ministry sent his father to Iran. While the family only spent a few years there, Hosseini taught a Hazara man, who worked as a cook for the family, how to read and write. By this time, Khaled Hosseini was already reading Persian poetry as well as American novels, and he began writing his own short stories.

Repeated moves marked the next decade of the Hosseini family's life. They returned to Kabul in 1973, the year Mohammad Daoud Khan, overthrew his cousin, Zahir Shah, the Afghan King, in a coup d'état. The Afghan Foreign Ministry relocated the Hosseini family to Paris in 1976. They hoped to return to Afghanistan in 1980 but that was not possible because of military invasion by the Soviet Union. Instead, the Hosseinis moved to San Jose, California after they were granted political asylum in the United States. Khaled Hosseini went on to graduate from high school in 1984 and attended Santa Clara University, where he received his bachelor's degree in Biology in 1988. In 1993, he earned his Medical degree from University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, and in 1996 he completed his residency at Cedars-Sinai medical Center in Los Angeles, making him a full-fledged doctor.

### **13.5 AUTHOR'S WORKS**

*The Kite Runner* was published in 2003, immediately becoming an international bestseller. The novel was published in 70 countries, however, never in Afghanistan. While some parts of the novel are based on Hossein's childhood, the novel is otherwise a work of fiction. It was also produced as an audio book recorded in Hosseini's voice. In 2007, *The Kite Runner* was adapted to screen bearing the same title as the novel. Hosseini made a brief appearance in a scene towards the end of the movie.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is Hosseini's second novel and revolves around the relationship between two women. It was released in 2007. Mariam lives in the small village of Gul Daman with her mother. She is the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a wealthy businessman who lives in the nearby city of Herat. After her mother's suicide, she is sent to live with Jalil. Jalil and his wives quickly marry Mariam off to a shoemaker named Rasheed, and the newlyweds move to Kabul, where Mariam becomes pregnant. Sadly, Mariam miscarries. Rasheed is furious and becomes abusive.

Across Kabul (and in a galaxy far, far away...) a girl named Laila is born on the same night when the Soviets take control of Afghanistan. Her best friend (and love interest) is Tariq, a neighborhood boy who lost a leg when he was a child. With the war worsening, Tariq's family decides to leave for Pakistan, and he and Laila consummate their relationship the night before he leaves. Laila's family decides to leave soon but her parents are killed by a stray rocket as they're packing up the car.

Rasheed and Mariam care for Laila as she recovers. A man comes by and tells Laila that he saw Tariq die in a hospital. Rasheed, being the dirt ball that he is, uses this as an opportunity to ask Laila to marry him. Surprisingly, she says yes. It turns out that she's pregnant with Tariq's child. Her plan is to convince Rasheed that the child is his, and then escape to Pakistan after she's saved enough money.

Mariam resents Laila at first, but she eventually becomes close to Laila and her new daughter, Aziza. Laila tells Mariam about her plan to escape, and Mariam decides to join them. They eventually go through with the plan, but they're arrested before they can leave and are sent home with Rasheed. He is so furious that he almost kills them.

Laila and Rasheed have a son named Zalmai. After Rasheed's shop burns to the ground and the family goes broke, he forces Laila to send Aziza to a nearby orphanage. One day, after visiting Aziza, Laila returns home to find a very surprising guest: it's Tariq. It turns out the man who had come by all those years ago was hired by Rasheed to trick Laila. Laila tells Tariq about Aziza, and he promises that he will meet her the following day.

Rasheed starts to beat Laila that night when he finds out about Tariq. Mariam ends up killing Rasheed to protect Laila. Mariam remains in Kabul to take the blame and is executed by the Taliban. Laila, Tariq, and the kids move to Tariq's home in Murree, where life is comfortable. After the U.S. invasion, however, Laila decides to return to Kabul.



Before returning home, Laila stops in Herat, Mariam's hometown. She visits Mariam's childhood home, and receives a box from the local Mullah's son that was meant for Mariam. It's from her father Jalil. It contains a long letter, as well as her share of his inheritance. Laila uses the money to renovate the orphanage in Kabul, and we learn at the close of the book that she is pregnant with a new child.

*And the Mountains Echoed*, is more of a family drama that examines the factors that lead to and reverberate from one action: a poor family sells their youngest daughter to a wealthy couple in Kabul. Set in Afghanistan the novel spans over fifty years and four generations. Hosseini includes several narrative voices, rather than just the story's main family. The multiple narrators provide several different angles into the grand narrative of the main family, but they also examine their own context and the motives behind their choices in their life. The reader will notice many similarities between the "unconnected" narrators to the main characters – the members of the family are part of the grand narrative.

The story begins with Saboor and his two children, Abdullah and Pari, taking a journey to Kabul. Although the children are unaware of the reason of the trip, they willingly follow their father and their uncle Nabi to the Wahdati household. Abdullah recognizes Mrs. Wahdati who had visited their home earlier. Their uncle Nabi works for them. Because they are poor, and because Saboor had already lost a son due to the cold of last winter, he is convinced by Nabi that selling Pari to the Wahdati family (who cannot have children of their own) is the best idea for all of them involved. Saboor's family will get financial help, will have one less mouth to feed, and the Wahdatis will have a child. However, Abdullah and Pari are incredibly close and their separation is horrific and life changing.

Nilá and Suleiman Wahdati have a loveless marriage. Suleiman is secretly in love with Nabi, his servant and Pari's and Abdullah's uncle, and Nilá is a troubled soul. Despite acquiring Pari into her life, once Suleiman suffers a stroke, Nilá feels unhappy and unfulfilled enough to leave him and

move to Paris, taking Pari with her. Although we do not learn much about Pari's upbringing we can sense that Nila withheld a lot of information from Pari and so, Pari feels a large void in her life. Pari eventually marries, has three children and is widowed in her late forties. A phone call from a Mr. Markos in Afghanistan reveals a lot of her past, as he reads her a letter left behind by Nabi, her estranged uncle.

Pari Wahdati arranges a trip to Afghanistan and after seeing her childhood home (the Wahdatis') remembers several things, but is still plagued with loss. The strong absence she has always felt in her life is the loss of connection with her brother Abdullah. Once she learns of his existence, she searches for him and finds him in the United States.

Her niece, Abdullah's daughter, also named Pari, like her aunt Pari, is suffering from a missing piece in her life as well, absorbed from her father's loss of his sister. When the two women meet, they feel like their life stories are finally complete and a much deeper understanding of themselves and where they "fit" into place. Unfortunately, both Abdullah and Pari suffer from big gaps in their memory and so their reunion is not as satisfying as the reader may have hoped. However, she is content in knowing that Abdullah had been thinking of her all of these years, and now knows that the missing pieces in her life have been fulfilled.

Having set his novels in Afghanistan, Hosseini's devotion to his homeland extends beyond his writings. His activism for a better Afghanistan is proof of his love for the country. Since 2006, Hosseini has served as a goodwill ambassador to the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR. His official website also contains information and links to many aid organizations helping Afghanistan in addition to The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which provides humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. The foundation came into being after a trip Hosseini made to Afghanistan in 2007. Having gone there for the first time in twenty-seven years, Hosseini was immensely disturbed to discover the situation of the country he was born in.

### **13.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Briefly discuss the historical background of Afghanistan.
- Q2. “Violence punctuates the life of ordinary people in Afghanistan”. Discuss.

### **13.7 LET US SUM UP**

*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini deals with the country of Afghanistan from 1970s to the year 2002. Like all places, Afghanistan has a long and complicated history, but it came to international attention only after the coup of 1973. The story of *The Kite Runner* is fictional, but it is rooted in real political and historical events ranging from the last days of the Afghan monarchy in the 1970s to the post-Taliban near present. It is also based on Hosseini’s memories of growing up in the Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul and adapting to life in California.

### **13.8 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Stuhr, Rebecca. *Reading Khaled Hosseini*. California: Greenwood Press, 2009. Print
2. Hosseini, Khaled. *And the Mountains Echoed*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013, Print.

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***THE KITE RUNNER***

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 *The Kite Runner*: The Context
- 14.4 *The Kite Runner*: The Plot
- 14.5 Glossary
- 14.6 Excerpts from Interviews
- 14.7 Self-Assessment Questions
- 14.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.9 Answer Key
- 14.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.11 Suggested Reading

**14.1 INTRODUCTION**

Novelist Khaled Hosseini came to the United States as a 15-year-old Afghan asylum seeker who knew only a few words of English. Today, he is a doctor, a United Nations goodwill ambassador, and author of three internationally acclaimed books.

## 14.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. This would help the learners to analyse *The Kite Runner* and objective of author behind writing this novel.

### 14.3 *The Kite Runner: The Context*

Khaled Hosseini acknowledges that the Afghanistan he knew as a child inspired *The Kite Runner*. Like his main character, Amir, Khaled Hosseini enjoyed Western films and kite fighting. He also lived in a pre-revolutionary Afghanistan that had not yet been ravaged by the Soviet invasion and subsequent Taliban rule. In 2003 in the interview with *Newsline*, Khaled Hosseini said that the passages in the book most resembling his life are those of Amir and Baba as immigrants in the United States. When Hosseinis arrived in California, they had difficulty adjusting to the new culture, and for a short time his family lived on welfare. He also remembers the local flea market where he and his father worked briefly among other Afghans, just as Amir and Baba did in the book.

Although the period of adjustment passed and Khaled Hosseini became a successful practicing doctor in 1996, he felt deeply influenced by what he recalled of his homeland, and he began writing *The Kite Runner* in March 2001. Two years later, in the midst of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Riverhead Books published the book. *The Kite Runner* became an international bestseller, with more than eight million copies in print. It also received the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Award, and the Literature to Life Award. In 2007, it was made into a feature film. The movie encountered some problems. The children who played Hassan, Amir and Sohrab, and a fourth boy with a smaller role, had to be moved out of the country. Hassan's rape scene in the film, along with Sohrab's abuse at the hands of the Taliban, put the young actors and their families in possible danger, as some Afghans found the episode insulting. In May 2007, Khaled Hosseini published his second book, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which also became a bestseller.

Khaled Hosseini's literature also changed his personal life. After nearly twenty-seven years, he returned to Afghanistan to see what had become of his country and his people. Like Amir, he was able to find his father's old home, but he also recognized that war and brutality destroyed the place where he grew up. His efforts to bring attention to the plight of refugees earned him the Humanitarian Award from the United Nations Refugee Agency in 2006, and he became a US goodwill envoy to the organization. It was during a 2007 trip as an envoy that he was inspired to start his own non-profit group. He created the Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which funds projects to empower vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, such as women and children. Today, Khaled Hosseini writes full-time. He continues to live in Northern California with his wife, Roya, and their two children.

#### **14.4 *The Kite Runner: The Plot***

*The Kite Runner* is the story of Amir, a Sunni Muslim, who struggles to find his place in the world because of the aftereffects and fallout from a series of traumatic childhood events. An adult Amir opens the novel in the present-day United States with a vague reference to one of these events, and then the novel flashes back to Amir's childhood in Afghanistan. In addition to typical childhood experiences, Amir struggles with forging a closer relationship with his father, Baba; with determining the exact nature of his relationship with Hassan, his Shia Muslim servant; and eventually with finding a way to atone for pre-adolescent decisions that have lasting repercussions. Along the way, readers are able to experience growing up in Afghanistan in a single-parent home, a situation that bears remarkable similarities to many contemporary households.

One of the biggest struggles for Amir is learning to navigate the complex socio-economic culture he faces, growing up in Afghanistan as a member of the privileged class yet not feeling like a privileged member of his own family. Hassan and his father, Ali, are servants, yet at times, Amir's relationship with them is more like that of family members. And Amir's father,

Baba, who does not consistently adhere to the tenets of his culture, confuses rather than clarifies things for young Amir. Many of the ruling-class elite in Afghanistan view the world as black and white, yet Amir identifies many shades of gray.

In addition to the issues affecting his personal life, Amir must also contend with the instability of the Afghan political system in the 1970s. In a crucial episode, which takes place during an important kite flying tournament, Amir decides not to act he decides not to confront bullies and aggressors when he has the chance and this conscious choice of inaction sets off a chain reaction that leads to guilt, lies, and betrayals. Eventually, because of the changing political climate, Amir and his father are forced to flee Afghanistan. Amir views coming to America as an opportunity to leave his past behind.

Although Amir and Baba toil to create a new life for themselves in the United States, the past is unable to stay buried. When it rears its ugly head, Amir is forced to return to his homeland to face the demons and decisions of his youth, with only a slim hope to make amends.

Ultimately, *The Kite Runner* is a novel about relationships specifically the relationships between Amir and Hassan, Baba, Rahim Khan, Soraya, and Sohrab, and how the complex relationships in our lives overlap and connect to make us the people we are.

#### **14.5 GLOSSARY**

**Agha:** Great lord; nobleman; commander; Mister

**Ahmaq:** Foolish, stupid, awkward; a greater or the greatest fool

**Al hamdullellah:** Thanks to God

**Attan:** A Pashtun tribal dance performed on festive occasions and as a physical exercise in the army. It is performed to the ever-faster rhythm of drums, the tribesmen's long hair whipping in unison, and is often continued to exhaustion. In some respects it resembles the dance of the "whirling dervishes" of the

Ottoman empire. Although Pashtun in origin, it has also been adopted by other ethnic groups as the Afghan national dance.

**Awroussi:** Wedding ceremony

**Azan:** The call to prayer, five times a day, by the muezzin from the door of a mosque or a minaret of a large mosque

**Bachem:** Word meaning “my child” or “my baby”

**Bakhshida:** Pardoned (by God)

**Bazarris:** Merchants; people or workers from Bazzars

**Biwa:** Widow

**Bolani:** Afghan dish consisting of flat bread stuffed with foods such as potatoes or leeks

**Burqa:** A women’s outer garment that covers them from head to toe, including the face. Now rarely worn outside of Afghanistan.

**Buzkashi:** An Afghan national game meaning “goat-pulling” and is played on horseback by two opposing teams who use the carcass of a calf (goat was used in former days) as their object of competition. The purpose is to lift up the carcass from the center of a circle, carry it around a point some distance away, and put it again in its original place. All this has to be done on horseback and the chapandaz, expert player, must try to keep possession of the headless carcass. Cash prizes are given to the player who scores a goal and to the winning team.

**Chapan:** A traditional coat for men popular among the Turkic population of northern Afghanistan, but worn also by other Afghans. It is a long, buttonless caftan with knee-length sleeves which in warm weather is worn open with a sleeve thrown over a shoulder. In cold weather fur-lined or quilted chapans are worn, tied around the waist with a cummerbund. It comes in various colors, often striped, and is fashioned of cotton or silk.

**Chapandaz:** A “master” horseman in the Buzkashi competition



**Chopan kabob:** Pieces of lamb chops marinated and broiled on a skewer

**Diniyat:** Religion, religious

**Hazara:** A term describing the Hazara people, an ethnic minority originating in the mountainous region of Afghanistan called Hazarajat. Characterized by their mongoloid facial features, adherence to Shia Islam, and long history of persecution.

**Hypochondriac:** One who is consistently and habitually convinced that he is ill when he is not.

**Dozd:** Bandit

**Dostet darum:** I love you

**Hijab:** Veil

**Iftikhar:** Honour

**Ihtiram:** Veneration, honor, reverence, respect

**INS:** Immigration and Nationalization Service of the United States of America. Formerly, the government agency that oversaw immigration issues. Now the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

**Mazar-i-Sharif:** A large city in Afghanistan famous for its Blue Mosque. The Taliban massacred the Hazara population there in 1998.

**Mujahedin:** A term used to describe a group of Muslims engaged in a war or conflict. In this novel, it describes the Afghanistan Mujahedin Freedom Fighters Front, which challenged the Soviet forces and later lost against the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) government.

**Pashtun:** An ethnic group forming a majority in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. Characterized by adherence to Sunni Islam as well as Pashtunwali, an ancient code of tradition.

**Shia Islam:** The second largest denomination of the Islamic faith. Shia Islam believes that the teachings of Muhammad were carried through his descendants and do not accept the caliphate.

**Shorawi:** The Farsi term for the Soviets, who invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and occupied the country for a decade.

**Sunni Islam:** The largest denomination of Islam. Sunni Islam accepts the caliphate, meaning that it considers the Caliph or head of a Muslim state a successor to Muhammad.

**Wazir Akbar Khan:** The neighborhood in Kabul where Amir and Hassan grew up.

#### **14.6 EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEWS**

- **What experiences inspired the storyline for *The Kite Runner*?**

Well, the storyline itself was fairly fictional, although, you know, I was watching a news story in the spring of 1999 on television, and this news story was about the Taliban. And it was talking about all the different impositions that the Taliban had placed on the Afghan people. And at some point along the line, it mentioned that they had banned the sport of kite flying, which kind of struck a personal chord for me, because as a boy I grew up in Kabul with all my cousins and friends flying kites.

So I sat down after that news story and wrote a 25-page short story about two boys in Kabul flying kites, and it became this kind of a much darker, more involved tale than I had anticipated. A couple of years later, in March of 2001, I rediscovered the short story in my garage, essentially, and it kind of became the inspiration for the novel. And I kind of sat down and began expanding the short story into a book, which eventually became, *The Kite Runner*, the novel.

***The Kite Runner* is such a vivid portrayal of Afghanistan. How much of it is autobiographical, how much of it is fiction?**

Hosseini: Like any other first time novelist who writes a novel in the first person, those first books, as you know, tend to be a little more autobiographical than the subsequent ones. It's not a memoir by any stretch of imagination, although I have surprisingly a hard time convincing some of my readers of that. You know, there are some parallels within my life and the life of the boy in *The Kite Runner*. I grew up in Kabul in the same era, I went to the same school, we both were kind of precocious writers, we both love film, loved those early Westerns of the '60s and '70s. We love poetry and reading and writing from a young age, both me and this character. And both of us left Afghanistan and became political refugees in the U.S., and probably the sections in the book that resemble my life more than any other are the ones in the Bay Area, where Amir and his father are selling the goods at the flea market and socializing with other Afghans who left Afghanistan. I did that with my father. We would go to the flea market to sell some junk, and we just socialized with other Afghans. So there is quite a bit of me in the book. The story line itself, what happens between the boys and the fallout from that, that just — that is all imagination.

**The Kite Runner helped alter the world's perception of Afghanistan, by giving millions of readers their first real sense of what the Afghan people and their daily lives are actually like. Your new novel includes the main events in Afghanistan's history over the past three decades, from the communist revolution to the Soviet invasion to the U.S.-led war against the Taliban. Do you feel a special responsibility to inform the world about your native country, especially given the current situation there and the prominent platform you've gained?**

Hosseini: For me as a writer, the story has always taken precedence over everything else. I have never sat down to write with broad, sweeping ideas in mind, and certainly never with a specific agenda. It is quite a burden for a writer to feel a responsibility to represent his or her own culture and to educate others about it. For me it always starts from a very personal, intimate place, about human connections, and then expands from there.

What intrigued me about this new book were the hopes and dreams and disillusionments of these two women, their inner lives, the specific circumstances that bring them together, their resolve to survive, and the fact that their relationship evolves into something meaningful and powerful, even as the world around them unravels and slips into chaos. But as I wrote, I witnessed the story expanding, becoming more ambitious page after page. I realized that telling the story of these two women without telling, in part, the story of Afghanistan from the 1970s to the post-9/11 era simply was not possible. The intimate and personal was intertwined inextricably with the broad and historical. And so the turmoil in Afghanistan and the country's tortured recent past slowly became more than mere backdrop. Gradually, Afghanistan itself—and more specifically, Kabul—became a character in this novel, to a much larger extent, I think, than in *The Kite Runner*. But it was simply for the sake of storytelling, not out of a sense of social responsibility to inform readers about my native country. That said, I will be gratified if they walk away from *A Thousand Splendid Suns* with a satisfying story *and* with a little more insight and a more personal sense of what has happened in Afghanistan in the last thirty years.

• **What kind of response do you hope readers have to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*?**

Hosseini: Purely as a writer, I hope that readers discover in this novel the same things that I look for when I read fiction: a story that transports, characters who engage, and a sense of illumination, of having been transformed somehow by the experiences of the characters. I hope that readers respond to the emotions of this story, that despite vast cultural differences, they identify with Mariam and Laila and their dreams and ordinary hopes and day-to-day struggle to survive. As an Afghan, I would like readers to walk away with a sense of empathy for Afghans, and more specifically for Afghan women, on whom the effects of war and extremism have been devastating. I hope this novel brings depth, nuance, and emotional subtext to the familiar image of the burqa-clad woman walking down a dusty street.

- **Where does the title of your new book come from?**

Hosseini: It comes from a poem about Kabul by Saib-e-Tabrizi, a seventeenth-century Persian poet, who wrote it after a visit to the city left him deeply impressed. I was searching for English translations of poems about Kabul, for use in a scene where a character bemoans leaving his beloved city, when I found this particular verse. I realized that I had found not only the right line for the scene, but also an evocative title in the phrase “a thousand splendid suns,” which appears in the next-to-last stanza. The poem was translated from Farsi by Dr. Josephine Davis.

- **You recently received the Humanitarian Award from the United Nations Refugee Agency and were named a U.S. goodwill envoy to that agency. What kind of work have you done with the agency? What will your responsibilities be in your position as a goodwill envoy?**

Hosseini: It’s been a tremendous honor for me to be asked to work with UNHCR as a goodwill envoy. As a native of a country with one of the world’s largest refugee populations, I hold the issue of refugees close to my heart. I will be asked to make public appearances on behalf of the refugee cause and to serve as a public advocate for refugees around the world. It will be my privilege to try to capture public attention and to use my access to the media to give voice to victims of humanitarian crises and raise public awareness about matters relating to refugees.

Hosseini: In January of this year, I had the opportunity of going to Chad with UNHCR to visit the refugee camps where some 250,000 people from Darfur have sought haven. I had the chance to speak to refugees, local authorities and humanitarian staff and to educate myself about the staggering tragedy unfolding in the region. It was a sobering and heartbreaking experience and one that I will never forget. Presently I am working with UNHCR on the Aid Darfur campaign. It is my intention that my future work with the agency take me to Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.

You present a portrait of Afghanistan under the Taliban that may be surprising to many readers. For example, the Taliban’s ban on music and movies is well known, but many readers are not familiar with the “Titanic fever” that swept through Kabul upon the release of that film, which was shown in secret on black-market VCRs and TVs. How tight a grip did the Taliban truly have on the country? And how does pop culture survive under these traditions?

Hosseini: The Taliban’s acts of cultural vandalism—the most infamous being the destruction of the giant Bamiyan Buddhas—had a devastating effect on Afghan culture and the artistic scene. The Taliban burned countless films, VCRs, music tapes, books, and paintings. They jailed filmmakers, musicians, painters, and sculptors. These restrictions forced some artists to abandon their craft, and many to continue practicing in covert fashion. Some built cellars where they painted or played musical instruments. Others gathered in the guise of a sewing circle to write fiction, as depicted in Christina Lamb’s *The Sewing Circles of Heart*. And still others found ingenious ways to trick the Taliban—one famous example being a painter who, at the order of the Taliban, painted over the human faces on his oil paintings, except he did with it watercolor, which he washed off after the Taliban were ousted. These were among the desperate ways in which artists tried to escape the Taliban’s firm grip on virtually every form of artistic expression.

#### 14.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- (1) Khaled Hosseini was born in \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - (a) Kabul, Afghanistan
  - (b) Peshawar, Pakistan
  - (c) San Francisco, USA
  - (d) Punjab, India
- (2) \_\_\_\_\_ is the first novel by Khaled Hosseini .
  - (a) *And the Mountains Echoed*

- (b) *The Kite Runner*
  - (c) *A Thousand Splendid Suns*
  - (d) *The Blue Mountains*
- (3) Khaled Hosseini has earned a degree in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) Creative Writing
  - (b) Literature
  - (c) Law
  - (d) Medicine
- (4) Hosseini is a goodwill ambassador of .
- (a) United Nations
  - (b) Red Cross
  - (c) Amity Foundation
  - (d) United States
- (5) The family of Khaled Hosseini sought asylum in which country?
- (a) United States
  - (b) France
  - (c) United Kingdom
  - (d) Pakistan

#### **14.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Draw a biographical sketch of writer Khaled Hosseini.
- Q2. Briefly discuss the novels of Khaled Hosseini.
- Q3. Do you think the works of Khaled Hosseini reflect the reality of Afghanistan? Discuss.

#### **14.9 ANSWER KEY**

- (1) a            (2) b
- (3) d            (4) a            (5) a

#### 14.10 LET US SUM UP

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-born writer. In March 2001, while practicing medicine, Hosseini began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which became an international bestseller. His next two novels also earned a lot of acclaim. Through his writings, Hosseini not only tells stories but also represents Afghanistan and its ordinary people.

#### 14.11 SUGGESTED READING

1. Hosseini, Khaled. “‘Kite Runner’ Author On His Childhood, His Writing, And The Plight Of Afghan Refugees.” By Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. *rferl.org*. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 21 June 2012. Web. 24 Jan 2017.
2. “An interview with Khaled Hosseini.” *bookbrowse.com*. Book Browse, 2003. Web. 24 Jan 2017.
3. *The Kite Runner*. *sparknotes.com*. Spark Notes, n.d. Web. 23 Jan 2017.

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**DETAILED SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL**  
***THE KITE RUNNER***

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives
- 15.3 *The Kite Runner*: Character List
- 15.4 Detailed Summary
- 15.5 Self-Assessment Questions
- 15.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 15.7 Answer Key
- 15.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.9 Suggested Reading

**15.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Kite Runner* was marketed as not just the first novel by its author, Khaled Hosseini, a medical doctor, but the first novel of its kind: an Afghan novel written in English is a modestly told, quietly ambitious story of its narrator- protagonist's journey from his rather comfortable life in Kabul in the 1970's to his and his father's fleeing the country in 1981 and beginning life anew as struggling immigrants in Fremont, California, and, following marriage and the publication of his own first novel, his fateful return to Taliban-run Afghanistan in 2001, where he will atone for a past wrong.

## 15.2 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to introduce the characters of the novel to the learners along with providing a detailed summary of the text.

### 15.3 *THE KITE RUNNER* : CHARACTER LIST

**Amir:** The narrator and protagonist; a Pashtun and Sunni Muslim.

**Baba:** Amir's father, who is considered a hero and leader in Kabul.

**Hassan:** Amir's playmate and servant; a Hazara and Shi'a Muslim; son to Ali.

**Sohrab:** Hassan's son. Like his father, Sohrab is excellent with a slingshot. Sohrab is the bait that Rahim Khan uses to lure Amir back to the Middle East.

**Rahim Khan:** Baba's best friend and business partner; father-figure to Amir.

**Assef:** A Kabul bully who ends up joining the Taliban.

**Soraya:** Amir's wife.

**Ali:** Hassan's father; servant to Baba. Having suffered from polio as a child, Ali has a crippled leg and is teased by kids in Kabul.

**General Sahib (Iqbal Taheri):** A friend of Baba's in America; father to Soraya. The general is biding his time in America, waiting to be called back into service in Afghanistan.

**Khala Taheri (Khala Jamila):** The wife of General Taheri and mother to Soraya. Khala Taheri is the first to encourage Amir's romantic overtures toward Soraya.

**Farid:** The taxi driver who takes Amir back to Afghanistan. Farid initially judges Amir as a traitor who abandoned Afghanistan, but after he learns of the real reason for Amir's return, Farid helps him.

**Raymond Andrews:** The official at the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan who makes Amir realize the difficulties he will encounter if he attempts to adopt Sohrab.

**Zaman:** The director of the orphanage in Kabul.

**Kamal:** A childhood follower of Assef. Kamal dies when attempting to escape Afghanistan in a fuel truck.

**Wali:** A childhood follower of Assef.

**Farzana:** Hassan's wife and Sohrab's mother.

**Sanaubar:** Hassan's mother. Although she abandons him soon after giving birth, she returns years later and takes care of her grandson.

**Kaka Sharif:** Soraya's uncle, who has connections in the INS and helps Amir get Sohrab a visa into the United States.

**Dr. Armand Faruqi:** The surgeon with the Clark Gable mustache who tends to Amir's injuries after being beaten by Assef.

## 15.4 DETAILED SUMMARY

### Chapters 1-3

The novel opens in December 2001, and the narrator, telling his story in the first person, recalls an event that occurred in 1975, when he was twelve years old and growing up in Afghanistan. The narrator, named Amir, does not explain what had happened but only mentions that the event made him who he is. Following his recollection, he says that he received a call last summer from a friend in Pakistan named Rahim Khan, asking him to come to Pakistan. He then walks through San Francisco, where he lives now. He notices kites flying, and thinks of his past, including his friend Hassan, a boy with a cleft lip whom he calls a kite runner.

Amir, as a child would play with Hassan, climbing trees and using mirrors to reflect sunlight into a neighbor's window, or shoot walnuts at the neighbour's dog with a slingshot. Though these would be Amir's ideas, Hassan never let the blame fall on Amir if they were caught.

Amir lived with his father, Baba, in a lavish home in Kabul. Meanwhile, Hassan and his father, Ali, lived in a small mud hut on the grounds of Baba's estate, and Ali worked as Baba's servant. Neither Amir nor Hassan had a

mother. Amir's died giving birth to him, and Hassan's ran away after having him. One day while the boys were walking, a soldier told Hassan that he once had sex with Hassan's mother, Sanaubar. Sanaubar and Ali were an unlikely match. Ali was a devout reader of the *Koran*, the bottom half of his face was paralyzed, and polio destroyed the muscle in his right leg, giving him a severe limp. Sanaubar was nineteen years younger than Ali. She was beautiful but reputedly immoral. Most people thought the marriage was arranged by Sanaubar's father as a way to restore honour to his family. Sanaubar openly detested Ali's physical appearance. Five days after Hassan was born, she ran away with a group of travelling performers.

The soldier refers to Hassan as a Hazara, which the novel tells is a persecuted ethnic group in Afghanistan. The Hazaras originally came from further east in Asia, and their features are more Asian than Arabic. Hassan's parents were Hazara as well. Amir and Baba, on the other hand, are Pashtun. Once, while looking through history books, Amir discovered information on the Hazara. They had an uprising during the nineteenth century, but it was brutally suppressed by the Pashtuns. The book mentions some of the derogatory names they are called, including mice-eating and flat-nosed, and says part of the reason for the animosity is because the Hazara are Shia Muslim while the Pashtuns are Sunni Muslim.

Amir mixes his memories of Baba in with this information. Though nobody thought he would marry well because he wasn't from a prominent family, he married Amir's mother, Sofia Akrami, a beautiful, intelligent woman who came from a royal bloodline.

Baba also has his own strong moral sense. While Baba pours himself a glass of whiskey, Amir tells him that a religious teacher at his school, Mullah Fatiullah Khan, says it is sinful for Muslims to drink alcohol. Baba tells him that there is only one sin: theft. Every other sin is a variation of theft.

Amir tries to please Baba by being more like him but rarely feels he is successful. He also admits to feeling responsible for his mother's death.

Since Baba likes soccer, Amir tries to like it as well, albeit unsuccessfully. Amir is good at poetry and reading. But he worries his father does not see these as manly pursuits. Amir later overhears Baba talking to his business associate, Rahim Khan, the man that later calls Amir from Pakistan. Baba says Amir is not like other boys, and he worries that if Amir can't stand up for himself as a child, he will not be able to do so as an adult.

### **Chapters 4-7**

The story jumps back in time to 1933, the year Baba is born and Zahir Shah becomes king of Afghanistan. Around the same time, two young men who are driving while drunk and high hit and kill Ali's parents. Amir's grandfather takes the young Ali in, and Ali and Baba grow up together. Baba, however, never calls Ali his friend. Similarly, because of their ethnic and religious differences, Amir says as a child he never thought of Hassan as a friend. Even so, Amir's youth seems to him like a long stretch of playing games with Hassan. But while Amir would wake up in the morning and go to school, Hassan would clean the house and get groceries. Amir often read to Hassan, who is illiterate. One night, Amir narrates his story to Hassan who then tells him that the story is terrific, though he puts a question: why didn't the man make himself cry with onions? Amir is annoyed he didn't think of it himself and has a nasty thought about Hassan being a Hazara, though he says nothing.

One night, gunfire erupts in the street. Ali, Hassan, and Amir hide in the house until morning. Amir says that night was the beginning of the end of the Afghanistan they knew. It slipped away further in 1978 with the communist takeover, and it disappeared completely in 1979 when Russia invaded. The gunshots were part of a coup in which Daoud Khan, the king's cousin, took over the government. Because the roads are closed that night, Baba doesn't arrive home till dawn. That morning, Amir and Hassan hear talk of what happened on the radio, but they don't understand what it means that Afghanistan has become a republic. They decide to go climb a tree.

While they're walking, a rock hits Hassan. Amir and Hassan discover Assef, a notorious bully, and two other boys from the neighborhood. He is one of the children who mocks Ali's limp and calls him names, adding that Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns and the Hazaras just pollute the country. Assef takes out his brass knuckles. He says Amir is part of the problem for being friends with a Hazara. For a moment, Amir thinks that Hassan is his servant, not his friend, but he quickly recognizes his thought is wrong. As Assef goes to hit Amir, Assef suddenly freezes because Hassan has his slingshot aimed at him, which allows Amir and Hassan to get away.

Baba is waiting for him with a man named Dr. Kumar. Dr. Kumar is a plastic surgeon. He is Hassan's present surgeon. Dr. Kumar explains that his job is to fix things on people, sometimes people's faces. Hassan touches his lip in recognition. The surgery works, and though Hassan's lip is raw and swollen while he recovers, he smiles all the while. The winter after, all that remains of his cleft lip is a faint scar.

For boys in Kabul, winter is the best time of year. The schools close for the icy season, and boys spend this time flying kites. Baba takes Amir and Hassan to buy kites from an old blind man who makes the best in the city. The highlight of the winter is the annual kite-fighting tournament, when boys battle kites by covering the strings in broken glass. When a string is cut, the losing kite flies loose, and boys called kite runners to chase the kite across the city until it falls. The last fallen kite of the tournament is a trophy of honor. Hassan is the best kite runner in Kabul, and seems to know exactly where a kite will land before it comes down.

In the winter of that year, 1975, the tournament is held in Amir's neighborhood. A few days before the tournament, Baba casually tells Amir he may win. An overwhelming desire to win seizes Amir as Amir thinks this will earn him Baba's approval. On the day of the competition, Amir is doing well. He can see Baba sitting on a rooftop, watching. Eventually all that

remain are Amir's kite and one other, a blue kite. They battle and Amir wins, sending the blue kite flying loose. Amir and Hassan cheer and hug, but Amir sees Baba motioning for them to separate. Hassan vows to bring the kite back for Amir and sets off.

Amir reels in his kite and accepts everyone's congratulations, then goes looking for Hassan, asking neighbours if they saw him. One old merchant asks Amir what he is doing looking for a Hazara. Amir replies that the Hazara is the son of his father's servant. He tells Amir he saw the Hazara going south, adding that the boys chasing him have probably caught him by now. Amir searches the neighborhood until he comes to an alleyway. Hassan has the blue kite, and he is surrounded by Assef and the two other boys that are always with him, Kamal and Wali. Amir watches from around the corner. Assef tells Hassan they will let him go only if he hands over the kite. Hassan refuses. He ran the kite fairly, and it belongs to Amir. Assef says Amir would not be as loyal to him, an ugly pet Hazara. Hassan is not shaken. He says he and Amir are friends. Assef and the other boys charge Hassan. Amir almost says something, but ultimately he only watches.

Amir remembers something. He and Hassan fed from the same breast, that of a Hazara woman named Sakina. Then Amir thinks of a dream: he is lost in a snowstorm until a familiar shape appears before him. Suddenly the snow is gone. The sky is blue and filled with kites. Amir looks down the alley where Assef and the others have Hassan pinned to the ground without his pants. Wali says his father believes what they are considering doing to Hassan is sinful, but Assef says he is only a Hazara. The boys refuse, but agree to hold Hassan down. Assef raises Hassan's bare rear end into the air and takes down his own pants. Amir debates doing something, but instead runs away. Fifteen minutes later Amir sees Hassan coming toward him. He pretends he was looking for Hassan, who is crying and bleeding. He hands Amir the kite and neither boy speak about what happened. When they arrive home, Baba hugs Amir, who presses his face into Baba's chest and weeps.

## Chapters 8-10

After the rape, Amir and Hassan spend less time together. Baba and Amir take a trip to Jalalabad and stay at the house of Baba's cousin. When they arrive they have a large traditional Afghan dinner. Baba proudly tells everyone about the kite tournament, but Amir does not enjoy it. After dinner, they all lie down to bed in the same room, but Amir cannot sleep. He says aloud that he watched Hassan get raped, but nobody is awake to hear him. He says this is the night he became an insomniac. When Amir and Baba return home, Hassan asks Amir if he wants to walk up the hill with him. They walk in silence, and when Hassan asks if Amir will read to him, Amir changes his mind and wants to go home.

Amir discontinues playing with Hassan. When Hassan asks Amir what he did wrong, Amir tells Hassan to stop harassing him. After that, the boys avoid each other. One day, Amir asks Baba if he would ever get new servants. Baba becomes furious and says that he will never replace Ali and Hassan. With the start of school, Amir spends hours alone in his room. One afternoon he asks Hassan to walk up the hill with him so he can read him a story. They sit under a pomegranate tree, and Amir asks Hassan what he would do if he threw a pomegranate at him. Amir begins pelting Hassan with pomegranates and yells at Hassan to hit him back. But Hassan won't. He crushes a pomegranate against his own forehead, asks Amir if he is satisfied, and leaves.

That summer of 1976, Amir turns thirteen. Baba invites more than 400 people to the party he plans. At the party Baba makes Amir greet each guest personally. Assef arrives and acts politely as he jokes with Baba. He tells Amir that he chose the gift himself. Amir cannot hide his discomfort, embarrassing Baba and forcing him to apologize.

The next morning Amir opens his presents. He thinks to himself that either he or Hassan must leave. As he is going out later, Ali stops him and gives him his present. It is a new version of "Shahnamah", the book of



stories Amir would read to Hassan. The morning after, Amir waits for Hassan and Ali to leave. He takes his birthday money and a watch that Baba gave him and puts them under Hassan's mattress. He tells Baba that Hassan stole them, and when Ali and Hassan return, Baba asks Hassan if he stole the money and the watch. To Amir's surprise, Hassan says he did. Amir realizes Hassan saw him in the alley, and he knew also that Amir was setting him up now. Baba forgives Hassan, but Ali says they must leave. Baba pleads with him to stay, but Ali refuses. It rains when Ali and Hassan leave, and Amir watches from inside as they go.

It is March 1981, Amir and Baba are in the back of a truck with several other Afghans on the way to Pakistan. The ride makes Amir sick, and he worries he is embarrassing Baba. Because they can't trust anyone, they left home in the middle of the night. The rafiqs, or comrades as Amir calls them, have divided society. People turn each other in for money or under threat. The truck driver, Karim, has a business arrangement with the soldiers guarding the road. But when they arrive at the checkpoint, the Russian guard eyes a woman in the truck and says the price of passing is half an hour with her. Baba won't allow it. The Russian threatens to shoot Baba and raises his handgun, but another Russian officer stops him. For a week they stay in a basement with other refugees and then they finally arrive in Pakistan.

### **Chapters 11-13**

The story jumps forward in time. Baba and Amir are in Fremont, California, where they have lived for nearly two years. Baba, who works at a gas station now, has had difficulty adjusting to life in the US, which is quite different from that in Afghanistan. Baba tells Amir that they are in US only for Amir.

On the night of Amir's graduation, Baba takes him out for a big dinner, then to a bar where he buys drinks all night. He also gives Amir an old Ford Grand Torino as a gift. In the days after, Amir tells Baba that he wants to study writing. Baba disapproves and says the degree will be useless, but Amir has made up his mind.

For Amir, America is a place to forget the past. One day, Baba speaks with a man whom he introduces to Amir as General Taheri. Baba tells General Taheri that Amir is going to be a great writer. General Taheri's daughter, Soraya, comes over, and she and Amir make eye contact. On the drive home Amir asks Baba about her. All Baba knows is that she was romantically involved with a man once, but it didn't end well. Amir falls asleep that night thinking of her.

After nearly a year of yearning for Soraya, Amir finally gathers courage to speak to her. For weeks he talks to Soraya only when General Taheri is away, until one day he is giving her one of his stories when General Taheri arrives. General Taheri throws the story out, and walking Amir away he tells Amir to remember that he is among other Afghans. Amir is disheartened, but he soon becomes focused on Baba, who is ill. Baba is diagnosed with lung cancer but refuses to receive treatment. Amir tells Baba he doesn't know what he's supposed to do. Baba replies that he's been trying to teach Amir precisely this all his life and forbids Amir to tell anyone about his illness.

Baba weakens as the months pass until one day he collapses. The cancer has spread to his brain. Afghans arrive in droves to see Baba in the hospital. At Baba's bedside, Amir asks if he will go to General Taheri to ask Soraya's hand in marriage for Amir. Baba goes happily the next day. General Taheri accepts. Soraya is happy, but she says she must tell Amir about her past because she doesn't want any secrets. When she was eighteen, she ran away with an Afghan man. They lived together for nearly a month before General Taheri found her and took her home. While she was gone, Jamila had a stroke. Amir admits through it bothers him a little, but he still wants to marry her.

The following night, Amir and Baba go to the Taheris' home for the traditional ceremony of "giving word". General Taheri is happy and says they are doing it the right way now. Because Baba is so sick, they plan to have the wedding quickly. Baba rents an Afghan banquet hall for the ceremony, buys the ring, Amir's tuxedo, and other necessities, until he has spent almost all of

his \$35,000 in savings. Of the wedding Amir remembers sitting on a sofa with Soraya. They are covered with a veil and look at each other's reflections in a mirror. It is the first time he tells her he loves her, and they are together for the first time that night. Shortly after, Baba dies. Many Afghans whom Baba helped, come to the funeral. As he listens to them paying their respects, Amir realizes how Baba defined who he is.

Because their engagement was so brief, Amir doesn't learn about Soraya's family until after the wedding. General Taheri does not work. He feels it is below him and keeps the family on welfare. He also does not allow Jamila, who was once a great singer, to sing in public. Soraya tells Amir that, on the night her father brought her home after she ran away, he arrived with a gun, and once she was home he made her cut off her hair. Amir is different from every Afghan guy she has met.

In the summer of 1988, Amir finishes his first novel. He gets it published, and then he and Soraya start trying to have a baby. They are unable to conceive, however, and after numerous tests doctors cannot explain why they can't have a child. They talk about adoption, but General Taheri says he doesn't like the idea. Amir agrees, though he doesn't seem certain. Amir's writing career has gone well, in the meantime, and with the advance from his second novel, he and Soraya buy a house in San Francisco. But the inability to have a child still lingers between them.

### **Chapters 14-17**

The period is June 2001, and Amir has just received a call from Rahim Khan, who wants Amir to see him in Pakistan. Rahim Khan, the first grownup Amir ever thought of as a friend, is very ill. While taking a walk to Golden Gate Park, he watches a man play catch with his son and then looking at the kites flying, he thinks of something Rahim Khan said to him on the phone. He told Amir there is a way for him to be good again. That night, while Amir and Soraya are in bed, Amir thinks of their relationship. They still make love, but both of them feel a kind of futility in the act. They used to lie together and talk

about having a child, but now their conversations are about work or other things. Amir drifts off to sleep and dreams of Hassan running through the snow. A week later, Amir leaves for Pakistan.

Amir lands in Peshawar, where Rahim Khan is. The driver of the cab he takes talks incessantly, telling Amir that what has happened to Afghanistan is awful. They reach the neighbourhood known as “Afghan Town” and Amir sees dirty children selling cigarettes, carpet shops, and kabab vendors. Amir remembers the last time he saw Rahim Khan, twenty years earlier in 1981. It was the night he and Baba left Kabul. They had gone to see Rahim Khan, and Baba had cried. Baba and Rahim Khan had kept in touch, but Amir had not spoken with Rahim Khan since just after Baba’s death.

Amir meets Rahim Khan in his apartment. Inside they have tea and talk. Amir tells him he is married now to Soraya Taheri, General Taheri’s daughter, and he talks about Baba and his career as a novelist. Rahim Khan says he never doubted Amir would become a writer. The conversation turns to what Afghanistan has become since the Taliban took over. Amir learns that Rahim Khan had been living in Baba’s house in Kabul since 1981, when Amir and Baba fled. He took care of the place, as Baba expected to eventually return. Meanwhile, Kabul became dangerous as the fighting between Afghan factions vying for control of the city grew worse. Rahim Khan tells Amir that he is dying and does not expect to live through the summer. He asked Amir there because he wanted to see him, but also because he wanted something else. In the years he lived in Baba’s house, he was not alone. Hassan was with him. Before he asks Amir for the favour, he must tell him about Hassan.

Rahim Khan tells Amir the story of how he found Hassan, and the narrative shifts so that Rahim Khan narrates in the first person. In 1986, Rahim Khan went to Hazarajat. He went primarily because he was lonely, but also because as he aged it became difficult for him to care for Baba’s house by himself. He found Hassan’s home, a small mud house, and saw Hassan in the yard. The men greeted each other, and Hassan took Rahim Khan inside to

introduce him to his wife, a pregnant Hazara woman named Farzana. As they spoke, Rahim Khan learned that Ali was killed by a land mine. Rahim Khan then explained to Hassan that he wanted Hassan and Farzana to come to Baba's house with him and help him care for it. Hassan declined, saying that Hazarajat was their home now. Hassan asked several questions about Amir. When he learned Baba was dead, he cried. Rahim Khan stayed the night, and in the morning, Hassan told him that he and Farzana would go back to Kabul.

Out of respect, Hassan and Farzana live in the small servants' hut on Baba's property, and Hassan works diligently cleaning and repairing the house. That fall, Farzana gives birth to a stillborn girl, whom they bury in the yard. Farzana becomes pregnant again in 1990, and that same year Sanaubar, Hassan's mother, appears at the front gate, weak and with her face severely cut up. Hassan and Farzana nurse her back to health, and she and Hassan become close. That winter it is Sanaubar who delivers Hassan's and Farzana's son. Sanaubar loves and cares for the boy, who is named Sohrab, after the character from Hassan's and Amir's favorite story when they were children. She lives until he is four. By then it is 1995. The Soviets had been pushed out of Kabul, but fighting continues between rival Afghan groups. Hassan, meanwhile, is teaching Sohrab to read and to run kites. In 1996, the Taliban take control of Kabul. Two weeks later they ban kite fighting.

The story shifts back to Amir's perspective. Amir sits with Rahim Khan thinking of everything that happened between him and Hassan. Amir asks if Hassan is still in Baba's house, and Rahim Khan hands him an envelope. It contains a photograph of Hassan and a letter for Amir. In it, Hassan says the Kabul they used to know is gone. One day a man at the market hit Farzana simply because she raised her voice so another man who was half-deaf could hear her. He talks about his love for his son, and says Rahim Khan is very ill. If Amir ever returns, he will find his faithful friend Hassan waiting for him. Rahim Khan says a month after arriving in Pakistan, he received a call from a neighbour in Kabul. The Taliban had gone to Baba's house and found Hassan and his family there. Hassan said he was taking

care of the house for a friend, and they called him a liar like all Hazaras. They made him kneel in the street and shot him in the head. When Farzana ran out of the house, they shot her, too.

The Taliban moved into Baba's house, and Sohrab was sent to an orphanage. Rahim Khan knows an American couple in Pakistan that care for Afghan orphans, and they have already agreed to take in Sohrab. Amir says he can't go to Kabul. He can pay someone else to get Sohrab. Rahim Khan says it is not about the money, and that Amir knows why he must go. Rahim Khan says one day Baba told him he was worried that a boy who can't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything. He tells Amir one more thing. Ali was unable to have children. Amir asks who Hassan's father was then, and Rahim Khan says Amir knows who it was. Hassan never knew. They couldn't tell anyone because it was a shameful situation. Amir shouts at Rahim Khan and storms out of the apartment.

### **Chapters 18-21**

Amir walks from Rahim Khan's house to a small teahouse, thinking about how responsible he was for Hassan's death. He also goes over the evidence that Baba was Hassan's father: Baba's paying for the surgery to fix Hassan's lip, and his weeping when Ali and Hassan left. Baba had said that theft was the only sin, and Amir thinks how Baba stole from him a brother, from Hassan his identity, from Ali his honour. Amir realizes he and Baba were more alike than he knew. They had both betrayed their truest friends. What Rahim Khan wanted was for Amir to atone for Baba's sins and his own. On the ride back to Rahim Khan's, Amir recognizes he is not too old to start fighting for himself, and that somewhere in Kabul, a small part of Hassan remains. He finds Rahim Khan praying and tells him he will find Sohrab.

Rahim Khan arranges for an acquaintance named Farid to take Amir to Kabul. Farid and his father had fought against the Soviets. Once in Afghanistan Amir says he feels like a tourist in his own country. Farid asks sarcastically if, after twenty years in America, Amir still thinks of Afghanistan as his country.

He guesses that Amir grew up in a large house with servants, that his father drove an American car, and that Amir had never worn a *pakol* before.

Amir explains that he is going to find a Hazara boy, his illegitimate half-brother's son so that he can take him to Peshawar where people will take care of him. Wahid calls Amir a true Afghan and says he is proud to have Amir stay in his home.

That night, Amir dreams of a man shooting Hassan, and realizes he is the man in the dream. He goes outside to think and hears two voices coming from the house, Wahid's and his wife's. They are arguing about dinner. Because they gave Amir their food, the children did not have any dinner. Amir realizes that the boys weren't staring at his watch, they were staring at his food. The next morning, before Amir and Farid leave, Amir stuffs a wad of money under one of their mattresses.

On the way to Kabul, Amir sees signs of the wars, such as broken-down Soviet tanks and destroyed villages. When Amir and Farid reach Kabul, Amir does not recognize it.

Amir and Farid find the orphanage where they think Sohrab is. The orphanage itself was once a storage warehouse for a carpet manufacturer.

Zaman says Sohrab is not there, but he knows where he may be. It might already be too late, however. Amir asks what he means, and Zaman tells him there is a Taliban official who comes every month or two. The official brings cash, and sometimes take a child with him. Farid attacks Zaman for letting this occur, but stops when he notices children in view. Zaman says he can do nothing against the Taliban, and it is the only way to get money to feed the children. He tells Amir and Farid that the official took Sohrab a month ago. If they want to find him, he will be at Ghazi Stadium the next day.

Farid drives Amir to Baba's house. It is falling apart, but recognizable. Amir finds his bedroom window and remembers looking out of it to watch Ali and Hassan the morning they left.

The following day they go to the soccer game at Ghazi Stadium. The field is just dirt, and the crowd is careful not to cheer too loudly. At halftime, Taliban in red pickups drive into the stadium. They unload a blindfolded man from one truck and a blindfolded woman from the other and bury each up to the chest in a hole on the field. The woman is screaming uncontrollably. A cleric on the field recites a prayer from the *Koran* and announces that they are there to carry out God's law. Another man steps out of a pickup, and Farid and Amir see it is the official they are looking for. He is wearing black sunglasses, as Zaman said. Farid tells one of the Taliban nearby that he has personal business with the official, and the official agrees to see them that afternoon.

### **Chapters 22-25**

Amir and Farid arrive at the house where Amir will meet the Taliban official. Farid waits in the car, and two guards lead Amir to the room where he is to wait. Amir thinks to himself it may have been a mistake to stop acting like a coward. The Taliban official enters with some guards. Amir and the official greet each other, then one of the guards tears off Amir's fake beard. The official asks Amir if he enjoyed the show at the stadium. He says it wasn't as good as when they went door-to-door shooting families in their homes. It was liberating. Amir realizes the official is talking about the massacre of Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif, which Amir had read about in newspapers.

The official asks what Amir is doing in America. Amir only answers that he is looking for Sohrab. The official motions to the guards, and Sohrab enters in a blue silk outfit, bells strapped around his ankles and mascara lining his eyes. The guards make Sohrab dance until the Taliban official orders them to leave. While the official rubs Sohrab's stomach, he asks Amir whatever happened to old Babalu, a name Assef used to call Ali, and Amir realizes that the Taliban official is actually Assef. Stunned, Amir says he will pay him for the boy. Assef replies that money is irrelevant and not why he joined the Taliban. Assef says he is on a mission to rid Afghanistan of garbage. Amir calls it ethnic



cleansing and says he wants Sohrab. Shoving Sohrab forward, Assef says he and Amir have unfinished business. Assef tells the guards that if Amir exits the room alive, he has earned the right to leave. Then Assef puts on a pair of brass knuckles. Amir remembers little after that. There are flashes of Assef hitting him and swallowing teeth and blood. Amir remembers laughing while Assef beat him, and feeling relief. He had looked forward to that, and felt healed for the first time. Sohrab told Assef to stop and held up his slingshot, and when Assef lunged at him, Sohrab fired, hitting him in the left eye. Sohrab and Amir ran out of the house to where Farid waited with the car. As they drove away, Amir passed out.

A blur of images followed: a woman named Aisha, a man with the moustache, someone he recognizes. Slipping in and out of consciousness, he imagines Baba wrestling the bear. He wakes up and discovers he is in the hospital in Peshawar. The people he saw are doctors, and Farid was the man he recognized. Amir's mouth is wired shut. His upper lip is split, the bone of his left eye socket broken, several of his ribs cracked, and his spleen ruptured. Farid and Sohrab are there, and Amir thanks them both. Farid tells Amir that Rahim Khan has gone, but he left a note.

In his note, Rahim Khan says he knew everything that happened with Hassan. Though what Amir did was wrong, he was too hard on himself. He knows Amir suffered because of how Baba treated him, but there was a reason. Because Baba couldn't love Hassan openly, he felt guilty and took it out on Amir, whom Baba thought of as his socially legitimate half. But real good came from Baba's remorse, Rahim Khan says, the orphanage Baba built, the poor that he fed, were his way of redeeming himself. Rahim Khan also leaves Amir a key to a safe-deposit box with money to cover Amir's expenses. He has little time left, he writes, and Amir should not look for him. The next morning, Amir gives Farid the names of the American couple that runs the orphanage. Amir spends the day playing cards with Sohrab, who barely speaks. Amir decides Peshawar isn't safe. Amir leaves for Islamabad and takes Sohrab with him.

Amir and Sohrab arrive in Islamabad. When Amir wakes from a nap, Sohrab is gone. Amir remembers Sohrab's fascination with a mosque they had passed and finds him in the mosque parking lot. They talk a little about their parents, and Sohrab asks if God will put him in hell for what he did to Assef. Amir says Assef deserved more than he got, and Hassan would have been proud of Sohrab for saving Amir's life. Sohrab is glad his parents cannot see him. The sexual abuse he suffered makes him feel dirty and sinful. Amir says he is neither, and asks Sohrab if he wants to live in America with him. For a week Sohrab doesn't give an answer, but one afternoon he asks what San Francisco is like. He says he is scared that Amir or his wife will tire of him. He never wants to go back to an orphanage. Amir promises that won't happen, and after Sohrab agrees to go to America, Amir calls Soraya to explain everything.

The next day, Amir goes to the American embassy. The man there tells Amir the adoption will be almost impossible. Without death certificates, there is no way to prove Sohrab is an orphan. Amir should speak to Omar Faisal, an immigration attorney. Amir and Sohrab see Faisal the next day. He says it will be hard, but there are options. Amir can put Sohrab in an orphanage, file a petition, and wait up to two years for the government to approve the adoption. That night, when Amir tells Sohrab he may have to go back to an orphanage, Sohrab screams that they'll hurt him and cries until he falls asleep in Amir's arms. While he sleeps, Amir talks to Soraya, who tells him that Sharif, a family member who works for the U.S. immigration department, or INS, says there are ways to keep Sohrab in the country once he's in. Amir goes to tell Sohrab and finds him bleeding and unconscious in the bathtub.

Sohrab is rushed to the emergency room. In the hospital waiting area, Amir uses a sheet as a prayer rug and prays for the first time in more than fifteen years. Eventually he falls asleep in a chair and dreams of Sohrab in the bloody water and the razor blade he used to cut himself. A doctor wakes Amir and tells him that Sohrab lost a great deal of blood, but he will live. For several days, Amir stays in the hospital while Sohrab sleeps. When Sohrab awakes,

Amir asks how he feels, but Sohrab doesn't answer. Amir reads to him, but Sohrab pays no attention. Sohrab tells Amir he is tired of everything. He wants his old life back and says Amir should have left him in the water. Amir says he was coming to explain that they found a way for Sohrab to go to America. But Sohrab stops speaking entirely.

Amir and Sohrab arrive in San Francisco in August 2001. General Taheri and Jamila come over for dinner, and while Soraya and Jamila set the table, Amir tells General Taheri about the Taliban and Kabul. General Taheri tiptoes around the subject of Sohrab at first but finally asks why Amir brought back a Hazara boy. Amir says Baba slept with a servant woman. Their son, Hassan, is now dead. Sohrab is Hassan's son and Amir's nephew. Amir tells General Taheri never to call Sohrab a "Hazara boy" in his presence again. After September 11 and the American bombing of Afghanistan that followed, the names of places in Amir's country were suddenly all over. Amir and Soraya take jobs helping to run and raise money for a hospital on the Afghan-Pakistani border, and General Taheri is summoned to Afghanistan for a ministry position.

One rainy day in March 2002, Amir takes Sohrab, Soraya, and Jamila to a gathering of Afghans at a park. There is a tent where people are cooking. Sohrab, who is still not speaking, stands out in the rain, but eventually the weather clears. Soraya points out kites flying in the sky. Amir finds a kite seller, and with the new kite he walks over to Sohrab. While Amir checks the string, he talks about Hassan. Then, with the kite ready, he asks Sohrab if he wants to fly it. Sohrab doesn't answer, but as Amir runs, sending the kite into the air, Sohrab follows him. When Amir offers again, Sohrab takes the string. A green kite approaches for a battle, and while Amir prepares Sohrab he notices Sohrab looks alert. He shows Sohrab what used to be Hassan's favourite trick, and quickly they have the other kite on the defensive. In one move, Amir and Sohrab sever the other kite's string, cutting it loose. People cheer around them, and a brief smile appears on Sohrab's face. Amir asks if he should run the kite for Sohrab, and Sohrab nods. "For you, a thousand times over," Amir says and sets off running.

## 15.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- (i) Who is the narrator?
- (a) Amir
  - (b) Baba
  - (c) Hassan
  - (d) Ali
- (ii) The setting of the novel is in\_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) Kabul/San Francisco
  - (b) Pakistan/San Francisco
  - (c) Afghanistan/Fremont
  - (d) Kabul/Fremont
- (iii) Who is the author of *The Kite Runner*?
- (a) Ayn Rand
  - (b) Khaled Hosseini
  - (c) George Orwell
  - (d) Nathaniel Hawthorne
- (iv) What is Hassan's deformity?
- (a) Half of his face is paralyzed
  - (b) Paraplegic
  - (c) Cleft Lip
  - (d) Quadriplegic
- (v) What does Baba get Amir for his birthday?
- (a) Toy Truck
  - (b) Dictionary
  - (c) Watch
  - (d) Snow Globe

- (vi) What does Rahim Khan get Amir for his birthday?
- (a) Flowers
  - (b) Bible
  - (c) Book of Stories
  - (d) Koran

### **15.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss how the ever-changing politics of Afghanistan affect each of the characters in the novel.
- Q2. Throughout the story, Baba worries because Amir never stands up for himself. When does this change?
- Q3. Amir and Hassan have a favorite story. Does the story have the same meaning for both men? Why does Hassan name his son after one of the characters in the story?

### **15.7 ANSWER KEY**

- (i) a            (ii) a            (iii) b  
(iv) c           (v) c            (vi) c

### **15.8 LET US SUM UP**

Khaled Hosseini's novel presents simply and quietly an intimate account of love, honour, guilt, fear and redemption through the story of Amir. The story is a tale of betrayal and redemption that rises above time and place while simultaneously remaining firmly anchored against the tumultuous backdrop of modern Afghanistan.

### **15.9 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner: Rejacketed*. Bloomsbury: Great Britain, 2003. Print

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**ANALYSIS OF THE CHAPTERS OF NOVEL**  
***THE KITE RUNNER***

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Objectives
- 16.3 Detailed Analysis
- 16.4 Theme of Betrayal and Redemption
- 16.5 Role of Politics and Religion
- 16.6 Motifs and Symbols
- 16.7 Self-Assessment Questions
- 16.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 16.9 Answer Key
- 16.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.11 Suggested Reading

**16.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the novel, Khaled Hosseini deals with different themes, including that of betrayal and redemption and diaspora. The plot of *The Kite Runner* revolves around the protagonist's betrayal of his best friend. In a way, this betrayal drives the rest of the book and perhaps everything that precedes it.

## **16.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to offer learner a comprehensive of the novel. The detailed analysis of the chapters, while drawing inference from the text, reflecting on the underlying thematic concerns.

## **16.3 DETAILED ANALYSIS**

### **Chapters 1-3**

The first three chapters set out the basic facts of the story, including who the major characters are, their backgrounds, and what their relationships with each other are like. The section also establishes a context for the information: Amir, our narrator, is an adult living in the United States and looking back on his childhood years in Afghanistan. In fact, history is an important theme in the novel, and looking back on the past is a recurring motif. That's because, for Amir, the past is not over. He believes it to be a fundamental part of who he is, and no matter how far he is in time or location from his childhood in Afghanistan, the events of that period are always with him. Though it remains unclear why, he feels a tremendous sense of guilt about those events, and he believes they shaped him into who he is. This guilt, in fact, informs the entire narrative. Appropriately, he opens the novel in the present then quickly jumps back in time.

The boy Amir is sensitive, bookish, sometimes selfish, and a little mischievous. He is eager to please Baba, whom he views as a role model he can never live up to. Yet he feels Baba does not love him for certain reasons. Baba, meanwhile, is gruff, hardworking, a little distant from Amir, and very much an independent thinker. Anytime someone said he would fail, he didn't listen, and he always succeeded. He doesn't always listen to religious authorities either, evidenced by the fact that he disregarded Mullah Fatiullah Khan saying it is a sin to drink alcohol. Ali, meanwhile, is dutiful, modest, and quiet. Lastly there's Hassan, who is a loyal and courageous friend. When Amir is threatened, Hassan intervenes. He has his own vulnerabilities, however, particularly regarding his mother.

Significantly, both Hassan and Amir have lost their mothers. They have only their fathers and each other. The relationship between fathers and sons, and between the older generation and the new one, is a major theme of the story. Also, in many ways Amir and Hassan act for each other as a kind of substitute parent, looking out for the other and providing companionship. They are closer than regular friends. They are more like brothers who are on occasion reminded that one is Pashtun and one Hazara. Their relationship plays a central role in the book, and it figures in another theme that is introduced in this section: standing up for what is right. The theme is introduced primarily through Baba, who worries that if Amir can't stand up for himself as a young boy, he may not be able to stand up for what is right as an adult. He says this because he sees Hassan standing up for Amir in fights while Amir appears to back down.

Since Khaled Hosseini's main audience for the book is not Afghan, he familiarizes his readers with life in Afghanistan by explaining some basic facts. Using the characters of Baba and Amir on one side and Ali and Hassan on the other he lays out all the divisions—economic, ethnic, and religious—present in the country during the late 1970s. Baba and Amir, for instance, are rich and live in a large mansion, while Ali and Hassan are poor and live in a small hut on Baba's property. Related is the difference in the health of the rich and the poor, who cannot afford proper medicine. Baba and Amir are both healthy, but Ali and Hassan both suffer from problems affecting their faces. Furthermore, Baba and Amir embody the Pashtun population, whereas Ali and Hassan are part of the Hazara minority, a group subjected to relentless racism in Afghanistan. A related divide in religions is also present: like most Pashtuns, Baba and Amir are Sunni Muslim, while Ali and Hassan, like most Hazaras, are Shia Muslim.

One additional divide hinted at in this section is that between Islamic fundamentalists, such as Amir's teacher, Mullah Fatiullah Khan, and more liberal Afghans like Baba. The eventual takeover of Afghanistan by the radical Islamic fundamentalists called the Taliban is foreshadowed early in the novel.



## Chapters 4-5

The relationship between ordinary people such as Hassan and Amir, and political events like Daoud Khan's coup become the focus. The fates of Zahir Shah and Baba as well as the fates of those dependent on Baba like Amir, Hassan, and Ali are all bound together in a sense. When Daoud Khan, in a bloodless coup, takes over in Chapter 5, we know that the lives of our characters are about to change, even if we aren't sure how. Amir's and Hassan's encounter with the racist boy Assef is a hint: the change is not going to be for the better. The rules that govern life in Kabul have been stirred up, and power balances have shifted. Bloodshed and violence may be in store. We witness this from the perspective of Amir, a young boy who does not know what it means that Afghanistan has become a republic.

Amir also talks about how prevalent American culture was in the country during this time. The movies Amir and Hassan love most are western starring American actors, notably John Wayne and Charles Bronson. The movies are dubbed into Farsi, and the boys spend their money on Coca Cola, one of America's biggest exports, as well as Afghan snacks like rosewater ice cream and pistachios. Baba even drives a black Ford Mustang. Though Assef, the bully, never speaks of these things specifically, he does talk about Afghanistan's purity. It is not just ethnic purity that Assef and others like him are after, but also cultural purity. The aim is a pure Pashtun people and culture, and the prevalence of American culture in Afghanistan threatens this goal. As a result, the influence of American culture in Afghanistan wiped out almost entirely during the years that Amir calls the end of Afghanistan as they know it.

In fact, the overall theme of the section is change, in politics, in society, and in the personal lives of Amir and Hassan.

Hassan also undergoes a change: his cleft lip is repaired. The deformity is something Hassan has known all his life. It is, in a way, a marker of who he is: a poor servant boy. The surgery removes that marker, and again it is

as if a balance is upset. We can expect things to change between the boys, though it is unclear at this point how they will change.

The adult Amir, who is telling the story, recognizes several things about his younger self that he evidently didn't realize while he was still a boy. He sees that he was selfish, for example, that he wanted to be the best at everything, and didn't want Hassan to be as good. The young Amir genuinely felt that Hassan was beneath him because of Hassan's poverty, ethnicity, religion, and deformity. Whenever Hassan does something that earns Baba's love and respect, Amir lashes out at him in his thoughts.

Reinforcing the theme of love and tension between fathers and sons that recurs throughout the story is Amir's and Hassan's favorite story *Rostam and Sohrab*, which is about a father that fatally stabs an opponent not knowing until too late that the opponent is his son. For Amir, the story represents his relationship with Baba. Complicating Amir's feelings toward Baba further is his relationship with Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan read Amir's story when Baba would not, giving Amir the attention and approval he craved, and Amir even wishes at that point that Rahim Khan was his father. The fact is, Amir desperately wants Baba's approval, yet he has no idea how to get it.

### **Chapters 6-7**

Many of the tensions that have been building till now, such as the treatment of Hazaras by Pashtuns, Amir's desperation to please his father, and the question of whether he can stand up for what is right, come together in the events of this section. The central event is Hassan's rape, and it will be the catalyst that propels the rest of the novel forward. This event is the source of the guilt Amir feels as an adult, and it is why the image of the alleyway, the place where Hassan was raped while he stood by and watched, stays with him. Hassan, we are led to infer, is the kite runner of the book's title, and Amir tells us the story both as a confession and an act of penance. He wants to atone for his sins, and in fact atonement will become a major theme. Two

other important themes also converge in the single image of Amir struggling with the decision to intervene while Assef, a rich Pashtun boy with a powerful father, rapes Hassan, a poor Hazara. This image conveys the challenge and importance of doing what is right, and the rape of Afghanistan's powerless by those who have power.

In terms of Amir's character growth, his desperation to please his father, which we have witnessed throughout the story, plays a significant part in causing the events of the section. Although Amir feels paralyzed by fear when he sees what is happening, he admits that his main reason for not intervening is selfish. When Baba was a boy, he won the kite-fighting tournament. Though Amir had always done well in the competition, even making it to the final, he had never won. To finally please Baba, Amir feels he must show Baba he is like him by winning the tournament and bringing home the kite of his final opponent. Only then will Baba forgive Amir for killing the woman who was Baba's wife and Amir's mother. Amir does not stop Assef from raping Hassan first and foremost because he wants the kite to bring to Baba, and Hassan is the price he has to pay.

A terrible irony exists in the fact that Amir allows his friend to be raped in exchange for a prize that he believes will earn him Baba's love. Baba's greatest concern regarding Amir is that he will grow up to be a man who can't stand up for what is right, evident in what he said to Rahim Khan earlier in the novel. If Amir had stood up for Hassan but lost the kite in the process, he still could have proved that he has the courage to do the right thing even when it is frightening or dangerous to do so. Perhaps more than he could have by any other action, he would have shown Baba that he is like him. Instead, he runs away because he wants the kite to please Baba, inadvertently doing exactly the opposite of what Baba would want. As the adult Amir narrates his story, he seems to be aware of the irony of his own history, and he even hints at it earlier in the novel, when he describes Rahim Khan telling him that his understanding of irony is clear from his story about the man who cries pearls.

## Chapters 8-9

Further ironies stemming from Amir's sacrifice of Hassan come to light in this section. Amir is unable to fully enjoy Baba's attention. He is so consumed by a different guilt—guilt over his inaction during Hassan's rape—that he is constantly miserable. During the trip to Jalalabad, he tries to rid himself of this weight. While everyone is sleeping, he says aloud that he saw Hassan raped, hoping someone will hear him. But no one does, and Amir recognizes that his curse is getting away with it. What's more, when he asks Baba if he would ever consider new servants, Baba is so upset he tells Amir that he is ashamed of him. A similar event occurs at Amir's birthday party, when Baba is embarrassed by Amir's rudeness toward Assef. In other words, Amir's guilt leads him to do things that result in loss of Baba's approval. Rather than gaining everything he wants, Amir loses the happiness he had.

Amir does not know how to deal with his feelings of guilt and unhappiness after Hassan's rape. At first he tries to keep away from Hassan, who becomes a constant reminder to Amir of his own cowardice and selfishness. He seems to think avoiding Hassan means he won't feel these things any longer. But Hassan is a part of the household, so Amir can never escape him completely. When the two are face-to-face, Amir wishes Hassan would punish him. Hassan, however, will not retaliate, and this becomes the greatest torment for Amir. Hassan proves that his love and loyalty to Amir are unshakable, whereas Amir proves that his love and loyalty are weak. One of Amir's constant fears is realized: Hassan emerges as the stronger, better person. Amir cannot tolerate this truth and engineers a plan to make Ali and Hassan leave. Yet his guilt is only heightened when Hassan admits to stealing the money and watch. Amir recognizes that Hassan is sacrificing himself again, despite knowing that Amir did not do the same for him when he was raped.

There are also more examples in this section of the injustices against Hazaras. When Rahim Khan's father becomes angry because Rahim Khan wants to marry a Hazara woman, he resolves the problem not by moving his own family, but by sending away the Hazara woman and her family. Similarly,

to resolve the tension between Hassan and Amir, Ali decides that they will leave. Both the Hazara family from Rahim Khan's story and Ali and Hassan go to Hazarajat, an isolated, mountainous region in central Afghanistan that is principally inhabited by Hazaras. But perhaps the most poignant image of the injustice toward Hazaras is the moment Amir witnesses Hassan serving drinks to Assef and Wali from a silver platter. Hassan cannot do anything about the rape because of his inferior status as a poor Hazara, and Assef, whose family is rich and powerful, knows it. Hassan dutifully serves Assef, the boy who raped him, and Assef expresses no remorse or shame during the encounter. Instead, he grins at Hassan and kneads him in the chest tauntingly with his knuckle.

### **Chapters 10-11**

The first half of the section primarily describes Baba's and Amir's horrific journey, first to Jalalabad and finally into Peshawar, Pakistan. It also gives some detail about how Kabul has changed in the roughly five years that have elapsed since.

To Baba, for whom doing the right thing is so important, the loss of honor and decency in Afghanistan is perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall his country. The atrocities described, including the Russian guard's attempted rape of the woman in the truck and the rape of Kamal that is implied, are examples of how the rule of law had essentially collapsed.

The move to America represents two completely different things to Amir and Baba. In California, Baba feels disconnected from everything he knows. In Kabul, he was wealthy and respected. In California, he earns low wages working at a gas station. Baba is perpetually frustrated. In small ways, he continues trying to reclaim his life in Kabul, like when he buys everyone drinks the night of Amir's graduation.

Amir also feels disconnected from everything he knew in Kabul, but for him this disconnection has a different meaning. He sees it as an opportunity for a new beginning, and he thinks of America as a place where he can literally

escape his past. Most significantly, it is a place where he doesn't have to be reminded of Hassan and the rape. The metaphor Amir chooses to describe America is a river. Here, the metaphor has two meanings that are related but separate. First, a river always moves forward. In other words, it is always moving towards the future and never towards the past. Second, the river is a common symbol for washing away sin.

### **Chapters 12-13**

The different events of this section all revolve around one focus: Amir becoming a man. He marries and makes love for the first time. He loses Baba and becomes fully responsible for himself. He also completes and publishes his first novel, establishing his career as a writer. In all of these events, Amir experiences a profound mix of joy and pain. Embracing independence and adulthood also requires him letting go of his childhood dependence on Baba. To Amir, it is clear for the first time why Baba has always treated him the way he has. He was preparing Amir to take care of himself and to know right from wrong. In other words, he was teaching Amir to be a man. In his transition to adulthood, Amir also transits from one family to another. At the beginning of the section he is a boy living in his father's house. At the end, he is a man with a wife and his own home. What Baba does witness of this makes him happy, and he dies proud of Amir. Only one crucial thing remains missing for Amir. He wants to have a child.

Despite Amir's growth into an adult, one part of his childhood he does not let go of. He still feels guilty about Hassan. This guilt, though it is not prominent as it once was, still rises to the surface on occasion. Sometimes Amir simply wonders about him, as when he wonders if Hassan has married. Other times his guilt is more pronounced. When Soraya tells Amir about the time she ran away with another man, Amir actually feels jealous that she is able to speak about the incident. For Soraya, her secret is an event in the past that is done and over with. For Amir, however, his secret is very much still present, and he still cannot talk about it. Amir feels that, until he is able to atone for his treatment of Hassan, it will continue to haunt him.

Another subject of the section is the way the Afghan refugees, Amir and Baba included, preserve their culture in California. In the US, no controversy results from a young man and woman speaking in public without adults present. For Afghans, however, such encounters are not entirely appropriate. Certain customs must be followed. General Taheri feels the need to remind Amir of this fact when he sees Amir speaking with Soraya. He tells Amir he is among Afghan peers. The message is clear: they may be in California, but Afghanistan is still present, and Amir should act accordingly. From that point forward Amir's courtship of Soraya and then the wedding all happens in a more traditional fashion. Baba is the one who proposes the marriage to General Taheri. The wedding takes place in an Afghan banquet hall, and the ceremony follows Afghan customs, such as Amir and Soraya gazing at each other's reflection in a mirror while they are covered with a veil. Traditional Afghan culture is not always positive, however, and the section slips in some comments on the way it treats women.

### **Chapters 14-15**

The call Amir receives from Rahim Khan at the beginning of the section is the same one he refers to in the book's first chapter. The narrative has almost come back to the present, though some important events need to occur before that happens completely. Amir has not spoken to Rahim Khan for twenty years, and hearing from him visibly shakes Amir. He is upset to hear that Rahim Khan is ill, but the call upsets him for another reason, which becomes clear when he takes his walk to Golden Gate Park and watches the kites flying. He realizes that Rahim Khan knows about everything that happened with Hassan, evident in Rahim Khan's comment to Amir that he knows of a way for Amir to be good again. Amir is again reminded of his treatment of Hassan, and despite the life Amir has made for himself in California, he will not be free of this guilt until he finds a way to make up for letting Hassan be raped and then falsely accusing Hassan of stealing from him.

Though Amir does not yet know how to atone for his sins against Hassan, two hints about how he will do it occur in the section. The only things keeping Amir from being completely happy are his guilt and the fact that he and Soraya are unable to have a child. For Amir, these have become linked into one feeling of emptiness. To underscore the way Amir links the two, as he lies in bed with Soraya he thinks first of their inability to have a baby, then dreams of Hassan running in the snow.

Once he arrives in Pakistan, Amir begins to realize the extent of what has happened to the people of Afghanistan and the events that have destroyed Kabul in the time he has been away. When the cab driver takes him through “Afghan Town,” for instance, Amir sees children covered in dirt and selling cigarettes along the road, indicating that they are poor. Although they were forced to leave everything behind, Amir and Baba were lucky in the sense that they were able to make it to the United States and to some degree rebuild their lives. Based on Rahim Khan’s description, it’s evident that the fighting destroyed everything, from the buildings Amir knew to the way of life he remembers in Kabul.

### **Chapters 16-17**

The events of this section, which largely recount what happened to Hassan in the time since Baba and Amir left for Pakistan, deftly tie together several of the book’s thematic elements: the pain of guilt, the hatefulness of racial prejudice, the challenge of acting against injustice, the value of loyalty, the love as well as the discord between fathers and sons, and the role history plays in private lives. We do not learn all the details of Hassan’s life, but we learn the basics. Most importantly, we now know that he had a son, Sohrab. In many ways, Hassan’s relationship with Sohrab acts as indirect proof that Hassan never forgot Amir. Naming the boy after a character in his and Amir’s favourite story is one example. Hassan also did with Sohrab all the things he and Amir used to enjoy, such as going to the movies and flying kites. The relationship between Hassan and Sohrab also adds a new dimension to the theme of fathers and sons that runs through



the novel. It is perhaps the most loving father-son relationship we see in the book, making it all the more painful when we learn that Hassan is dead.

Hassan's murder is important for many reasons. It plays multiple roles in the section, and in the novel as a whole. For instance, it brings together two of the story's major themes. His death is presented as a combination of the political strife ravaging Kabul and the entrenched prejudice against Hazaras that has turned up repeatedly in the novel. Two members of the Taliban, who at this point control Kabul without competition, shoot Hassan. Conspicuously, the men are not punished for killing Hassan and Farzana. The suggestion is that, to these men, the lives of Hazaras have no value, or at least not enough value to punish anyone for ending them.

Hassan's death also marks a turning point in Amir's quest for redemption. To Amir, the news of Hassan's murder means not only that he has lost his friend forever, but also that he can never apologize to Hassan for allowing his rape and then lying about him stealing Amir's birthday money. Making up for these actions was part of the reason he traveled to Pakistan in the first place. Initially, the story suggests that Amir will have to live with his guilt permanently, but Rahim Khan says one way remains for him to make amends. Amir can go to Kabul, find Sohrab, and bring him back to Pakistan where he can be taken care of. The request is not Rahim Khan's alone. Hassan said in his letter to Amir that the most important thing for him was to survive so that Sohrab would not become an orphan. With Hassan and Farzana dead and Rahim Khan ill, Amir is perhaps the only person who can make sure Sohrab is not abandoned.

Going to Kabul becomes a test of Amir's honour, loyalty, and manhood. Amir is clearly afraid to go. He knows the city is extremely dangerous, and in returning there he would risk everything he has, including his life and the welfare of his family. Kabul will also undoubtedly recall memories of Hassan and his past that Amir would rather not confront. Rahim Khan recognizes that the decision is a difficult one for Amir. To convince

him, he brings up the conversation he once had with Baba, when Baba said he feared that Amir would not be able to stand up to anything as a man if he could not stand up for himself as a boy. Amir concedes that Baba may have been right. Then Rahim Khan reveals that Ali was not Hassan's father, and implies that Hassan was, in fact, Baba's child. Hassan and Amir, then, would be half-brothers, and Sohrab would be Amir's nephew, obligating Amir further to find the boy. The dilemma brings together the tensions Amir has struggled with in the novel. By rescuing Sohrab, Amir can become the man that Baba always wanted him to be, and he can finally atone for the ways he failed for Hassan as a friend.

### **Chapters 18-19**

Another irony appears in this section: Amir realizes he is more like Baba than he thought. However, what they share is betrayal of their best friends. Baba had betrayed Ali, his closest friend since childhood, by sleeping with Sanaubar. As Amir says, having sex with a man's wife was the worst possible way an Afghan man could be dishonored. Amir had similarly betrayed Hassan. But despite all Baba's lies, Amir sees that Baba was correct to say that Amir always let someone else fight his battles for him. Though Amir never says so explicitly, he knows he is doing what Baba would have done in the situation when he resolves to go to Kabul to find Sohrab. The situation presents a further twist of irony in that Amir realizes he can share in Baba's greatest virtue, the courage to do what is right, only after he has recognized that he shares Baba's greatest failing as well. If Amir saves Sohrab, both he and Baba will be pardoned, at least to some degree, for the ways they betrayed their dearest and closest friends.

Amir's guilt over the way he treated Hassan also plays a significant role in his decision to return to Kabul. As Amir leaves Rahim Khan's house, Amir wonders if the chain of events that followed from his coercing Hassan and Ali out of Baba's house eventually led to Ali stepping on a landmine and to Hassan being shot. Had Amir acted differently, Ali and Hassan never would have left for Hazarajat, and both might still be alive now. Through

this logic, Amir has made himself responsible for their deaths. He realizes he cannot save them, but a piece of Hassan lives on in Sohrab. By rescuing Sohrab, Amir will figuratively rescue Hassan as well. With this in mind, and the knowledge that he still has time to begin fighting for himself, Amir returns to Rahim Khan's house to tell him he will make the trip back to Afghanistan.

### **Chapters 20-21**

As Amir and Farid look for Sohrab, the reader sees through Amir's eyes more of the devastation of Kabul. The city is now completely unfamiliar to Amir, and he looks at it almost as a tourist, as Farid called Amir in the previous section. His description sounds at times like science fiction. Littered with rubble, populated by beggars, the city has become a post-apocalyptic nightmare. In a scene that vividly represents Afghanistan's desperation, Farid points out to Amir one man trying to sell his prosthetic leg to another man, who haggles with him over the price. There are few real signs of life left, made clear by the fact that not even trees remain, rendering the landscape oddly desolate.

The public stoning that Farid and Amir witness at the stadium is an example of Taliban law. The Taliban claims to enforce Sharia, the law that all Muslims are supposed to follow. Because Islam makes no distinction between religious and non-religious matters, Sharia governs everything from business ethics to criminal justice, which is why a cleric rather than a judge or some other secular official comes out to speak to the crowd before the stoning begins. Many Muslims, however, believe the Taliban used Sharia as a way to oppress women and justify their violent behavior. In fact, most of the Muslims Amir speaks with, including Zaman and Rahim Khan, deplore the society the Taliban has created, underscoring the point that the Islamic state the Taliban established is not supported with all Muslims.

The book hints at the corruption of the Taliban by having a Taliban official taking girls and boys from the orphanage. We do not know at this point why the official is taking the children, but the unspoken implication is

that the official is sexually abusing them. Whatever the case, the official is clearly misusing his position of power. As Zaman, the orphanage director, tells Farid after Farid strangles him, he has not been paid in six months and has already spent his life savings on the orphanage. Without the official's money, he is unable to feed the children in his care. Furthermore, if he protests, the official takes ten children instead of one. Much as Hassan was powerless to do anything against Assef, Zaman is now powerless against the Taliban official, and it is Sohrab, Hassan's orphaned son, who is the victim. Again, it is a case of the powerful in Afghanistan taking advantage of the powerless.

### **Chapters 22-23**

The climax of the novel, in which Amir is finally able to atone for his past, occurs in Amir's fight against Assef. In another instance of irony, Amir discovers the Taliban official he must rescue Sohrab from is the same person that raped Hassan all those years ago. Yet the bizarre coincidence also creates a situation in which Amir is able to confront the same scenario that was the source of his guilt more than twenty years earlier. From the way Assef touches Sohrab and what he says to Amir, Amir has no doubt at this point that Assef has been sexually abusing Sohrab. Because Sohrab represents a living piece of Hassan, Assef continues a figurative rape of Hassan. But Amir is now in a position to stop this. He can do what Baba always hoped he would and stand up for what is right. As Rahim Khan put it, it is his way to be good again.

Representing the idea of an eye for an eye, Assef gets what he deserves. For Amir, the situation means he can now intervene in Hassan's rape, at least symbolically, by saving Sohrab from further sexual abuse. Though Assef brutally beats Amir, Amir's goal isn't to win the fight. The fact that he did not run is what's important, and as Amir says, in a way he welcomes the beating. It is the punishment he deserved for his actions toward Hassan, but which he never received. It is the reason he feels relief and a sense of healing as Assef beats him, and why he begins laughing.

Amir's laughter establishes a significant parallel between Amir and Assef. Before he challenges Amir to a fight, Assef tells a story about the time he was imprisoned. He says he began to laugh as a guard kicked him because it ended the pain he suffered from his kidney stone. Amir's laughing, though stemming from the relief of a different pain, clearly mirrors Assef's. In fact, the novel establishes a few similarities between Amir and Assef. Both Amir and Assef are Pashtuns from wealthy, well-connected families, and they shared similar upbringings. They represent a particular part of Afghan society, namely the ruling powers. In his note to Amir, Rahim Khan even tells Amir that Baba thought of him as the socially legitimate part of his life, the part that inherited wealth and with it a freedom from punishment, which made Baba feel guilty.

Hassan, on the other hand, represented the poor and oppressed part of Afghanistan. He was the illegitimate boy whom Baba wanted to love but could never love publicly. In this context, Amir and Hassan act as the different sides of their country—the rich and poor, Sunni and Shia, Pashtun and Hazara, powerful and powerless—who are nonetheless still children of the same father. In allowing Assef to rape Hassan, Amir became complicit in the domination of the powerless by the powerful. Only by intervening on behalf of Sohrab, essentially sacrificing himself as Hassan once sacrificed himself for him, does Amir redeem himself. He takes a stand against this domination, and in doing so he is left with a split upper lip, recalling Hassan's cleft lip. In Hassan's case, his cleft lip acted as a kind of mark of his position in society. For Amir it is a symbol of his sacrifice, and it signifies the union of Afghanistan's two halves. Through Amir, Khaled Hosseini subtly suggests that if Afghanistan is to atone for its own guilty history of violence and discrimination, it must redeem itself through a similar stand and a similar sacrifice. It is the way for Afghanistan to be good again.

### **Chapters 24-25**

The ending of the book is not exactly a happy one, and not all loose ends are tied up neatly. It is not certain that the characters we have come to know will get what they want. It is quite the opposite, in fact, and for Sohrab

in particular there are fresh wounds that will leave permanent scars. The near endless abuse he has suffered is manifest in almost everything he does. Because of the physical and sexual abuse Assef and the Taliban inflicted on him, he flinches every time Amir reaches out to touch him. He also bathes for long periods because he feels he is literally dirty as a result of his rape. Because of this abuse, as well as the abandonment he experienced when Hassan and Farzana were murdered, he is so terrified of going back to an orphanage, even temporarily, that he tries to kill himself. After he recovers, he says only that he wants his old life back. He stops speaking entirely, instead withdrawing into himself as if into a protective shell, completely unable to trust or open up to another person. In the pink scars on his wrists, he is left with a permanent mark of his trauma. Like everyone in the novel, he may move beyond the past, but he can never undo it.

Amir's redemption is not perfect either. As his feelings of guilt return in the aftermath of Sohrab's attempted suicide, he feels that, because he was going to break the promise he made never to send Sohrab back to an orphanage, it is his fault Sohrab tried to kill himself. As Amir prays in the hospital waiting room, he thinks the sins he committed against Hassan in the past are being revisited on him now. He is responsible now for Sohrab's suicide, for instance, just as he was responsible for the chain of events that led to Hassan's death. Furthermore, because he once pushed Hassan away when Hassan needed him most, God is now taking Sohrab as punishment. Even the relief from his past feelings that he does experience is not uplifting and transformative. He knows, for example, his guilt over his relationship with Baba was gone only because he feels no sting when he thinks Baba may have considered Hassan his true son.

With all this, Khaled Hosseini suggests a general lesson about life: that there are no simple solutions to such emotionally and historically complex problems as those we have seen throughout the novel. In a perfectly just world, Amir would have been able to adopt Sohrab without any difficulty and bring

him home to a wonderful new life. For that matter, in a perfectly just world, few of the novel's significant events would have occurred at all. At one point, Amir describes an experience he had at a video store in California. A man was looking at a copy of "The Magnificent Seven," and Amir, who had seen the movie 13 times, gave away the ending. In such movies, the ending reveals the point of the journey. Does the good guy win or does the bad guy? Does the love affair end tragically or happily? Amir isn't sure exactly how his story ends. Life, he says, is not a movie. Of course, it is Khaled Hosseini, the author, putting these thoughts in the head of his fictional creation. But in doing so, he proposes something about the goal of fiction. If fiction wants to be true to life, it cannot provide easy answers to life's intractable problems.

Despite this dose of wary realism, Hosseini ends his often painful novel with hope. Flying the kite with Sohrab, Amir feels like a boy again, and for that time at least, he is innocent. It is also the first real connection he feels to Sohrab since Sohrab stopped speaking. Flying the kite is his link to Sohrab much as it was once his link to Baba. The lifeless, vacant look leaves Sohrab's eyes as he gets ready to battle the other kite, and half a smile peeks out from his face, which is enough to mark the beginning of Sohrab's recovery in Amir's mind. A portent of what's to come, Sohrab's smile implies that the abuses of the past cannot dominate him or anyone forever, and that eventually Amir, Sohrab, and Afghanistan will look to the future and be healed. The novel comes full circle as it ends, with Amir going to run the kite for Sohrab. He says to Sohrab the last words Hassan said to him before Hassan was raped, but despite the fact that those were the circumstances the last time these words appeared in the book, the hopeful tone suggests Amir has paid his penance and found his redemption.

#### **16.4 THEME OF BETRAYAL AND REDEMPTION**

Betrayal, which can be considered a form of sin, is enduring and ends up being cyclical in *The Kite Runner*. Amir's quest to redeem himself makes up the heart of the novel. Early on, Amir strives to redeem himself in Baba's

eyes, primarily because his mother died giving birth to him, and he feels responsible. To redeem himself to Baba, Amir thinks he must win the kite-tournament and bring Baba the losing kite, both of which are inciting incidents that set the rest of the novel in motion. The more substantial part of Amir's search for redemption, however, stems from his guilt regarding Hassan.

For most of the novel, Amir attempts to deal with his guilt by avoiding it. But doing this clearly does nothing towards redeeming himself, and thus his guilt endures. That is why he still cringes every time Hassan's name is mentioned. When Amir finds out about Baba's betrayal of Ali (and subsequent betrayal of Hassan), he realizes that everything he thought he knew and understood about his father was false. And Amir himself feels betrayed. But Baba has been dead for fifteen years, and there is nothing he can do about the situation.

Neither feelings of betrayal nor punishment are enough to redeem Amir. That guilt drives the climactic events of the story, including Amir's journey to Kabul to find Sohrab and his confrontation with Assef. The moral standard Amir must meet to earn his redemption is set early in the book, when Baba says that a boy who doesn't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything. As a boy, Amir fails to stand up for himself. As an adult, he can only redeem himself by proving he has the courage to stand up for what is right. Rescuing Sohrab from Assef is not enough either. Only when Amir decides to take Sohrab to the United States and provide his nephew a chance at happiness and prosperity that was denied to his half-brother does Amir take the necessary steps toward atonement and redemption.

## **16.5 ROLE OF POLITICS AND RELIGION**

The major events of the novel, while framed in the context of Amir's life, follow Afghanistan's transitions as well. In Amir's recollections of his childhood, we see the calm state of Kabul during the monarchy, the founding of the republic, and then watch as the Soviet invasion and infighting between



rival Afghan groups ruin the country. These events have a hand in dictating the novel's plot and have significant effects on the lives of the characters involved. The establishment of the republic gives Assef an opportunity to harass Amir, simply because Assef's father knows the new president. Later, Kabul's destruction forces Baba and Amir to flee to California. When the Taliban took over after that, they murdered Hassan and even gave Assef a position that let him indulge his sadism and sexual urges without repercussions. Both of these events factor into Amir's mission to save Sohrab and his redemption by confronting Assef, subtly implying that Afghanistan will similarly have its own redemption one day.

Though it is rarely the main focus, religion is nearly always present in Amir's narrative. It is part of the culture of Afghanistan, and it is accordingly a fixture of the everyday life Amir describes. Amir creates a complex portrait of both the positive and negative traits of religion, with the negative always stemming from fundamentalists who use their beliefs as an excuse to carry out violence against others and to limit people's freedom. From what we learn of Baba's feelings toward religion, this is not surprising. The first significant episode in the book involving religion, for instance, occurs when Amir, who is still a child, tells Baba that the mullah at school called drinking alcohol a sin as Baba pours a glass of whiskey. Immediately, the scene establishes a contrast between Baba and the mullah. Baba calls the mullah and men like him bearded idiots and explains to Amir that theft, in its many variations, is the only true sin. Baba obviously does not respect the beliefs of the mullah, yet he still has his own moral code. Amir consequently grows up with a strong sense of morality, though it is entirely separate from Islam.

Yet religion also has a major role in determining the direction that Afghanistan takes in the years after Baba and Amir flee to the United States. Although Amir's narrative does not give a clear step-by-step account of the political events in Afghanistan, the reader does know that fighting continued in the country even after the departure of the Russians, called the Shorawi.

Ultimately, the Taliban emerged with control, and from Amir's narrative we learn that many of the Afghans who left their country think the Islamist government the group has created is simply a means for them to justify their violence and authoritarian rule. The character that most represents this image of the Taliban is Assef, who tells Amir that he felt liberated while massacring Hazaras in their homes because he knew God was on his side. Ultimately, however, Assef's violence becomes his downfall when Sohrab shoots his eye out, and later, when Sohrab has tried to kill himself, Amir has something of a religious conversion when Sohrab survives after Amir prays for God's help. Amir becomes an observant Muslim after that, but not a fundamentalist, making the case that religion is as good as the person practicing it.

## 16.6 MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

**Rape:** Rape recurs throughout the novel. The most significant instances of rape are Assef's rape of Hassan and his later rape of Sohrab. Hassan's rape is the source of Amir's guilt, which motivates his search for redemption, while stopping Sohrab's rape becomes Amir's way of redeeming himself. In each case, rape is a critical element in the novel's plot. Other instances of rape include Baba stopping the rape of the woman in the truck with them as they flee Kabul, and the rape of Kamal that Kamal's father implies. As a motif, rape is important for multiple reasons. It is not just physically violent, but it is also an attack on the victim's emotions and dignity. Rape in this sense represents complete physical and mental domination of those who don't have power by those who do, and the victims of rape that we see in the novel, most notably Hassan and Sohrab, always suffer lasting emotional trauma.

**Irony:** The adult Amir clearly recognizes the ironies in his own story. The novel's greatest irony centers on Amir's choice not to stop Hassan's rape. Amir doesn't intervene because he wants Baba's approval, which he knows he can earn by bringing home the kite and proving that he, like Baba, is a winner. But by not stopping Assef and the others, Amir becomes

exactly the sort of coward Baba worried Amir would become, and unwittingly allows Baba's son—and his own brother—to be raped, as he does not yet know that Baba is Hassan's father. Amir ultimately wants to be happy, but instead he earns himself an overwhelming sense of guilt. There is a further irony in the fact that Amir only realizes how much he resembles Baba when he discovers that Baba conceived Hassan with Sanaubar, Ali's wife. Amir wants to share the best of Baba's traits, but instead what they share is the betrayal of their best friends. Another significant irony is the fact that Assef, who raped Hassan and caused Amir's guilt, becomes the way for Amir to atone. Amir is emotionally healed by taking the beating Assef gives him. In each instance, the irony stems from Amir recognizing the unintended consequences of his actions or desires.

**Regressing in Time:** Amir does not exactly have flashbacks which will suddenly put him back in the midst of an earlier event. Instead he repeatedly moves the story back in time to give a history of what he is talking about. The novel begins with him living in San Francisco, for instance, then immediately jumps back to his childhood in Kabul. Shortly after that, he jumps back yet again, this time to Baba's and Ali's childhood. When he meets Rahim Khan in Pakistan, Rahim Khan starts his own story by going back in time and telling Amir what Hassan's life has been like. Amir tells his story to a reader who has no knowledge of any of this beforehand, and his choice to regress in time and give the back story of each character does two things: it provides critical information about the character's history, and it also reinforces the thematic idea that the past defines the present.

**The Cleft Lip:** Hassan's cleft lip is one of his most representative features as a child, and it is one of the features Amir refers to most in describing him. The split in Hassan's lip acts as a mark of Hassan's status in society. It signifies his poverty, which is one of the things that separate him from Amir, simply because a cleft lip indicates that he and his family do not have the money to fix the deformity. Baba, who is Hassan's biological father,

chooses to pay a surgeon to repair Hassan's lip as a birthday gift, signifying his secret fatherly love for Hassan. Later, Assef splits Amir's lip as he beats him, leaving Amir with a permanent scar much like Hassan's. In a sense, Amir's identity becomes merged with Hassan's. He learns to stand up for those he cares about, as Hassan once did for him, and he becomes a father figure to Sohrab. Because of this, it also serves as a sign of Amir's redemption.

**Kites:** The kite serves as a symbol of Amir's happiness as well as his guilt. Flying kites is what he enjoys most as a child, not least because it is the only way that he connects fully with Baba, who was once a champion kite fighter. But the kite takes on a different significance when Amir allows Hassan to be raped because he wants to bring the blue kite back to Baba. His recollections after that portray the kite as a sign of his betrayal of Hassan. Amir does not fly a kite again until he does so with Sohrab at the end of the novel. Because Amir has already redeemed himself by that point, the kite is no longer a symbol of his guilt. Instead, it acts as a reminder of his childhood, and it also becomes the way that he is finally able to connect with Sohrab, mirroring the kite's role in Amir's relationship with Baba.

**The Lamb:** In Islam, as in Christianity, the lamb signifies the sacrifice of an innocent. Amir describes both Hassan and Sohrab as looking like lambs waiting to be slaughtered. Amir says this during Hassan's rape, noting that Hassan resembled the lamb they kill during the Muslim celebration of Eid Al-Adha, which honors Abraham's near sacrifice of his son for God. Similarly, he describes Sohrab as looking like a slaughter sheep when he first sees Sohrab with Assef. Assef and the others had put mascara on Sohrab's eyes, just as Amir says the mullah used to do to the sheep before slitting its throat. Both Hassan and Sohrab are innocents who are figuratively sacrificed by being raped, but these sacrifices have very different meanings. In Hassan's case, Amir sacrifices him for the blue kite. But in Sohrab's case, Amir is the one who stops his sexual abuse. In this context, sacrifice is portrayed as the exploitation of an innocent.

## 16.7 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Q 1. According to Amir, what are the things that most connect him to his father?
- (a) Kites
  - (b) Music
  - (c) Poetry
  - (d) Short stories
- Q 2. As Assef sodomizes Hassan, Amir compares the look he sees on Hassan's face to what?
- (a) A cat's face
  - (b) A resistant goat
  - (c) A sacrificial lamb
  - (d) A sterile bull
- Q 3. From what does Baba die?
- (a) A heart attack
  - (b) A land mine
  - (c) Cancer
  - (d) Old age
- Q4. From what does Ali die?
- (a) A heart attack
  - (b) A land mine
  - (c) Cancer
  - (d) Old age
- Q5. In the end, what does Amir ultimately do surrounding Hassan's being sodomized?
- (a) He fights Assef

- (b) He runs
- (c) He tells an old man in the bazaar
- (d) He yells at Assef to stop

Q6. In which Afghanistan city do Amir and Hassan grow up?

- (a) Heart
- (b) Kabul
- (c) Kandahar
- (d) Kunduz

### 16.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1. Baba never tells Amir he fathered Hassan. Amir never tells Baba he left Hassan in the alleyway, or that he put the watch and money under Hassan's mattress. What role does silence play in the novel?
- Q2. What role does religion play in the lives of Baba, Amir, and Assef, and in the novel as a whole?
- Q3. How does the author, Khaled Hosseini, use irony in the novel?
- Q4. What is the significance of rape in the novel?
- Q5. How do Amir and Hassan represent the divisions in Afghan society, and how do these divisions affect the courses their lives take?

### 16.9 ANSWER KEY

- |         |        |
|---------|--------|
| (i) a   | (ii) c |
| (iii) c | (iv) b |
| (v) b   | (vi) b |

### 16.10 LET US SUM UP

There are two major relationships in *The Kite Runner*. One is between the protagonist and his father. The other is between the protagonist and his

best friend. Because the protagonist's best friend is also his servant, though, and a member of the discriminated against ethnic minority, the novel presents a relationship that is fairly complex. Furthermore, religion and political changes also play a role in drawing the course of people's lives.

#### **16.11 SUGGESTED READING**

1. *A Study Guide for Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner."* Gale and Cengage Learning: Farmington Hills, 2015. Print.

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***MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN - PART I***

**STRUCTURE**

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Objectives
- 17.3 *Midnight's Children*, Part I
- 17.4 The Kashmir Chapters
- 17.5 The Birth of Saleem
- 17.6 The Childhood of Saleem
- 17.7 Midnight's Children
- 17.8 Saleem and Hybridity
- 17.9 Let Us Sum up
- 17.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 17.11 Suggested Reading

**17.1 INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the lesson is to introduce the learner to the background of the novel *Midnight's Children* and its detailed analysis.

**17.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learners with the first



part of the story of the *Midnight's Children* while bringing out the postcolonial leanings of the author Salman Rushdie. This lesson brings out how the history of the nation is linked with the history of the narrator and how the postcolonial context results in a sense of hybridity in his identity.

### **17.3 MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN-PART I**

In the *Midnight's Children* we follow the life of the narrator and protagonist, Saleem Sinai. Saleem is born in Bombay on the stroke of midnight on 15th of August, 1947- that is exactly at the moment of independence of India from the British colonial rule. The creation of this link between the protagonist and this historic juncture enables Rushdie to comment upon the formation of identity of people in the newly independent nation, by presenting the life of one character. This connection is an intentional and explicit literary device. Therefore, we should read the novel as symbolic of the formation of Indian identity in the aftermath of British colonialism in India. By presenting the lives and characters of Saleem and his family at such a period of history Rushdie is able to address the issues pertaining to the formation of identity in post-colonial context. Saleem's sense of self in relation to this historic juncture is how he relates to his heritage of colonialism.

The novel can be divided into three parts. The first, which covers Saleem's birth and early life in Bombay, introduces the protagonist's historical heritage and his current experience of the burden of history. In the second part of the novel, which is set in Pakistan and in the Sundarbans, Saleem experiences the loss of all ties to both family and history. In the third part of the novel, Saleem is back in Bombay, trying to confront his past. The whole story of Saleem is told retrospectively and is framed by the narrator's tale in the present.

### **17.4 THE KASHMIR CHAPTERS**

Starting at the very beginning Rushdie in the opening chapters of the novel introduces the reader to Saleem's paternal grandfather,

Aadam Aziz, somewhat in the manner of Tristram Shandy. Aadam has returned to his native home in Kashmir after studying medicine for five years in Germany. However, his return to Kashmir does not bring him the happiness that one feels at homecoming. In Germany, he had made new friends and had come in contact with ways of life other than the customs of his native land. Though, this experience broadened his horizon, it also shook his earlier confidence and sense of self. The attitude of his fellow German students that he faces during his sojourn abroad is typical of the colonizers. Though they are his friends, he is still the 'other' to them, an oddity, an aberration. Whereas they see themselves as modern, intellectual, and reasonable people, Aadam stands before them as the negation of these ideals. He seems to embody the ideals contrary to the ideals of modern Europe. They project all their fears and prejudices in him, in the 'other'. Ania Loomba also points to the essential predicament here: "One of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it both needs to 'civilise' its others and to fix them into perpetual 'otherness'." Moreover, they have a stereotypical image of the orient and they see Aadam according to that image refusing to see him as the individual that he is. What irks Aadam the most is that for his friends he is in some sense an invention of their grandparents.

Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India- like radium- had been 'discovered' by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco da Gama, and this was finally what separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow the invention of their ancestors.

Aadam has come back to his homeland with these experiences, a changed perception, with his spectacles and his doctor's bag. The experiences and the changed perception alienate him from his own land and his bag becomes a symbol of oppression and treason to Aadam's childhood friend, the boatman Tai which furthers his sense of estrangement. He sees everything with changed eyes. The same valley which appeared like a far away paradise now appears isolated and conservative to him. He feels that the country resents his western-

educated appearance, and, in an attempt to resume some of his old self he tries to follow his old custom of praying to Allah. The attempt is doomed to fail as the change in him is irreversible and as he tries to ignore this fact and bends down to pray, the ground literally strikes back at him as a reminder of the futility of his attempt. Aadam hits his nose on a curve in the ground and bleeds three drops of blood, that turn into rubies. After this experience, Aadam renounces God altogether. He swears never to kiss the ground for any man or God again. However, this again is an illusion on his part. If he cannot go back to his earlier self he also cannot acquire an artificial self of his friends because he is not them. Thus even after his resolve of not believing Aadam is not able to follow his secular, German friends and is unable to fully disbelieve in the God of his childhood. Consequently this decision leaves a “hole in his stomach” or an emptiness which proves to be his lifelong albatross and finally drives him towards his death.

In the chapters dealing with Aadam’s life Rushdie brings out how his exposure to the west has left him adrift between two worlds, and he is unable to fully belong to either of the two. To the west, Aadam is unreason, a colonised subject, who for all his education in the west can never actually become one of them and will always be perceived by them as the ‘other’. Infact his education in the west makes him nothing more than a counterfeit westerner, at best a poor imitation of them and this instead of acting as a bridge only emphasizes the differences between them. Thus in his case Bhabhian mimicry becomes mockery. Instead of building a bridge between the perceived differences, his education only makes them clearer. On one hand Aadam finds it impossible to belong to the western world and on the other hand, his western education causes Aadam to see his homeland with new eyes. This new perspective alienates him from his old home as well. In Kashmir, represented by the view of Tai, Aadam has stepped over to the enemy’s side. He has lost his purity. So now Aadam is left without a sense of belonging to either of the worlds.

It seems that there is no possible position that involves belonging to both camps, and Aadam is left in-between. This sense of in-betweenness is often described as typical of the experience of being colonised. Both Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha have written extensively about the colonised subject's experience of being trapped between two cultures. What is demonstrated in the first part of the novel therefore is an idea of cultural purity. Aadam's exposure to the western world has left him impure and his loss of purity has made him unacceptable in either camp. Aadam's sense of hybridity and in-betweenness is not directly related to the experience of being colonised by the British. However, the most important message of the Kashmiri chapters is that they demonstrate a tendency towards dividing the world into 'us' and 'them', a tradition of distrust towards other peoples and cultures and stereotypical views of the Oriental in the west. In other words, the them-and-us dichotomy between British and Indians is recreated within India.

Aadam's sense of in-betweenness and hybridity is said to be passed on to his grandson, Saleem. But Saleem does not feel these impulses as a part of his inheritance alone. Infact he develops a sense of hybrid identity based on his own experiences when he is drawn in opposing directions by the mixed and conflicting impulses of Indian tradition and the heritage of British colonial culture.

Most modern theories about identity seem to regard identity as being composed of different aspects rather than to assume that one can detect and describe a whole and unified essence of a person based on a few given factors such as nationality, gender, class etc. Moreover, the issue of fragmentation is also a central issue within both post-modern and post-colonial theory. In *Midnight's Children*, we come across the issue of fragmented identity with regard to both Aadam and Saleem.

The experience of fragmentation is described as being passed down from grandfather to grandson. In the case of Aadam Sinai, the experience is linked to his first encounters with the woman he will eventually marry. The

chapter is titled 'Perforated Sheet'. The young doctor newly come from Germany is also an eligible bachelor and Ghani, the blind landowner views him as such. With this ulterior motive he instructs the young doctor to cure his daughter of her illness while limiting his contact with her to that which can be accomplished through a hole in a sheet. Thus Aadam sees his future bride in bits and pieces everyday trying to construct the whole from the fragments. As a result of this act, Aadam develops a tendency towards seeing the world in fragments, a tendency which has its effects also upon Saleem. This is yet another example of Rushdie's symbolic portrayal of Indian, post-colonial identity. The incident is to be understood as symbolic of the experience of a colonised people.

These Kashmir chapters demonstrate how identity is formed when people and cultures meet that too in unequal power relations. This gives rise to the tendency of regarding other people and cultures as backwards and inferior. This is a bad habit and demonstration of one's own mental limitations. As several critics have pointed out, the perceptions of other people and the power of these descriptions was crucial to the project of colonialism. The description, and thereby also the construction of the 'other' helped prepare for and legitimise European colonialism abroad. They could legitimize their plunder and loot of other lands by projecting it as a mission of civilizing the 'uncivilised other'. They were not greedy colonizers but people with a noble mission of bearing the white man's burden. Furthermore, these beginnings play an important role in the formation of Saleem's identity.

## **17.5 THE BIRTH OF SALEEM**

By giving birth to a son at the precise instant of India's independence, Saleem's mother, Amina Sinai, wins The Times of India competition. Saleem gets a full-page picture in the newspaper and a letter from the Prime Minister saying that his life will be a mirror of the life of the nation. This becomes the defining event of Saleem's life. He views himself and everything in his life in relation to his time of birth. He regards himself as the reflection of his nation, his status as incomparable and his self as destined for very big things in life.

Saleem identifies completely with the prize and status granted to him, or to be brutally honest, to his mother. Saleem seems to think of himself as the prize made flesh, as a personified statue of liberty, whose life is inevitably connected to that of the country. As we will see, this becomes a heavy burden for the young boy. At the age of nine, he is already troubled by the question of meaning. As he expresses it: “It was a very early age at which to be perplexed by meaning”. Saleem yearns for his life to be meaningful, for his genius to make itself known, for his parents to have their money’s worth, so to speak. We will see how his quest to satisfy this yearning is to haunt the boy for the rest of his life.

The experience of colonialism seems to be of vital importance to the building up of Saleem’s sense of self, although he himself is born after colonialism. The heritage of his grandfather and the time of his birth are darkening his young life. This again suggests that although colonialism has formally ended, something remains.

The symbolic relevance of Saleem’s longing for meaning is descriptive of all Indian citizens after the end of formal colonialism. The goal of independence that everyone was striving for had been achieved. But that did not satisfy the people. Along with the onset of freedom followed an inflated expectation of meaning and significance. Saleem will eventually have to confront these expectations, as must the people of India. We can see that the presentation of Saleem’s identity is not only closely linked to his relationship with the nation, it symbolises the development of identity in India after colonialism. This is precisely what Rushdie seeks to accomplish by associating his protagonist’s time of birth with the time of birth of the nation.

The timing of Saleem’s birth is the defining moment of his self-image. However, what was at first a boon for the young boy soon becomes a bane and almost destroys him. At the age of ten, Saleem’s self-image is grotesque and unacceptable to him. This is the reason why he tries to escape his destiny defined by the time of his birth by creating a secret identity for himself. When he denies his true self and acquires a secret and changed identity he is in a

way trying to distance himself from his symbolic statements which is his status as a symbol of liberation. We can recognise here already the tendencies described by both Fanon and Bhabha about the colonised subject's sense of hybridity due to conflicting and unbridgeable claims of the traditional and colonising cultures and demands. Although Saleem cannot be considered a colonised subject in the true sense of the word nevertheless his sense of uneasiness about his belonging and loyalties seems to be the same as was that of his grandfather. This is evident from the way he describes his position as being "handcuffed to history" when he says "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly linked to those of my country."

## **17.6 THE CHILDHOOD OF SALEEM**

In the novel it is evident from the very beginning that the protagonist is feeling 'handcuffed' to history and his feelings seem to be more of a prisoners than of someone who is enjoying the bond and it will become his quest and mission in life to free himself from these ties. This can be seen in the episode where as a young boy Saleem is teased by the other children on the school bus who chant and call him Pinocchio. We know from the Disney version of the character of Pinocchio that his main characteristic is that he has no strings to hold him down. Saleem, on the other hand, is tied down by all kinds of ties, by family and history. Later in the novel the children's chant comes true. Saleem is suddenly freed from all ties.

Two aspects of Saleem's childhood that deserves some attention are his appearance and his upbringing. The way Rushdie describes him we gather that he has blue eyes and very light skin and looks almost white like a British. Furthermore, due to his father's love of the English and his conviction about the superiority of their culture he is dressed like a little English milord. Whereas the other inhabitants of the Methwold Estate only reluctantly agree to the coloniser's demand that they must keep up the appearance of a British lifestyle, Ahmed is only too eager to please whom he thinks is his newfound

friend, William Methwold, and is generally convinced of the benefits of doing so. He states: “All the best people are white under the skin; I have merely given up pretending”. That this is true not only of Ahmed can be supported by the presentation of Indian economy in the first decade after independence:

It seems that the gargantuan (even heroic) efforts involved in taking over from the British and becoming masters of their own destinies had drained the colour from their cheeks...in which case, perhaps my father was a late victim of a widespread, though generally unremarked phenomenon. The businessmen of India were turning white.

Saleem’s connection with the history of his country is strengthened throughout the novel. At the time of his birth, Saleem’s connection to the history of the nation is merely a date. The connection is soon strengthened by the letter from the Prime Minister and the picture in the paper. At school Saleem is taught the values of the coloniser by the reading of the English canon of literature.

Colonialism was not only descriptions and representations. It was also aided by a conscious policy of education in which English values and ideal were dominant. We see here that not only non-institutional aspects of colonialism remained after 1947, but also institutions such as the canon of literature that was taught in schools. We understand that the ties that are holding Saleem handcuffed to history are not only something vague and surreptitious, but also inherited power structures and institutionalised practices that are very palpable and visible. We can see therefore that Saleem’s connection with India as a national symbol of liberation is challenged by his father’s adoration for the British.

## **17.7 MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN**

Although the novel is titled *Midnight’s Children*, the midnight’s children are not introduced until late in the novel. The importance of the children’s relation to Saleem’s quest for meaning is immense . There are a thousand and one children who are born on this hour. At a later instant,



Saleem expresses the view that 1001 is the largest number that can be meaningful to people. Any number larger than that he argues, becomes statistics. We are therefore to understand the number as symbolic, as representing the first generation after independence.

Only two children are born on the exact moment of midnight: Saleem and Shiva. Shiva represents the other whole of the social scale and serves as the opposite or rival of the protagonist, Saleem. We notice that the difference in them is the irony of the destiny. The love and the prosperity that Saleem gets is in fact Shiva's birth right and Shiva's life is in fact the actual inheritance of Saleem. However the switch of the two babies at the hospital changes their life completely. Throughout the story of Saleem, Shiva is lurking in the back as a constant threat to his quest for meaning, to the love of a family and to the heritage of a wealthy family. Whereas the midnight's children obviously represent the various demographical groups of the Indian nation, the tension between Saleem and Shiva not only stresses the diversity in terms of affluence, but is at the same time a comment upon the arbitrary status of the various demographical groups. Rushdie here aims at demonstrating that no aspect of one's identity is natural. As Ten Kortenaar says "... identity does not reside in the blood; it is the claim and its recognition by the one claimed that matter". This is also true of one's material comfort level. Although this might seem a rather obvious remark, one should remember that newly independent India inherited a sharply defined caste system in which wealth was seen to depend upon a person's past lives. It is obvious that the ideal of equal rights and democratic values does not easily harmonize with such a tradition. One can argue about the literary quality of the baby-switching as metaphor, but it allows Rushdie to address and criticise an important issue of Indian society.

Saleem's sense of being a leader and at the centre of the things increases as he realizes his role as the person who makes the Midnight's Children's Conference (MCC) possible at all and as he explores the existence and the nature of the midnight's children he begins to make plans for the future.

However, Shiva contests the position. Whereas the other midnight's children all have suggestion for how they can employ their midnight-given abilities, the main battle is between Saleem's quest for meaning and Shiva's total denunciation of it. For the time being, Saleem wins. His contention is that the children's existence and status as the children of independence must be meaningful. The MCC is therefore a philosophical debate about what the new Indian nation shall be. However, the Midnight's Children's Conference eventually fails. After their initial rejoicing in each other's company, they gradually become infected by the prejudices of their parents. As Saleem says:

Children, however magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujaraties, and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils.

According to Saleem ; the children were a thousand and one opportunities and a thousand and one traps. He however asserts that inspite of having special abilities and extra ordinary powers, they were also just normal children. Thus what Saleem wants to convey is that beneath their special abilities, Midnight's Children were just normal children and this is what made them vulnerable to the atrocities of the widow Indira Gandhi. However, their quest for meaning, their existence, their potential was due to their special powers and when the widow drains them of these powers, she finishes them off. Saleem and Midnight's Children remain no more than victims of a quest for meaning. Midnight's Children were the first generation of independent India and if given the opportunity they would have not only helped in the building of the newly independent nation but taken it to great height by their immense potential. However, the whole generation and its potential is destroyed by the very Prime Minister of the country. The newly independent country coming to the term with its existence and meaning is not able to do justice to its first generation. Thus Saleem's tale is a tale of loss and lament. He is telling his story to his son retrospectively. And if there is any sense of optimism and

possibility left in Saleem's tale, it resides in the chance of the next generation, his son Aadam's generation.

### **17.8 SALEEM AND HYBRIDITY**

In many ways, therefore, Saleem's quest in life becomes to determine the relation between himself and his history, family and heritage. These relations are what define him and how he visualizes himself will depend on them. From a celebrated and happy arrival into the world, Saleem is now beginning to feel the pressures and challenges from the outside world. A number of trials will force him to decide what he shall be: a product of the free nation, or the opposite, free of all connections with the nation.

As stated earlier, Saleem's grandfather, Aadam developed a sense of hybridity after his encounter with the west. This was also passed on to his grandson, Saleem, as his family's heritage. However, this was not a passive transferral or a genetic transfer, but a result of Saleem's cultural heritage and continued presence of colonial structures. As a young boy Saleem is unaware of the contrary influences being exerted on him. On the one hand, he is granted a status as a symbol of freedom after the end of colonialism. He gets a letter from the Prime Minister himself and gets a photo in the newspaper: and on the other hand, his upbringing keeps on informing him of the superiority of the British over the Indian. His father's anglophilia somewhere effects him as well. That these childhood influences have indeed seeped deep into him can be seen in the thirty-one-year old Saleem's sense of fragmentation and cracks in his skin.

This sense of hybridity is often referred to when analysing the psychological effect of colonialism upon the colonised people. Although formal colonisation has ended, the influence upon aspects of society that were linked to issues such as status and education during colonialism remains. These mental elements of colonisation are not that can be easily subtracted from people's consciousnesses. Loomba comments upon the issue of race relations that were defined by colonialism but which remain long after

independence: “The race relations that are put into place during colonialism survive long after many of the economic structures underlying them have changed”.

It is clear, therefore, that Saleem’s present feeling of his cracking skin is a result of conflicting impulses from the past. These conflicting impulses are not to be confused with the plurality of Bombay, which Saleem cherishes so much, but contradictory and confusing systems of values. Saleem’s hybridity is therefore best understood in the terms of Fanon, whose theories stress the impossibility of identifying with the coloniser. When applied to the theories of Homi K. Bhabha, one can recognise the anti-colonial political potential of this sense of psychological split. Bhabha argues that the colonised subject’s sense of failure in mimicking the coloniser is potentially disruptive to the colonising power, since it demonstrates that the colonial project is doomed to fail. However, in Saleem’s case, colonialism has already ended, and his enemy is a much more elusive - one of values and remnant power structures. Saleem’s quest therefore, is not to fight the rule and presence of the coloniser, but to fight the mental legacy of imperialism, the ghost of colonialism so to speak.

Ahmed Sinai’s anglophilia infects Saleem as well and he is brought up to love the west. This has led to the young boy’s sense of hybridity. As mentioned earlier he is torn between the national pride of being liberated and his father’s love for the West. That under the influence of his father Saleem is also in love with the west, which is represented by his love of Evie (Evelyn) Burns. Although she is American and not English, the narrator claims that this amounts to the same thing. However, Evie brutally refuses Saleem’s expressions of love. This can be read as symbolic of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. On the one hand, the coloniser seeks to transform the colonised into resembling themselves. However, the result is inevitably a caricature of the coloniser, and therefore works to challenge rather than unite the two sides of the colonial equation. Saleem’s

love for the west is denied. He is crushed by Evie's refusal, but he will have his revenge. His sister, the Brass Monkey, takes a brutal revenge by beating up Evie. The Empire Strikes Back, quite literally, and Saleem is forever cured of flirting with the west. This can be read as a mental liberation from the coloniser.

Saleem's liberation from his love for the west does not liberate him from the burden of meaning that his birth has laid on him. The event that will suddenly and unexpectedly relieve Saleem from the burden of meaning is a school dance. In a fight with two other boys, Saleem loses a part of his finger. At the hospital, then, Saleem's blood type reveals to the unknowing family that Saleem cannot be the biological offspring of his parents. The young Saleem has fought hard to liberate himself from the connection with history and the spell is suddenly broken. Saleem is unexpectedly freed of all ties to both family and history. The school time chant of pinnocchio has suddenly come true as he finds all strings broken.

It is a pivotal moment in his search for meaning and the process of identity formation. Saleem had always defined himself in terms of his status as the nation's first born child. Apart from causing Saleem's first exile and loss of parents, Saleem also loses his status as the nation's first-born child. From this moment on, Shiva becomes the face of fear for Saleem as Saleem realizes that he is nothing but a usurper of Shiva's position. That the letter from the Prime Minister was not written to him, but to Shiva, and that the picture in the paper should have portrayed him. Shiva becomes more than a rival. He becomes a threat to Saleem's former birthright. At first this is a devastating realisation for Saleem. However, gradually he begins to detect the liberating possibilities of the fact and not only acknowledges it, but continues the process of separation deliberately and consciously. When the family leaves for Pakistan, Saleem buries the globe containing letter and newspaper in the garden.

It seems that Rushdie has used Saleem's loss of his biological parents as a device in order to comment upon the process of identity formation. By freeing Saleem from his ties, he allows us to contemplate what the opposite situation would be. Saleem is tied down by the burden of the past. Is it possible, the author seems to ask, to be free of all ties of the past? When again this also raises the question that can a nation ever overthrow its past, its history of colonialism and define itself entirely in the present? Interpreting this phase of Saleem's life in terms of a national allegory, the loss of biological parents would suggest the loss of traditions and a supposedly true connection to the country.

Here onwards Saleem enters a new phase of development. This is also a very important aspect of the protagonist's struggle for self-definition. The loss of biological parents causes Saleem to go through an existential crisis, in which all his previous notions and beliefs about himself and his place in the history of his country must be revised. In order to define one's identity after colonialism, one needs not only to turn to the past and traditions that came before the British and which thus are somehow purer and unspoilt, but to put these under scrutiny and decide how one wants to relate to them. In other words one has to both find and fight one's past and modify it according to one's present.

Joel Kuortii identifies Saleem's contradictory attempts to find and fight ancestry. Saleem's measure of his worth in the world is related to his ability to identify with the history of his nation. By claiming ancestors, real and imaginary, he is in fact trying to prove himself as the true son of nation. In other words his invention of fictional ancestors is related to Saleem's claim for meaning which is an essential part of his identity formation. However, the real truth about Saleem's biological father is never revealed to him. Saleem is in fact the son of the departing coloniser, William Methwold. When Saleem sees himself as the 'true son of Methwold estate', he does not know how accurate his description really is. As we know, it is William Methwold, the departing coloniser who is the biological father of Saleem.

The blood of the coloniser is therefore still running in his veins. At a later stage, he expresses that he has eaten a whole world. We can see therefore that in a manner similar to Moraes's situation in *Moor's Last Sigh*, ancestry is a complex and shifting idea. One cannot possibly know the true and real roots of one's existence, but is forced to choose one's identity and belonging. Identity is thus not something that can be found in a pre-colonial past, but must be created anew.

### **17.9 LET US SUM UP**

To sum up in the first part of the novel Rushdie well establishes the postcolonial context of the story. He begins with Aadam Aziz to bring in the pre independence history of India to circumscribe the story of the newly -independent nation. In the first part of the novel Rushdie establishes a firm relation between the protagonist and the nation so that the story of Saleem becomes the story of India. The post-colonialism can be most poignantly discerned in the resultant sense of hybridity in both Saleem and his grandfather. Thus the novel in the first part traces the history of the subcontinent from pre-independence to the partition of India.

### **17.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss the importance of the 'Kashmir Chapters' in *Midnight's Children*.
- Q2. How does the MCC become representative of the Indians at large?
- Q3. The issue of 'hybridity' is central to the postcolonial discourse. How does this manifest in the characters of Saleem Sinai and his grandfather?
- Q4. The issue of ancestry has always been problematic in Rushdie's oeuvre. Discuss with reference to the character of Saleem Sinai.
- Q5. Interpret the title of the novel in the light of its theme.

### 17.11 SUGGESTED READING

- M.D. Fletcher (ed.), *Reading Rushdie, Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1994)
- Uma Parameswaran, *The Perforated Sheet: Essays in Salman Rushdie's Art* (New Delhi, Affiliated East-West, 1988)
- James Harrison, *Salman Rushdie*, Twayne's English Authors Series, (New York, Twayne, 1992)
- Catherine Cundy, *Salman Rushdie*, (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1996)

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***MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN - PART II & III*****STRUCTURE**

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Objectives
- 18.3 The Move to Pakistan
- 18.4 The Sunderbans Phase
- 18.5 Return to India
- 18.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 18.8 Suggested Reading

**18.1 INTRODUCTION**

As mentioned in the previous lesson, with the truth of his biological parentage out the process of separation from being a national symbol of liberation in India has begun for Saleem. He also loses his special ability of contacting the midnight's children and the ability to convene the conference. He is literally drained of his medium which is his running nose. He thus loses all contact with the midnight's children along with the loss of his position as the special child of the hour. However, his loss of telepathic abilities is replaced with a new feature, namely an exaggerated sense of smell. Saleem in Pakistan is able to smell feelings and emotions alike.

## **18.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this lesson is to familiarize the learners with the remaining part of the novel. After having established the link between Saleem and India the writer uses the rest of the story to comment upon the rest of the subcontinent. This lesson attempts to enable the learner to trace the connection of the history and the individual in the remaining journey of Saleem Sinai.

## **18.3 THE MOVE TO PAKISTAN**

With the family's move to Pakistan begins a new phase in everyone's life. The first thing to change is their status. From the position of a well-to-do and respected family in Bombay, they are relegated to the position of poor relatives of General Zulfikar. Further coming from a pluralistic and unorthodox city like Bombay, they are unable to feel at home in their newly adopted theocratic nation. With the result, they experience the same feeling of in-betweenness which Saleem felt. Though for the family this transaction is difficult it is worse for Saleem.

Born and brought up in cosmopolitan Bombay, Saleem has deeply absorbed the pluralistic, liberal atmosphere of the city. All his childhood he has learnt the values of tolerance and respect for other people's religions and cultures. Coming from such a liberal and liberated atmosphere, he is struck badly by the closed conservative society of his newly adopted home, Pakistan. He cannot identify with the country where even the younger generation demonstrates in the streets, demanding a more strict society with more rules. This is a state in which the nation predicts what the truth shall be. At first Saleem is opposed to this society and fights to avoid being assimilated into it. However, he eventually surrenders and he too becomes a submissive citizen of Pakistan, the land of the pure. As we can see, this might increase Saleem's sense of belonging, but it is a false sense as it does so at the expense of his own values and morals.

Saleem's sense of hybridity in Pakistan is not the same as in India. Whereas his former sense of in-betweenness was caused by the conflicting values of Indian traditions and the legacy of the colonising culture, he now experiences a personal struggle between the plurality of Bombay and the religious indoctrination of Pakistan. Moreover, Saleem is not only in a position of in-betweenness and submission in Pakistan, he is also displaced in his family. Whereas he was previously the favoured child of the family, at least in his own eyes, it is now his younger sister, the Brass Monkey, who acquires a position as celebrated national symbol. In Pakistan, the Brass Monkey is transformed into "Jamila the Singer", a symbol of purity and chastity. The transformation of the Brass Monkey into Jamila the Singer is a further example of how identity can be constructed. However, one must be cautious of Rushdie's use of the term constructed identity because though he does stress the constructed nature of identity especially in the personage of Jamila the Singer, it is not a completely postmodern view where identity is seen as something that can be decided completely freely. The writer tries to convey through Saleem's experiences in the Sundarbans that identity is and must be rooted in history and society somehow.

It is perhaps a reaction to his loss of status, his sense of being doubly displaced and his feeling of unease in his new surroundings that Saleem almost deliberately seeks to oppose his new position. In the land of the pure, he develops impure thoughts. He falls in love with his own sister. He tries to justify his feelings by telling himself that Jamila is not his biological sister, but his guilt due to his feeling of forbidden lust, causes him to seek the company of prostitutes. Saleem is rebelling against his new status of displacement and submission by embracing the forbidden. In the land of the pure he goes to prostitutes. We can hear the echoes of Homi Bhabha's theories of political opposition here. Saleem is in a system that he is not able to belong to, that makes him feel like an outsider in fact almost an outcast and this causes him to rebel against it. Though technically it is not incest as they are not biologically related, it is nothing other than

incest as all his life Saleem has looked to Jamila as his sister. Moreover it seems he has these feelings precisely because they are incestuous. Infact the use of incest as a symbol of unhealthy relationship between the state and its people can be seen in Rushdie's other novels as well. In *Moor's Last Sigh*, there are hints of an incestuous relationship between Moraes and his mother and sisters. Here again the unnatural code of conduct is symbolic of the unhealthy socio-political system. This works within the frame of national allegories, where the different characters can be seen to represent the country and its people.

To continue the theme of impurity, drained of his telepathic powers and endowed with the exaggerated power of smelling, Saleem's ability to smell emotions, enables him to smell the degree of purity and order in people's thoughts. It is perhaps not surprising that Saleem seems to favour the impure smells over the purer. This is a moral decision in opposition of indoctrination. Saleem's distrust of purity is at the same time a fight for tolerance and plurality.

Thus we can see that in the process of identity formation Saleem has been put through the distressing experiences of being displaced, of being an outcast, and a burden for society. He has been subjected to religious indoctrination and made into a submissive citizen of Pakistan. On the other hand, he has, perhaps unconsciously, began a process of opposition by refusing to accept purity as a higher goal. Although these experiences cannot be directly related to the experience of British colonialism in India, they are nevertheless post-colonial in the temporal sense of the term. The partition of the sub-continent was the departing gift of the colonizers and its consequences were clearly related to the colonial experience. With the departure of the external enemy, internal conflicts of religion became clearer. Furthermore, the focus on national identity is perhaps likely to become central in a country where one's national identity has been repressed and subdued for so long. This is very evident from the various incidents of nationalism in Rushdie's novels.

When the secret of his parentage was out, Saleem suddenly found all ties broken. However, he was still not completely free. His total freedom from family, history and his own self comes at the end of his experiences in Pakistan when his entire family (except Jamila the Singer) dies in the Indo Pakistani war and he is hit on the head by the spittoon resulting in complete memory loss.

#### **18.4 THE SUNDERBANS PHASE**

The Pakistani chapter in Saleem's life ends with the loss of his family, loss of his memory and he is forced to join the Pakistani army and participate in the war against Bangladesh. As readers we know that this is not his decision, but Jamila's revenge for Saleem's declarations of his love for her. Saleem is therefore a man with no connections to history or family who goes into the jungle of East Pakistan. Due to Saleem's exaggerated sense of smell, he is designated as a man-dog for the CUTIA division, a Pakistani intelligence unit. He is in charge of three young soldiers, who follow his lead. Saleem achieves the nickname the Buddha or the man-dog. Whereas the latter describes his nasal facility, the former refers both to God and to a man who has the appearance of old age. In the Sundarbans, Saleem, or the man-dog is used to trace down political opponents so that the rest of the unit can kill them.

After being hit on the head by the spittoon, Saleem has no memory. Furthermore, he refuses to try to remember. His amnesia seems almost deliberate, since it fulfils his former wish to be free of all ties with history and the nation. Saleem now refuses to be defined by history: "Don't fill my head with all that history, ... I am what I am and that's all there is". But what is he? And who is he? It seems Saleem's sense of hybridity is incapable of being healed.

In the way that Saleem's acceptance of the religious doctrines of Pakistan didn't really heal him so his loss of ties with history is incapable of healing him. This is emphasised by Saleem as a narrator in present time.

He consequently refuses to identify with this version of Saleem. He refers to Saleem in the Sundarbans as “him” or as “Saleem.” He even states directly that Saleem in the Sundarbans is “not-Saleem”.

At this point the author is presenting the protagonist in such terms that his development and identity has now become completely detached from any connection to family, history or nation. However, the author does not offer this as a feasible solution. Though the philosophical dictum of losing one’s self in order to find oneself appears to be very spiritual and attractive, in real life a person cannot claim any identity in isolation with the world. This is why, Rushdie presents memory-less Saleem as a sub-human, man-dog devoid of all feeling and humanity. The terrible atrocities that are committed by his division of Pakistani soldiers in the east wing of Pakistan fail to have any effect on him. He has become not just an animal, a man-dog, but a machine.

When Saleem and his division of soldiers get lost in the jungle, the author subjects them to a phantasmagoric atmosphere. The hardships and the mysteries of the jungle further reduce them to sub-human level. Infact, this time they become transparent and invisible. It seems that in his search for meaning and identity, Saleem first lost his self and will now lose his entire being or existence itself. However, the turning point in the development of Saleem’s identity comes after he and his fellow soldiers have been carried out of the jungle on a tidal wave.

In the Chapter called “Snakes and Ladders”, Saleem comments upon the game of Snakes and Ladders: “but I found, very early in my life, that the game lacked one crucial dimension, that of ambiguity – because as events are about to show, it is also possible to slither down a ladder and climb to triumph on the venom of a snake.” Snake-venom has been always panacea for Saleem. Even as an infant when he fell terribly ill and beyond all hope, he was cured by the venom of the snake. Now again it helps him return to humanity. Just when he had begun to become invisible as a human

being, the snake bite proves to be the antidote and saves him. Biblically, a snake bite is associated with Adam's expulsion from the paradise. But as is typical with Rushdie, here he subverts the meaning of this literary, cultural and religious allusion. By doing so he not only draws attention to the constructed status of such conventions but also highlights his own argument. Thus in a manner completely opposite to the biblical interpretation, Saleem is expelled from hell and not from any Garden of Eden by the snake bite.

The ambiguous nature of the snakes is used by the author also to comment on the relative nature of concepts. Identity is one such relative concept, and all ideas of true, stable and natural concepts should be broken down and analysed with respect to their multiple components. Rushdie's view on identity as a relative concept is thus very analogous to post-modern ideas on the topic.

After being cast out from the jungle, Saleem is a transformed person. His change has almost a spiritual hint in it as he begins the process of regaining memory by a means of confession. What resembles the cleansing given by confession, he tells his tale to his fellow soldiers in all its detail with absolute honesty. He remembers everything but his name. Thus though the transformation has begun and he is returning to humanity, something is still missing in the completion of the process. His return to humanity can also be seen by the fact that he is beginning to wake up and recognize the violence and atrocities committed by the Pakistani soldiers for what they are. This is the most important turning point in the story of Saleem. He makes a moral decision and deserts the army

With this the Bangladeshi chapter closes in Saleem's life. However this has been the most crucial time in his search for a meaning which would give him an identity. Saleem had for a long time felt burdened by the time of his birth and wished to be free of all ties. In Bangladesh he is granted his wish. He loses his memory and is free of any and every bond. This freedom however is more limiting than all the previous bonds. He has gained wholeness at the expense of humanity. We can therefore assume the

protagonist's careful return to society and healing. This is also the appearance of the subsequent story, with Saleem's happy reunion with Parvati the Witch and his return to his beloved India.

### **18.5 RETURN TO INDIA**

In the basket of Parvati the Witch, Saleem is brought back to India. This is the final step. It is Parvati who finally gives Saleem back his name thus completing his return journey to humanity. In her basket, Saleem experiences complete invisibility, and his firm grip on the spittoon is his only link to reality. This invisibility, however, is very different from the one he experienced in the jungle. The latter was a move towards obliterating his very being. This invisibility is like oblivion before birth. Saleem is therefore in a sense reborn in India.

But the Saleem who is reborn is not the same that had left India. The Saleem who had left India was no more than a boy in search of meaning and identity, defined by the time of his birth. However, he is a changed man who returns from the war in East Pakistan. Saleem has taken a moral position and gained new perspectives. In the course of his quest to free himself from the burden of history, he has undergone great changes. Saleem is no longer defined by the time of his birth. The pride he felt in the letter and the picture is no longer there. Saleem's process of distancing himself from the quest of his childhood had begun when he had buried the letter and the picture before leaving for Pakistan. He furthers the process by carefully examining the burden that was laid upon his young shoulders. On returning from Pakistan, Saleem has discovered injustice. And it is injustice that comes to mind when he is attempting to come to terms with the burden of meaning that defined his childhood in India. Injustice turns into anger, and Saleem ends up accusing his parents of putting him in the position of being the sole provider of meaning for the new nation.

Saleem's moral return continues, as does his separation from this earlier position of iconhood. He refuses to carry the burden alone and insists



that the rest of India's five hundred million people carry it with him. Furthermore, he will not allow the history of the country to define what and who he shall be. After being rejected by his remaining family in Bombay, who will not accept him due to his lack of blood-ties, of pedigree so to speak, he renounces family as an 'overrated idea'. This is in a sense a continuation of the aforementioned aspect about the uncertainty of ancestry. Saleem decides that from now on, he will choose and decide what his identity shall be. He asks: "Why, alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?" And he continues: "anger made me determined ... from that moment forth to choose my own, undestined future".

It may seem, therefore, that the experience of being completely without ties, being lost in limbo, was not the solution after all. However, rather than assuming that Saleem must then return to his old life of being tied down by history, we should recognise that he has discovered that he is free to choose and decide what he shall be and where he shall belong. This can perhaps be described as a post-modern approach to identity. Rather than to assume that there is a true essence to which one can return for answers and truths, one must create one's identity as one goes along. However, Rushdie's version of freedom and relativism is not completely post-modern, in as much as he still stresses the importance and relevance of history. History is an important part of one's identity, but history as such must be treated as a narrative to which new narratives can be included. There is no true essence of identity that can be found in the past.

I have described here Saleem's developing identity after his return to India from Pakistan. It is clear that the protagonist has come home a changed man and makes moral decisions for himself. In a sense, therefore, Saleem seems to have freed himself from the burden of meaning.

From here onwards Saleem's life takes a new turn and to complete the process of Saleem's identity formation a final confrontation with Shiva is required. When Saleem first became aware of the fact that his family

was not his family and hence his birthright was not his birthright, he reacted with terror and decided to exclude Shiva from the MCC in order to protect his secret. As it turns out, when Saleem returns to India, they have switched places after all. Shiva fought on the side of the Indian army in the war against Pakistan, and is now a decorated war hero who enjoys life in the upper social classes. Saleem on the other hand, has gone from being the beloved child of a wealthy family to becoming an illegal immigrant in the same country. It is without any means, papers or education that he enters India, and eventually winds up in the magicians ghetto. It seems therefore that some form of ironic justice has taken place. However, the way Rushdie has presented both the characters our sympathies are always with Saleem. Moreover, if we study both the characters we see that Rushdie is presenting another aspect of his view on identity. Shiva and Saleem in a lot of ways resemble each other (e.g both fit the prophecy of Ram Ram Seth). But they are two very different individuals. Even when their circumstances change or rather switch, Saleem remains Saleem, though poor and Shiva is Shiva even in the higher echelons of society. It seems that Rushdie is subtly hinting that there are certain intrinsic qualities in a person which do not change with change in external circumstances.

In the magicians ghetto Saleem adapts himself to the life of poverty. He is now looking at the world from the other end of the social scale. One anticipates that after being disowned by his family, breaking the bonds that tied him down and beginning his life a fresh, Saleem might be able to heal and settle down. However, as he becomes involved with Picture Singh's communist campaigns, we again see him in a position where he is unable to belong to his surroundings. Saleem discovers that his pleasant childhood memories of life among the wealthy make it impossible for him to hate the rich. Again, Saleem finds that he is left somewhere in-between, unable to belong to either camp.

Furthermore, whereas Saleem might have been released from the former chains of historical weight, he seems determined to take on a new

quest for meaning. Having freed himself from his love for Jamila the Singer, he now declares India to be his true twin sister, and decides to save her from the grip of the Widow, the Prime Minister. This implies that his quest for meaning was not related solely to his bond with the nation and history. Now free of both, he still takes on a quest for meaning which it seems is essential for him, for his identity.

Shiva is no longer a threat to his existence, as the Widow is. So he takes it upon himself to defeat her designs. He actually tries to enlist his Uncle Mustafa's help in trying to achieve his purpose but fails. In fact it is the Widow who eventually finishes him off along with the other midnight's children during emergency.

Saleem tells his story retrospectively to his son Aadam. Now thirty one years old and left impotent, both physically and metaphorically, he feels the cracks in his skin widening and his being slowly crumbling. He knows that soon he will join the other midnight's children who are all dead. Their death is the death of the hopes of a generation-the first generation of independent India. However, all is not lost. Though the opportunities presented by the special abilities of the midnight's children were not fulfilled, there is some sense of hope left in the form of the second generation represented by Aadam.

Now at the fag end of life, Saleem's quest for significance and worth has acquired a new meaning. He now searches for the meaning of his life in the narration of his story to his son, in the preservation of his tale. As Taylor also says "In articulating it, I am also defining myself." Saleem Sinai says in the very beginning, "I must work fast, faster than Scheherazade, if I am to end up meaning-yes, meaning-something". Thus now Saleem feels that he can end up meaning only if he is able to 'pickle' the past thirty one years of his life. So now the meaning of his life is in his being able to narrated to his son, the next generation which still presents some sense of optimism and future for the country in the hope that the lessons of his tale would prove to

be useful for them. However, though he begins his tale with a sense of surety and confidence like a master story teller in full control of his craft, as he proceeds he seems to lose his ground. He begins to constantly question his own story and his own memory. This is perhaps an expression of the fact that the Indian, post-colonial identity is yet to be determined. The confidence and the surety are yet to come. We understand therefore that Rushdie does not endorse the possibility of a completely post-modern identity, with no regard to history or cultural tradition. Identity is therefore presented as a changeable, yet not entirely post-modern feature. Identity must be rooted in reality somehow, but it need not be limited to what family and history decree. Rushdie also addresses the predicament of cultural and religious diversity in the modern, Indian nation. He dismisses all ideas about a natural citizen of India as a mere phantasm, and strenuously argues for an acceptance of multiculturalism in India. As commented by Saleem: “There are as many versions of India as there are Indians.” In order to create ‘a new myth of India’ one needs to discard old truths.

## **18.6 LET US SUM UP**

In conclusion, if we look at Saleem’s tale, the very first question that comes to mind is that was his sense of self importance which dictated his process of identity formation for most of his life, fictional and exaggerated imaginings of a boy’s mind or was he justified in feeling so. If we look at Saleem’s birth we feel that his feelings were not unjustified. His birth was an eagerly awaited event. When he was born his birth was widely celebrated. In fact a guru moved into their family garden to await the miracles of the child of the hour. He gets his picture in the newspaper and a personal letter from the Prime Minister. Thus the burden of history and meaning felt by him is related to the moment of his birth. That he has a strong connection with the newly liberated nation is amply borne out by the later event of his life. It is therefore clear that Saleem’s life was symbolic of the expectations of the hopes for the future after independence from colonialism. The failure of the Midnight’s Children’s Conference and

Saleem's present time feeling of weakness, fragmentation and impotence is an image of the loss of those hopes after a few years had passed by.

Thus we see that Rushdie uses Saleem's tale to comment upon the nature of identity and identity formation. Rushdie seems to question the somewhat mechanic assumptions of identity formation along the lines of maturity from infancy to adulthood. Instead he suggests a more random process of going back and forth. It is not so that one at a stage of one's life acquires maturity and reason, which will aid one's decisions for the rest of one's life. Rather, one can always expect to be confronted by conflicting impulses and ideas and be forced to revise one's position and values. By refusing a final solution and completion in which the protagonist arrives at a state of healed and content selfhood, Rushdie presents us with the idea that this is either not possible or otherwise not desirable. There is perhaps no position in which a character can become a whole and true version of himself. Perhaps identity is bound to be complex and consisting of multiple parts. This might also be desirable in the sense that there is always room for new versions and change. Rushdie always presents ideas of truth and essence as suspicious and dangerous. This is clearly also so regarding his view on identity.

Rushdie presents identity as a problematic concept in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie presents identities at a position of in-betweenness, of hybridity. Moreover, the story of Saleem is symbolically linked to the fate of the Indian nation after independence. By presenting the challenges of Saleem, Rushdie is therefore able to comment upon the formation of identity in post-colonial India as a whole.

### **18.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. How does the move to Pakistan affect Saleem's sense of hybridity?
- Q2. How does Rushdie represent the dehumanization of war through the character of Saleem in Bangladesh?
- Q3. What does Saleem's return to India represent?

Q4. Discuss *Midnight's Children* as a post-colonial novel.

Q5. Shiva is claimed by critics as an alter ego of Saleem. In the light of this statement compare and contrast the characters of Shiva and Saleem.

#### **18.8 SUGGESTED READING**

- D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, *Salman Rushdie*, (New York, St. Martin's, 1998)
- Roger Y. Clark, *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other worlds*, (Montreal, Ithaca (N.Y), McGill Queen's University Press, 2001)
- Rajeshwar Mittapali and Joel Kuortti (ed.), *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights*, (New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2003)

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### **ASPECTS OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN***

#### **STRUCTURE**

- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Objectives
- 19.3 *Midnight's Children* as historiographic metafiction
- 19.4 Role of Padma
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Examination Oriented Questions
- 19.7 Suggested Reading

#### **19.1 INTRODUCTION**

The nexus of history and fiction is well known and can be traced through the ages up to the post modern and post colonial period. The relationship between history and fiction forms the basis of various histories that are represented in the novels of post colonial novelists in nineteen eighties like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor etc. The representation of politics in literature, political figures and events, are aesthetic representation of facts in fiction. The post colonial writers of nineteen eighties give view of the historical accounts and the post colonial interpretation of colonial power in all their works. History is fused, interspersed and even sometimes entangled with the fictional life of the

narrator and the life of the narrator in turn, related with the author's life. So, the life of the narrator is related to the life of the author and also to the history of the nation. The relationship between history and literature is well known and among all the relations of various literary forms, the relation and connection of the novel with history is the most widely accepted. History and fiction share social, cultural, ideological context as well as formal techniques. As a result, most of our modern day critics have chosen to study the history-novel/fact-fiction relation within the theoretical frames of post modernism and post colonialism.

The novelist's visualization of himself as a historian makes his or her literary work/fiction as historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction is "novels that are inversely self reflective but that also both reintroduce historical contact into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge." Historiographic metafiction bridges the gap between historical and fictional works by recombining the two genres. "Historiographic metafiction plays upon truth and lies of the historical record, certain known history details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and constant potential for deliberate and inadvertent error".

The novel in India came into existence under the impact of the novel in the west, particularly of Britain. The 'historical novel' had a major influence on the novelists in India. It had its strongest impact on those who wrote in regional languages and later on those who wrote in English. A good number of novelists in English as well as in regional languages opted for the past history of the nation as a suitable form of expression in their literary work. The first ever attempt was done by Bengali novelist 'Bankim Chander Chatterjee', who paved the path for his successors with his fictional works by adhering to the Indian tradition of writing.

The 1980's is the period of emergence of New Indian fiction in English announcing the beginning of a new era of change in the 'tone tenor and content.' This new group of writers deals with the subjects widely



varied and in a language of irreverence, marked with skeptical rigour. These novelists include Salman Rushdie [*Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Moor's last sigh* (1995)], Amitav Ghosh [*The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1998), *In an Antique Land* (1992)], Shashi Tharoor (*The Great Indian Novel* (1989), *Gita Mehta Raj*, (1989) and Rohinton Mistry [*Such a Long Journey* (1981), *A Fine Balance* (1996)] etc. Majority of these writers are students of history. The writers like Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, and Nina Sibal etc. also made important experiment in fictional form and captured the realities of their time.

## **19.2 OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this lesson is to acquaint the learners with the different critical aspects of the novel. The novel has been hailed by the critics as a postmodernist text and one of its most discussed aspects has been historiographic metafiction. This lesson introduces the concept of Historiographic Metafiction and traces its infusion in the novel. Moreover, Padma has been often claimed as indispensable to the story and hence in this lesson the role of Padma is outlined in detail.

## **19.3 MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AS HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION**

*Midnight's Children*, the magnum opus of Salman Rushdie is mainly concerned with a man's search for his identity in relation to the past of his life. The history of the nation is shown in such a way that it is compared to the life history of the protagonist. As Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, points out, "to understand just one life, you have to swallow the world". Salman Rushdie in *The Midnight's Children* gives a brief account of the events like Indian Independence, the partition of India and Pakistan and the aftermaths of the partition and communal riots. The Indian movement for freedom was "not merely a political struggle but an all pervasive experience that became a part of almost all the sensitive and Enlightened ." The Indians struggled for their independence from the British Rule and all these struggles and movements constitute the glorious history of India.

In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie develops a close connection between history and fiction. If history can be made up of fiction, then fiction, in turn, can be composed of history. The relationship between the historical and fictitious areas is not necessarily a dialectic one, as, legends and myths and history could be identical. According to Rushdie, history is composed of those elements that are authentic and meaningful to the narrator or the story teller and apparently insignificant incident being often valued. The actual meaning of history is built from the memories related to certain fragments of the past. There is mixing of historical events and personal activities, the less important and the more important moments in *Midnight's Children* which weaken the claim or pretensions of history to neutrality and objectivity. Reality is a carnivalesque space; infact, multiple realities, the space being open to various voices; history becomes the space for dialogue, not being controlled by any ultimate authority, the purpose being the dialogue in itself.

History, according to Rushdie, is always ambiguous, chaotic and is full of doubts and uncertainties whereas facts are hard to establish for Rushdie. Reality is made up of our opinions, our knowledge and our capacity of reception and understanding the reality. Reality and history are artificial in their nature and due to their constructed artificial nature, both can be deconstructed easily. The role of artist is to highlight the truth because like reality, truth is comparative, relative and dialogic and not absolute and monologic. As Rushdie mentions in *Imaginary Homelands*, "The truth I can remember is the truth of Memory". Although, history is not logical and objective, it can have a meaning. In fact, it can have more meaning and it is the role of the artist to give the exact and complete hidden meaning of the history. It is the writer or the creator who gives the complete hidden meaning of the reality or history because reality/history always exists in a hidden form and the writer manifests this hidden meaning of history or reality. From this perspective, history represents the combination of an infinite number of ingredients from an almost infinite range of choices.

Rushdie in his novels successfully mixes the real with the fictitious. His novel, during the long course of narration, comes closer to fantasies at times, but, there is a layer of reality on which the building of fantasy has been raised. To this reality, which is already present in the very genre of the novel, Rushdie makes episodes and comes across history.

The novel is structured in three sections and has the quality of intertextuality within itself. For instance, the name of Dr. Aziz is used in reference to the Aziz of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*. For Hutcheon, “Such post modern intertextuality is used to put into question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding inter-textual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality.”

*Midnight’s Children* is the story of an emerging nation i.e. India. It also relates to the birth and growth of Pakistan and Bangladesh. It also gives detail description about Great Britain. Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* successfully draws a parallel connection between the ‘Private destiny of Saleem and the public destiny of India.’ The story of the novel covers the three generations of Saleem Sinai’s family and the history of the family is related to the glorious history of India.

**Table**

	Individual/Personal	Historical
Book one (seven chapters)	Background	1919- Jallianwalah Bagh
Book two (Thirteen Chapters)	Birth and Growing up (In India) (In Pakistan)	1947-Independence 1956-Language riots 1958-Coup in Pakistan
Book three	Adulthood	1965-Indo-Pak War
(Eight chapters)	(Amnesia and after)	1971-Bangladesh 1975-Declaration of Emergency 1977-Lifting of Emergency

Total 30 Chapters/ independence Pickle Jars	30 years in the life of the protagonist/narrator	30 years after completed.
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Saleem, the protagonist of the novel, starts his autobiography focussing on his grand father Dr. Adam Aziz, the representative of the precolonial or pre Independent India, before giving us details of his birth. The Pre-independent India's history is related to the life history of Dr. Adam Aziz. Dr. Aziz was appointed in Kashmir as a doctor. He falls in love with his patient, named Naseem, the daughter of the rich but blind landowner. Naseem in those days suffered from a number of ailments. Dr. Aziz treated her through the perforated sheet on her body and face. He only has the glimpse of this young woman's body through this perforated sheet. There is disturbances, conflicts and tensions within his inner self. Similarly, the nation is also suffering from disintegration, disturbances, conflicts and tension within its territories, states, people etc. due to the World War I. But with the end of World War I, the mutual acquaintance of Dr. Aziz and the patient resulted in the blossoming of the love affair and both get married with the end of World War I. As with the end of World War I, there is peace and cordial relations among people, states, territories of the nation. Similarly, after marrying to Naseem the conflict within the innerself of Aziz is resolved.

The Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre or Amritsar Massacre is also connected to the private history of Sinai's family. The Amritsar Massacre was an extremely ruthless attack on Indians. The brutal attack left Indians horrified. This led to the rising of Indians and made way for Indian freedom. The whole event of Amritsar Massacre is connected to Dr. Aziz and thus it becomes more personal. In this event we witness the brutalities of Gen. Dyer who along with his troops opens fire at the crowd resulting in the death of 4516 people. Here, Adam's nose plays a vital role, as the firing of Dyer and his troops collides with Adam's sneeze which affirms that his nose will play an important role in the future generation of Saleem's family. The prediction

of the historical Jallianwallah Bagh event linked to the etching of Dr. Aziz's nose attracts the reader into 'a willing suspension of disbelief' that something is wrong.

Again we witness an instance of chemical binding between Saleem's family's personal history with India's national history. In an early morning in Kashmir, Adam Aziz receives an injury on his nose while hitting the ground during his prayers, which results in the fall of three drops of blood from his nose. These three drops of blood symbolically represent the setting up of three free nations-India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Saleem Sinai's moment of birth is identical to the moment of birth of the new nation in which he lived and hence a connection is built between public and private history. That is why, he is described as 'handcuffed to history' of the nation. 'Born at midnight on Aug. 15, 1947, the moment of India's Independence, Saleem's story has a representative significance, for his birth and upbringing are meant to parallel that of India'. With him are born other one thousand *Midnight's Children*. All are born in the early hours of India's Independence. Saleem's birth is celebrated by Pandit Nehru, newspapers and many others. At the very beginning of the novel, hints are offered that historical events would be important in the novel and the history of Saleem is linked to the history of nation i.e. India. As Saleem says: "I was born in the city of Bombay..... Once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Dr. Narlikar's Nursing home on August 15, 1947... I had been handcuffed to history, My destinies insolubly chained to those of my country... and there are so many stories to tell, too many, such as excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so deare a comingling of the improbable and the Mundane."

Saleem Sinai's face represents the map of India and the events that take place in India are connected to his life. Rushdie used this as a tool to explore the different aspects of India. Saleem Sinai grows up physically as well as mentally to deal with the maturing of India as an Independent nation. We first see India as an infant through the eyes of a child followed by an adult

look at the mature state of India. Sinai was a human map of India and his face resembled distinct areas of India and its neighbours. He described himself stating, “Fair skin curved across my features but birth marks disfigured it; dark stains spread down my western hairline, a dark patch coloured my eastern ear.”

Saleem was born exactly one day after the independence of Pakistan. The dark stains down his hairline represented newly formed western Pakistan while the dark patch over his eyes represented eastern Pakistan. The shape of his face including his narrow chin resembled the peninsula of India. His temples described the Himalayan Mountain to the North while his nose was associated with Deccan plateau, a centrally located elevated area on the peninsula.

With the partition between India and Pakistan, Saleem moves with his Muslim family. In the war over the partition, most of his relatives and family members are killed and he loses his memory. As he suffers from Amnesia and emotional numbness as a consequence of the death of his parents, he is enrolled in CUTIA Unit, a she dog unit in place of a tracker dog. We get a clear indication of the depth of human degradation through the facts about the political events in the novel. This is symbolic of cruelty of the 1971 war itself as it too had a dimension of cruelty and horror. When the war is over, he again moves back to India and finds the doings of politicians cruel like the war. This is clearly highlighted in the novel when “the widow” Indira Gandhi imposes martial law in India. Due to this short but controversial period of Mrs. Gandhi’s emergency rule, the freedom of the midnight’s children is threatened. Another important and note worthy event is the declaration of Justice Jag Mohan Judgments by Allahabad high court setting aside the election of Mrs. Gandhi under the provision of misuse of people’s representative Act. This led to the imposition and declaration of emergency by Indira Gandhi and the eventual birth of Janta Party under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan. This incident of the birth of Janta Party is metaphorically connecting to the Parvati, the witch at the birth of ‘Adam

Sinai,' son of Saleem Sinai, born at Midnight of the day "when Indira Gandhi clamped down Emergency Rule on India". Parvati's thirteen day labour is connected with the thirteen days of political violence when Indira Gandhi refused to resign after the verdict of the Allahabad high court. This description is mockingly interesting, it being a family affair connected to a national event:

"..... in the evening of the thirteenth day they screamed Yes Yes She has begun to push, come on Parvati Pushed in the ghetto, J.P. Narayan, Morarji Desai was also goading Indira Gandhi, while triplets yelled push push push the leaders of the Janta Morcha urged the police and Army to disobey the illegal orders of the disqualified P.M. So in a sense they were forcing Mrs. Gandhi to push...

[*Midnight's Children*, 499].

*Midnight's Children* thus occupies a place under the genre of historiographic metafiction. This form challenged the preposition of writing history as unity, continuity and objectivity. This is done through the nervousness of the narrator about his/her ability to understand the past clearly which is, for Linda Hutcheon, "not, a transcending of history but a problematised inscribing of subjectivity into history".

In historiographic metafiction, a writer like Rushdie himself adopts a self awareness that immediately keeps him away from the historical period he has carefully created, thus highlighting its fictiveness. As Rushdie's works are concerned mainly with history so he adopts the new form of historiographic metafiction and his works are dubbed with this new form. Historiographic metafiction are "novels that are intensely self reflective but that also both reintroduce historical context into metafiction to problematize the entire question of historical knowledge". To represent the past of the nation through the past of the protagonist, historiographic metafiction "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical records. Certain

known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible Mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error". Historiographic Metafiction specifies the ideological implications of historical representations and questions the authenticity of the past as that always plays upon 'known truth.' Thus, while redefining 'truth' and 'reality' historiographic metafiction opens a sort of way which rediscovers the histories of the suppressed people such as women or colonized natives.

The problematize and intricate relationship between real seeming version of past and reality is closely related to the historiographic metafiction. Through the technique of self-reflexive it motivates us to question our ability of interpreting the history from a particular socio-political context. Historiographic metafiction emphasizes that all past events are potential historical 'facts' but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated.

Post modernist modes such as parody and intertextuality critique the assumptions underlying 19th century humanist concepts of author and text. Historiographic metafiction uses "parody not only to restore history and memory in the face of the distortions of the 'history of forgetting,' but also, at the same time, to put into question the authority of any act of writing by locating the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either any single origin or simple casualty".

According to Linda Hutcheon, "traditional narrative models both historiographical and fictional that are based on European models of continuous chronology and cause-and-effect relations are utterly inadequate to the task of narrating the history of the New World". Rushdie takes into appeal the traditional Indian Epic writing and to the blending of mythical and realistic mode of writing in order to deconstruct the western notion of history and to reject the imperialistic version of Indian history. Moreover,



the author deliberately blurs some of the clear chronological outlines during his narrative manner of narrating history. Ambiguity and timelessness is another tool which helps Saleem to free him from the tyranny of cause and effect. Events follow a zig zagging pattern for most of the time and it is difficult for the reader to unfold the scheme of events in proper chronological manner. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, compares his own life history and his own birth with the life and history of modern India. He feels that his birth is honoured by the newspaper and other politicians as he is born at the stroke of midnight on 15 August, 1947 at the hour of India's Independence. He considers himself at the centre of the Indian history. He is constantly conscious of the fact that "historical coincidence have littered, perhaps befouled, my family's existence in the world.". However, this 'vengeful irruption into the history' of his age is 'Certainly no trivial affair for him.' At times, he finds history eagerly waiting for his arrival:

"At the end of that January, history had finally, by a serious of shores, brought itself to the point at which it was almost ready for me to make my entrance. There were mysteries that could not be cleared up until I stepped on the scene"

[*Midnight's Children*, 103].

Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, presents the history of the nation with the history of his own life. As he points out "already my very presence is having an effect on history; already baby Saleem is working change on the people around him". He is cutting up history to suit himself, just as he did when he cut up newspapers to compose his earlier text, the anonymous note to Commander Sabarmati. He unites the fragments of events to give in detail the Indian history as whole. This notion of bringing together the fragments to create a unified whole is well explained in detail by the peep show of Lifafa Das, who did not believe in presenting the only pleasant feature of the age to his audiences but to present or displayed some of the contemporary harsh images like "Stafford Cripps leaving Nehru's residence; untouchables being touched... of a fire at the Industrial estate".

Throughout the novel, the protagonist is falling apart. He experiences cracks in his own body and from where history comes out. He questions homogeneity of history by questioning the wholeness of his own self: “because a human being, inside himself, is anything but a whole, anything but homogeneous; all kinds of every which thing are jumbled up inside him, and he is one person one minute and another next.” As, according to R.S. Pathak, “the motif of fragmentation is present throughout the novel. However, in no case it is prominent as it is in the case of Saleem. He is fully aware of his problems and plights, misfortunes and discordances, so typical of a rootless person”. He disappointingly utters in the novel when his body is falling apart as-

“I am tearing myself apart, can’t even agree with myself talking and arguing like a wild fellow, cracking up memory going yes, memory plunging into chasms and being swallowed by the dark, only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more.”

[*Midnight’s Children*, 503].

In spite of the feeling of alienation and constant fear of disintegration, the protagonist always tries to keep alive his connection with history.

History, in Foucault’s terms, may become ‘Counter-Memory,’ which is “the process of reading history against the grain, of taking an acknowledged active role in the interpretation of history rather than a passive, viewing role”. ‘Counter Memory’ rather than simply give the details of events in a chronological order, is involved in the process of giving historical details in proper systematic order and present those events in such a way that it is comparable to the individual history. Then, in short, the project of the historiographical metafiction is the Foucauldian project of ‘Counter-Memory.’ The question that historiographic metafiction puts is not what the true history is, that rather, who presents what history and who reads and interprets history and what is its purpose.

*Midnight's Children*, on the one hand, gives the historical events in detail, including lower class characters, real referents, specific dates and an individual hero who sees himself as an influence on and even cause of important events around him. On the other hand, throughout the novel, it is clear that realism cannot communicate reality on a unified individual subject as prime mover of events. In the same way as history and narrative are thus denied their traditional humanist functions, the male unified writing subject is decentred and splitting. Saleem, the protagonist, suggests the quest for identity with the exclamation as- "If I am to end up meaning-yes, meaning- something... I admit it: above all things; I fear absurdity." Thus, *Midnight's Children* as a whole becomes what he terms a "chutnification of history". Saleem himself points out while linking the process of writing history to pickling:

I reconcile myself to the inevitable distortions of the pickling process. To pickle is to give immortality, after all: fish, vegetables, fruit hang embalmed in spice-and-vinegar, a certain alternation, a slight intensification of taste is a small matter, surely? the art is to change the flavor in degree, but not in kind; and above all to give it shape and form-that is to say meaning.

This above quotation sums up the whole of the novel. Historiography is immortalized but is critically reconsidered and altered. The constructed narrative of the west is shown with supernatural qualities so that it subverts its own tools; thus the novel by and large seems to echo the words of the critic John Berger who said "Never again will a single story be told as if these were only one".

Thus, there is uniqueness in Rushdie's representation of history as there lay multiple visions which replace the linear version of official history. Rushdie presents the history of the nation through the history of the narrator. In *Midnight's Children*, there are numerous historical events and all those events are joined by the thread of memory and

imagination. All these historical events serve as a backdrop and connecting link to the individual history. He explains this with the comic inversion that it is not that a single human is contained in the world but the world is contained in the human life. Rushdie's achievement lies in his blending of historical events with the fictional elements. The novel is not a mere record of historical and political events but an artistic recreation of them.

#### **19.4 ROLE OF PADMA**

Padma is vital to Saleem's story and his narrative. She is Saleem's loving companion and caretaker, and she will become his fiancée at the end of the novel. She is the audience for Saleem's narrative. With strong, hairy forearms, a name associated with dung, and a cynical and often impatient ear, Padma represents the antithesis to Saleem's magical, exuberant, freewheeling narration. She hurries the narrative along, imploring Saleem to get on with the plot rather than indulging in digressions and mixing other stories with the main narration, and often she expresses doubts as to the truth of Saleem's account. But she also validates many unbelievable aspects of the story as true. As a rhetorical device, Padma allows Rushdie the chance to acknowledge explicitly any doubts or frustrations the reader may feel in response to the novel. Saleem's frequent interruptions, digressions, and self-obsession are all, to some degree, made possible by Padma's expressions of doubt and frustration: the two sides work together to create a holistic reading experience. By explicitly taking into account the difficulties of the narrative, Rushdie is able to move beyond them.

In Salman Rushdie's metafictional *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai writes the story of his "handcuffed to history" life (3). In order to understand his story Saleem says that we must "swallow the world", because in order to understand the events of his life we must understand the lives of everyone else. It is for this reason that the story starts not at Saleem's birth, but with the life of his grandfather Aadam Aziz. One story leads to another, and that to another, and tangential stories arise from these which leads the reader into a very convoluted mess of names and events. The

reader is not alone in this frustration, though. Padma, Saleem's illiterate lover and eventual wife, is listening to Saleem tell his (and everyone else's) story as he is writing it down, and she proves to be a critical, multidimensional character in this novel.

Padma is hearing the same story that we, the readers, are and therefore expresses the same frustrations. Saleem is not a linear narrator for fear that if the reader does not understand the stories of all the people in his life, and the people that had influence on those people, we will not understand his story. Padma represents a stereotypical human audience when she expresses her impatience towards Saleem's method of storytelling. As Saleem tells about his grandfather's life Padma chimes in, "At this rate you'll be two hundred years old before you manage to tell about your birth", and, "You better get a move on or you'll die before you get yourself born". This persuasion to hasten the pace is important because Saleem continually reminds us that his time is finite, and that he is cracking. If not for Padma, Saleem's story could have gone infinitely on explaining and proving that everyone's story in the entire world is unquestionably crucial to his life. In addition to this, the presence of Padma slows the cracking process taking place in Saleem, or rather, in her absence the "cracks spread all over, radiating like a spider's web". If not prodded to accelerate by Padma's "what-happened-nextism", Saleem's finite amount of time may have run up before the unveiling of his story. Even Padma's body, her "musculature", is a guide for Saleem's story. The "ripples of uninterest", a "tic" in her cheek when she's unconvinced, Saleem even says, "The dance of her musculature helps to keep me on the rails". The motivation behind both telling the intricate details of history and the eventual story of his life is clear when he says, "...above all things, I fear absurdity." In order that Saleem's life, and even his existence as a child of midnight, is recognized by others as legitimate (or non-absurd), he must finish his story, and it is Padma that helps him reach this goal.

As well as aiding the progression of events, Padma's voice expresses that of the readers, and subsequently allows Saleem to speak to the readers

by speaking to, or about, Padma. In this manner of usage of this literary device, Rushdie acknowledges the fact that his story is a convoluted labyrinth that may lead to irritation in the reader, and, through Saleem speaking to Padma, he explains why his story is the way it is. An example of this is on page 37, where Saleem explains to Padma why he must recount history rather than simply telling of his own life. “Things-even people-have a way of leaking into each other...like flavors when you cook...the past has dripped into me...so we can’t ignore it.” In this way Padma acts as a string connecting two cans, thus allowing communication from Rushdie to the reader.

Rushdie also uses Padma as a way to warn the reader of upcoming vexation. When reading a serpentine passage which was not foretold, readers are often disoriented. Especially in a long novel such as Rushdie’s, it is easy to give up on the novel if it seems like the entire piece will be a confusing tangle of big words and way-too-long sentences. This is not an inaccurate judgement to make when reading *Midnight’s Children*, it truly is a confusing tangle of big words in big sentences. In knowledge of this, Rushdie uses Padma as a way of warning the reader of soon-to-come discontentment, “...she’s about to get even more frustrated...”, and also to promise reward if the reader perseveres, “Some people are never satisfied; but Padma will be, soon”(114). I would go as far as to say that Padma prevents readers from giving up on reading *Midnight’s Children*; she is, without a doubt, a guide that leads both the reader and Saleem along throughout this cleverly disjointed story.

Saleem’s entire story is about himself, and his momentous birth on the stroke of midnight, the same second that India became independent, and how because of this his entire life is linked to his country. Padma is a big part of Saleem’s life, so if we are to believe Saleem’s claims, we must also believe that Padma is symbolic of some aspect of India as well. John Su, in his piece *Midnight’s Children*, by Salman Rushdie”, says that, “Indeed, the relationship between Saleem and Padma becomes a metaphor for Rushdie’s vision of India as a diverse yet tolerant society that benefits from the differences between ethnic, religious, and regional groups”. It is clear that Saleem and Padma are very different from each other. Saleem is an educated middle-class citizen whereas Padma is an illiterate factory worker. These stark differences may be symbolic of the two main, polar opposite classes of which India’s societal infrastructure is composed. The fact that these two antithetical characters work

out their differences and enjoy the other's company supports Su's aforementioned statement when it describes India as a tolerant society. Saleem and Padma interact in a form of symbiotic relationship, each relying on the other with a dependence that is above the underlying friction between them. For Saleem, Padma slows the spreading of his bodily cracks, corrects and reproaches him when he exaggerates or oversteps his boundaries, she nurses him to health when he is sick, and in her absence his "certainties fall apart". Padma also benefits from this relationship because she is in love with Saleem, she receives his companionship, eventually gains his hand in marriage (after much persuasion), and gets Saleem's story. Padma, in the Saleem-Padma relationship, represents the working class of India, taking care, and guiding the steps, of the middle/upper class citizens while existing in an equivocal economic dependence of them.

In light of the roles that Padma plays in *Midnight's Children* it can be surely concluded that Padma is just as important to this story as Saleem is. Since Saleem is "handcuffed to history", and he admits that the lives of everyone else influence the events in his own life, the logical conclusion is that there is nothing truly special about Saleem other than his ability to smell(3). This is true because if we believe all of Saleem's claims we, therefore, believe in two things which contradict each other. Someone cannot be solely responsible for something when the life of someone else impacts that person in a crucial way which consequently effects that "something". Since we have seen that Padma influences Saleem in multiple ways, she, therefore, is of equal importance to the history of India and Saleem's story. So, by Saleem's logic, in order to truly understand his story we must also swallow Padma's entire world.

## **19.5 LET US SUM UP**

In this lesson we read about Historiographic Metafiction and how *Midnight's Children* can be categorized in this mode as well as the role of Padma. Hutcheon coined the term historiographic metafiction to describe those literary texts that assert an interpretation of the past but are also intensely

self-reflexive (i.e. critical of their own version of the truth as being partial, biased, incomplete, etc.). Historiographic Metafiction, therefore, allows us to speak constructively about the past in a way that acknowledges the falsity and violence of the “objective” historian’s past without leaving us in a totally bewildered and isolated present. This can be clearly seen throughout the novel. Moreover, Padma, the narratee plays an important role in the novel. A surrogate reader she not only helps to keep the narrator on track but also acts as a device of cohesion for the entire narration.

#### **19.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss *Midnight’s Children* as a piece of Historiographic Metafiction.
- Q2. Saleem and Padma interact in a form of symbiotic relationship. Discuss with reference to the role of Padma in the novel.

#### **19.7 SUGGESTED READING**

- Christensen, Inger. 1981. *The Meaning of Metafiction*. Bergen, Oslo, Tromso: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fowler, Alastair. 1982. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Oxford: Clarendon.

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## **MAGIC REALISM**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 20.1 Objectives
- 20.2 Introduction
- 20.3 Magic Realism in *Midnight's Children*
- 20.4 Elements of Romance
- 20.5 Magic Realist Devices in *Midnight's Children*
- 20.6 Use of Cinema
- 20.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.8 Examination Oriented Questions
- 20.9 Suggested Reading

### **20.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is generally agreed that the term magic realism originated with German art critic Franz Roh in his work *Nach-Expressionismus Magischer Realismus Probleme der neusten Europäische Malerei*. The term gradually entered literary studies enjoying a brief and somewhat obscure stint in German/Austrian and Flemish literature (D'Haen: 192) before making a lengthier stop in the field of Latin American literary studies. The 1950s and 1960s in Latin American literature saw the emergence of the so-called 'boom' period. Among the 'boom' writers were Alejo Carpentier, Carlos

Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez. These writers were united in their determination to find a Latin American mode of expression rather than look to Europe for readily available literary influences. Soon there was a flurry of texts labelled ‘magical realist’ emerging from Latin America. In his chapter on magical realism in his work *Concepts of Realism*, Luc Herman observes: Magic Realism is a literary mode that has received a variety of (overlapping) definitions. Due to the boom of Latin American fiction in the 1960s, for which the formulation was used as a cover term, it has become so popular as a marketing label that it has turned into a problematic or even dangerous critical tool. (Herman: 122)

## **20.2 OBJECTIVES**

Salman Rushdie has been universally acclaimed for his diverse handling of the convention of magic realism. *Midnight’s Children* best exemplifies the coruscating virtuosity with which the writer handles this mode and thus it is impossible to claim a knowledge of the novel without an understanding of this mode. The objective of the lesson is to acquaint the learners with the genesis of magic realism and its use in the novel entwined with the elements of supernatural, romance, popular culture and cinema.

## **20.3 MAGIC REALISM IN *MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN***

Critics unanimously have recognised and appreciated Rushdie’s use of magic realism in *Midnight’s Children*. As mentioned earlier this mode acts as an effective weapon against the colonial forces as it recovers or reclaims, “cultural discourses dominated until now by the centralizing and suppressing impulses of an imperial culture in decline” (lopez, 210). Thus magic realism serves as an effective way of handling material from the so-called Third World where colonialism was pervasive and resulted in juxtaposition of cultures of different origins. So magic realism can also be termed as the literary expression of cultural hybridity, an issue very close to Rushdie’s heart. The *Midnight’s Children*, the magnum opus of the author, best exemplifies the coruscating virtuosity with which Rushdie has handled Magic Realism. In this novel, the magic realism can be interpreted in

a number of ways. It can be read as a juxtaposition of realist and fantastic or realist and romantic represented by West and East or Literary and Oral.

Roger Clark finds in *Midnight's Children* a 'stereotypical polarity' between Indian spirituality and European worldliness (96). If we read the magic realism in the novel as a juxtaposition of indigenous (magic) and western (realism) (Lopez, 172), we will find ample examples from the text supporting this interpretation. If we take the character of Amina, she has been brought up by a traditional mother and a modern westernized father. In spite of her skepticism for superstition, she finds herself thinking, "this is still India, and people like Ramram Seth know what they know" (115). Her father, Aadam Aziz, the modern westernized man says that, "the hegemony of superstition, mumbo-jumbo and all things magical would never be broken in India" (74). Padma also has, "her down-to-earthery, and her paradoxical superstition"(38). But this element that she provides seems indispensable to Saleem for his narration. As he says, "How to dispense with Padma? How give up her ignorance and superstition, necessary counterweights to my miracle-laden omniscience?" (150)

However, in the discussion of the indigenous versus western, it is easy to distinguish between India and England, but it is difficult to differentiate between India as it is and India as it is seen by the West. In other words, there is no discernible line between where India stops and Orientalism begins. The question that troubles the reader the most is whether the magic and superstition that various characters talk of are really a part and parcel of the Indian culture or an interpretation of the West's notion of India as the land of magic and superstition?

#### **20.4 ELEMENTS OF ROMANCE**

Magic realism's displacement of the realist novel can also be interpreted as the return of romance. Certainly *Midnight's Children*, like Bombay cinema, relies heavily on the motifs of romance as listed by Northrop Frye: 'stories of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies about the future contortions of the plot,

foster parents, adventures which involve ... narrow escapes from death, recognition of the true identity of the hero and his eventual marriage with the heroine' (4). Thus what Rushdie represents as a blending of India and England, or of orality and literacy, can be best interpreted as a conflict between romance and realism especially in the context of identity formation.

In *Midnight's Children* one can discern two different strands of narrative: that of a child and that of an adult. The young boy projects into the future a romance of which he is the hero, in which the greatness he carries inside will finally stand revealed and be honoured, but the adult has surrendered such fond dreams and comes to regard his life as a lesson rather than a model (Moretti). If we look at the protagonists of the realist novels by Dickens, Stendhal, Balzac and others, we find the same realization in hindsight, as seen in Saleem, of the futility of the promise of greatness and meaning. As a child Saleem was convinced of his greatness which 'at the appointed hour, would float down around my shoulders like an immaculate, delicately worked pashmina shawl' (185). However, gradually, as if in some secret combined conspiracy, his family, society and his leaders cause the steady decline of his special powers. Other midnight children also suffer the same fate. The dreams of their greatness are mercilessly crushed by the war and the Widow. After all the abuse he himself has suffered – amnesia, the massacre of family and friends, a nightmare journey into madness, the horrors of war, the ravages of emergency, Saleem views his life with a different perspective. He is no longer proud of being linked to his nation, of being able to influence the course of its history in many instances. In fact, he now resents that he has witnessed so much history. This is visible in his narration as he begins from 'I was about to make my presence felt' (97) and 'Those jerks; if they knew who I was they'd get out of my way pretty damn quick!' (279) goes on to 'It should have been me' (324), and finally ends with 'It's not fair' (450) and 'Why me?' (457). Saleem says, 'it was at the house of the wailing women that I learned the answer to the question of purpose which had plagued me all my life' (506): and the answer that he has learnt is that there was no special meaning or purpose of his life. He was not a doer of things; he was the one to whom the things were done.

However, as one reads the novel, one feels that the narrator's motivation of writing is not to convey his better understanding of the futility of his hopes and vision of greatness. Infact he is pickling his past life as some sort of heritage to be passed on to his son. As I have mentioned earlier there are two narrators-the child experiencing the events and the adult remembering those experiences. The child is not able to make out the significance of his relation to the nation and his purpose, though his telepathic powers provide a provisional answer. It is the adult narrator who draws parallels between himself and the nation, parallels only available to a reader of newspapers and history texts. This insistence on what Saleem calls his 'metaphorical' relation to the nation (286) accounts for the core of the novel's magic. To the end, Saleem the writer, who has many (but never enough) tokens of his status as Fortune's favourite child, is confident that he is someone with a destiny, without whom the world cannot be understood. Even the death-wish expressed in the apocalyptic vision at the end reflects Saleem's narcissistic desire to contain the world and his refusal to admit it might not end with himself.

The 'structural core' of romance, Northrop Frye explains, 'is the individual's loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity' (104). Its concern with the preservation, recognition, and restoration of identity and its capacity to assuage anxiety are the attractions of romance for both colonial and postcolonial literature

In romance, identity is a question of merit and recognition, of what one 'deserves' and is 'worthy' of. This can be better understood if we interpret romance in terms of the definition that Rushdie gives of 'song' in *The Ground beneath Her Feet*: 'Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many ways painfully deficient. Song turns them into something else. Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us ourselves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world' (19–20). Romance assigns the hero the place that his merit deserves and the proper order of things, 'a world worthy of our yearning' is restored.

The notion of merit presumes distinctions. This can be dangerous as taking difference of merit into account in a social order is acceptable, but asserting that the existing social order reflects distinction in merit is nothing but an instrument of promoting self interest. Thus when Lord Khusro Khusrovand, says it is a lie 'that we are all Born Equal': 'Is a Crook the equal of Saint? of course not!!' (322). It seems nothing more than a propaganda of self interest. Similarly, the Congress party dictum that 'all men are created equal' is proclaimed by a despicable Sanjay Gandhi clone, sounds cruelly false (some people have power and others do not) and parodically true (all are equally in thrall to the ruling family) (475). Saleem's friend Picture Singh gives the lie to the clone's assertion of equality, proving with a display of snake-charming bravado that 'some persons are better, others are less. But it may be nice for you to think otherwise' (475).

Saleem has to avoid this pitfall. He has to convince the reader that the distinctions of merit which he draws, unlike Lord Khusrovand, are not a means of self propaganda and he is able to do so by proving his own merit by abjuring privilege and displaying a clear-sighted awareness of the relative nature of merit.

Rushdie moulds and bends the conventions to his purpose. Thus, though he uses the prime romance motif of body switch in this novel, it is not to assert the concept of identity based on blood, but to illustrate identity as a socially constructed entity. As soon as he is born Saleem is switched with Shiva by Mary Percira who does the deed to prove her love for her communist lover. It seems that her perplexed motive was to assert that 'self' is not innate or genetic but determined by the conditions one is born to.

The story of Shiva and Saleem is seeped in the conservation romantic tradition. The babies are switched at birth so that the one who was the actual inheritor of wealth, privilege and social status is raised in poverty and the one who was destined for lower scale of life enjoys the privileges that are not his birthright. Even when Saleem comes to know of this truth he tries to keep

Shiva from knowing it though his writing is a form of confession, his motive is not confession or restoring to Shiva what is rightfully his. However, events take a turn and the wheel of fortune rolls and Shiva, through his heroic deeds during the war, rises as Saleem falls. However, unlike in a romance his rise is only material. He himself feels that he does not truly belong to the high society he's been inducted into. He is easily convinced by Roshanara Shetty that his high-class female patrons are secretly mocking him. Moreover the readers are not anxious to see Shiva restored to his 'rightful' place, which his character manifestly does not deserve. The sympathy of the reader remains with Saleem and not with Shiva.

The difference between Saleem and Shiva is that, unlike Shiva, Saleem has learnt that he is not the centre of the things. Moreover, he realizes that the switch has changed him and who he is, is a culmination of all his experiences after the switch. Thus the baby that was switched is not the same as Saleem who is narrating the story. So even after the truth is revealed by the blood test he remains a Sinai, because, as he puts it, "they could not imagine me out of the role. Their love was stronger than ugliness, stronger even than blood"(361). This reminds one of the position expressed by Maria Edgeworth: "I hate that woman," said a gentleman, looking at one who had been his nurse, "I hate that woman, for she changed me at birth" (134). The absurdity of the Irish bull arises from the fact that, because the switch has intervened, the 'I' who speaks cannot be the same as the 'me' that was changed. The bull can be read as a figure for the postcolonial dilemma: the postcolonial subject cannot claim that colonialism has misshapen him before birth, for the one who protests does not share an identity with the one who has been changed.

Saleem all his life has been in fear of Shiva, of his coming in possession of the truth and displacing Saleem. Although Saleem is the usurper and Shiva the victim, Saleem tries to engage the sympathies for himself projecting Shiva as the worst of the two. He alludes to the story in Genesis of Jacob and Esau as he refers to Shiva as his "mess-of-pottage-

corrupted rival.” In Rushdie’s parody of romance, we are what we have been made. Esau, the older twin and legitimate heir, is stronger, hairier, and his father’s favourite, but he is outsmarted and cheated by the smaller, more effeminate Jacob with the help of his mother. When Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a mess of pottage, it is not the trickster but the one bribed and tricked who is guilty of corruption and who proves his unworthiness. Thus it is Shiva and not Saleem who is corrupt and unworthy.

Saleem, knows that had Mary not switched them he might have been in Shiva’s position. But what he is asserting is that it will not be advantageous to reverse the existing situation. Shiva raises a vital issue when he asks ‘For what reason you’re rich and I’m poor?’ we know how arbitrary this distinction of rich and poor is and how it just might have been that Shiva would have been in Saleem’s position. However, his menacing tone puts off the reader who not only do not want to see the reversal but in fact fear it.

Saleem is well aware of the fact that who he is, is not the result of genetic inheritance but of his circumstances. He also acknowledges his own potential to be Shiva. When taunted by schoolmates, ‘the image of two irresistible knees’ floats into his head and he reacts with violence (280). But Saleem believes there is genuine merit in the social order as it exists, that at the very least it is superior to the risk of social disorder that its overthrow would incur. Realism derives its authority by acknowledging a world of others whose perspective is dependent not on character but on relative position. Elizabeth Ermath writes of the arbitrariness of point of view in realist narration: that arbitrariness suggests a potential equality among viewpoints. Because the realistic medium of experience is neutral, the same everywhere, there is a potential continuity between the vision of the spectator and the vision of all possible spectators in the same horizon. Any position would reveal the ‘same’ world with as much validity; and any person could take up the position of the implied spectator. The implied spectator’s privilege, that is, depends not upon qualitative distinctions between ‘better’ and ‘worse’ points of view, but rather upon quantitative



distinctions, between more and less distance. It is a privilege available to anyone who is willing to travel (20–21) .

Mary Pereira's baby switch and later confession, by dividing Saleem into the middle-class boy at the centre of Methwold's Estate and the adult narrator who knows the truth about his inheritance and is therefore in some measure outside the world and able to judge it, function somewhat like the heuristic 'veil of ignorance' that John Rawls argues is necessary to measure a just society. Rawls suggests that we must imagine a society designed according to principles of justice from behind a veil that makes it impossible for anyone 'to design principles to favor his particular condition' because no one can predict what that condition will be: 'Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like' (12). In this way it becomes possible to imagine a society that could win the consent of members before they are actually born into it.

The postcolonial self is so shaped by the colonial experience that it is not the same as the precolonial self. However, the self is always more than its own experience: it is also all the selves it might have been and by whose images it finds itself surrounded and reflected. Thus Saleem who is entirely formed by the life of privilege in the Methwold's Estate cannot, try as he might, abjure Shiva.

The relation between Saleem and Shiva to an extent promote the idea of fixed identity. In the later stage of his life Saleem once again switches place with Shiva, when Shiva moves up on the social scale as a decorated and celebrated war hero and Saleem moves down the social scale and ends up in the magician's ghetto. However, their change of circumstances does not result in the change of their selves. They remain at heart what they were as boys, the violent social outlaw and the mild-mannered schoolboy. It seems it is not genetic parentage that is crucial to character and identity-formation, but the first ten years of life, spent with parents.

Culture (breeding in the sense of upbringing) is an important factor in identity formation of Rushdie's characters. The class-determined identities don't change with change in circumstances. Mary Pereira's song proclaiming that one can be whatever one wants to be is proven wrong by Saleem and Shiva. They are what they were raised to be in their childhood; and the change in their circumstances in later life cannot change them.

The story of the superhero born at midnight presents all the features of romance as listed by Fredric Jameson: a heightened magical world where the scene of the action is more important than those who perform it, a struggle between representatives of good and evil that are magical forces larger than the characters themselves, and 'a salvational historicity' (148). Saleem finds in the world around him signs that secretly confirm his inner greatness: a congratulatory letter from Nehru, the fisherman's pointing finger in a Victorian painting of Raleigh, and the giant Kolynos Kid on a billboard advertising toothpaste. In this romance, all that is not a confirmation of one's greatness becomes a threat to that greatness.

Though the magic of romance, where the anxieties are allayed and desires fulfilled, is enticing, it does not blind one to the fact that the truth of romance is insufficient, an inefficiency that is expressed in realism. A realist protagonist realizes that his position in the world is not central and he shares the world with others. His merit is not only not recognized and given its due, it in fact hinders with his seeing the true colours of the world. Thus he always remains at odds with the society. Like Stendhal's Julien Sorel or Balzac's Lucien de Rubempré, who come into conflict with their society when they try to master it. Similarly, Saleem finds that his way is thwarted except when it leads downward. He learns like the realist protagonists that moving on the social scale does not depend on merit or worth. It is in fact merely a question of Snakes and Ladders, that traditionally comes with small illustrations of virtue and vice being appropriately rewarded but in which progress and decline are actually determined by the role of a dice.

A prominent source in the novel is the character of Mary Pereria. As Kitie Trumpener says that in colonial romance, the key figure is the nurse: “the native nurse is able, through her milk, her love, and her influence, to heal the colony’s scars and to effect a lasting rapprochement between the colonizers and the colonized’ (230). Mary loves Saleem unconditionally. Moreover, she is under the romantic illusion that the switch was destined and she was merely a tool of destiny. She leaves her job and joins the Sinai family as an ayah so that she can watch over the fortunes of the baby. Though she is haunted by her secret, but her guilt is not for the disposed baby, but for hiding the truth from Saleem. Moreover, she fears the outcome if the secret is known. The name ‘Mary’ links her both to the mother of Christ, Virgin Mary, and also to the sister of Moses, Miriam. It is Miriam who was responsible for the events which resulted in the adoption of her brother by the Pharaoh household and raised as an Egyptian prince.

Romance provides Saleem with his meaning, but he needs realism for his authority. The novel wants it both ways. My point is that Rushdie’s magic realism is best understood not in terms of hybridity, a metaphor from genetics that locates identity in the blood, but in terms of a struggle between meaning and authority. If magic realism is indeed well suited to describing Indian reality, it is not because India is somehow exotic and magical, but because postcolonial identity is a matter of conflicting desires and anxieties.

## **20.5 MAGIC REALIST DEVICES IN *THE MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN***

*Midnight’s Children* offers a magic realist device emphasising the continued struggle to come to terms with identity within the polarities of the post-colonial. They are, by virtue of their midnight birth, ‘children of the times,’ as Rushdie has asserted, as much as magical creations (Pattanayak 21). Rushdie, through Saleem, writes that the children can be seen as ‘the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth ridden nation [myth perhaps referring to the more negative influence of Western as well as Indian fictions]...or as the true hope of freedom....’ (Rushdie 200). This freedom, at the end of the text, is described as being ‘now forever

extinguished,' and there is a sour irony inherent in Saleem's thoughts that the children 'must not become....the bizarre creation of a rambling, diseased mind' (200). Rushdie implies that Saleem's generation has failed to consolidate the possibilities inherent in independence. The possibility exists in each passing generation of midnight children, who are the children of each successive era. Each generation, as Saleem muses, will erase the presence of a previous generation that has not yet learnt to define a stable and solid sense identity: 'Yes, they will trample me underfoot....they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who is not his....' (463). The individual voice is swamped by the creeping progression of time and history: nevertheless, the text's conclusion is open ended. There may be no such thing as a single national identity in the contemporary world, where media and communication link cultures and countries: there is perhaps an interchange of cultures, to varying degrees, between all countries. This delicate ambiguity is emphasised in the final sentence of the text, which links magic with realism, the individual with history, the individual and regional identity and self-assertion with the magnet of the universal: '....it is the privilege of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and be unable to live or die in peace' (463).

Rushdie's principle use of fantastic in the text involves the telepathic abilities of Saleem and the other thousand and one children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15th 1947 (the date of Indian independence). Stephen Slemon writes that 'in the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a fictional world from the other' (11). If we take this to be the world of fantasy and the world of reality, both factors can be seen to be present and competing for the reader's attention. The fantastic is easily discerned in *Midnight's Children*. Through it, the realistic makes its voice heard. The thousand and one children point not only towards the fantasy of the similarly numbered *Arabian Nights*, but also to Rushdie's calculations of the Indian birth rate. He estimated that 'a thousand and one children an hour is roughly

accurate' (Durix 18). Furthermore, Rushdie's comments enable the gift of telepathy to be perceived as a magical signifier of the objective reality of contemporary Indian society which makes its impression on the individual psyche. 'In a country like India,' Rushdie continues, 'you are basically never alone. The idea of solitude is a luxury which only rich people enjoy....it seemed to me that people lived intermingled with each other in a way that perhaps they don't any more in the West....it was idiotic to try and consider one's life as being discrete from all other lives' (Durix 23). As 'All India Radio,' Saleem's 'telepathy' becomes a simultaneously magical and realistic device to signify the 'polyglot frenzy' consisting of 'the inner monologues of all the teeming millions' (Rushdie 168). As Slemon notes, 'the real social relations of post-colonial cultures appear, through the mediation of the text's language of narration, in the post-colonial magic realist work'.

## 20.6 USE OF CINEMA

Magic Realism, as it is used in *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie, can also be interpreted as a device employed to bind the Indian culture of the past to the multicultural scenario of the present and the technique used by Rushdie is employment of cinematic features. As Saleem muses, 'Once upon a time there were Radna and Krisna, and Rama and Sita, and Laila and Majnu; also (because we are not affected by the West) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn' (259).

Indigenous cinema and Western drama are intertwined with the history of postcolonial India to examine the effect of these on the mindset of the people in the newly independent nation. This, as Edward W. Said writes, is on the part of the writer a, "conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories".

According to Stephen Slemon magic realist writers, 'tend to display a preoccupation with images of borders and centres, and to work towards destabilizing their fixity'. Rushdie tries to achieve this by using the cinematic

and cinema screen to examine how subtly fantasy plays with perception of reality moulded by both Hollywood and the Indian film industry. Scattered references to the cinema continually inform the narrative of *Midnight's Children*. We have a prominent reference in the episode of Rashid the rickshaw boy, who is returning home after watching a film 'Gai-Wallah which is "an Eastern-Western". It seems to be a cross between the Hollywood and Hindu culture as the hero in the western cowboy getup and style defends and protects the cows. Rashid is so influenced by the movie that on his way back he imitates the hero in all his stunts and styles. This episode shows how the postcolonial mentality is being formed by both the indigenous and western influences in the sphere of cinema. 'Bollywood', the word itself echoes Hollywood and Bollywood productions are representative of a popular Indian medium after the independence. According to Mishra the Indian film industry has rapidly grown as is evident from the fact that in 1983, it produced 742 films (122). He notes that the status of the cinema in *Midnight's Children* is that of an industry which "began as a colonial business, and has...never been able to shed its colonial origins" (121).

Cinema captures people by its magical resonance thus moulding the individual by its hybridity. Saleem not only gives direct allusions from this medium but also uses it to give shape to his narrative. He compares events in his life with Hollywood productions: "would this....young father have behaved like, or unlike, Montgomery Clift in I Confess? (Watching it some years ago at the New Empire Cinema, I couldn't decide.)" (105); 'I may have got all this from an old film called Lost Horizon....' (306). The cinema becomes a further device for Rushdie's magic realism. Films transform the perception of others and their perception of themselves. Consider Inspector Vakeel, who 'leaps into action, swinging up his rifle, shooting from the hip like John Wayne' (147). Once more the magical signifies the composite nature of contemporary Indian culture and society.

Said says that *Midnight's Children* is a "work based on the liberating imagination of independence itself, with all its anomalies and contradictions

working themselves out” (260). Indian film industry post-independence, becomes a window for the possibility of construction of Indian cultural identity. Before independence, the power of the cinema to act as a promoter of indigenous culture and as a means for self assertion is muted and controlled by the colonizer. “No close-up is necessary” (35) says Saleem as he renders the massacre of the Sikhs by Brigadier Dyer and his men in 1919 as if on a cinema screen.

Though Rushdie presents the influence of cinema on the Indian psyche in a joyous manner, there is nevertheless a skepticism and criticism of such an ardent adherence of the masses to the magical and the fantastic. Rushdie breaks the magic of cinema by the sudden announcement of Gandhi’s assassination amidst a love scene.

The desire for fantasy to comfort an infant nation and culture is perhaps best illustrated in the case of Saleem’s uncle, who sits ‘pounding out scripts which nobody would ever film...’ (241). This is because, in the words of Saleem’s aunt Pia, “he must write about ordinary people and social problems” (242). This shows that, while this realist style of film making, as exemplified by Satyajit Ray is critically lauded both in India and internationally, there is no mass demand for realism in a culture whose desire for fantasy marks the nature of its post-colonial identity. This is so because the simple child like fantasy allows one to be oblivious of the harsh political and historical realities. In simple child like fantasy, identities can be constructed easily. Rushdie however, advocates that forgoing the magical and adopting the reality is the only way of attaining a complete Indian identity free from outside influences.

The cinema screen becomes a field in which an examination of the two polarities, ‘universalism,’ the ‘notion of a unitary and homogeneous human nature which marginalises and excludes the distinctive characteristics, the difference, of post-colonial societies,’ and difference, which finds ‘universalism....disappearing into an endless network of provisional and specific determinations in which even the most apparently “essential”

features of human life become provisional and contingent,’ (Ashcroft et al. 55) takes place. This is directly implied when Rushdie writes ‘Reality [emphasis added] is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems - but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems more and more incredible’ (165). Describing himself moving closer and closer to a cinema screen, from the back of seats to the front, Saleem considers that ‘*gradually the stars*’ faces dissolve into dancing grain; tiny details assume grotesque proportions; the illusion dissolves - or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself is reality....’ (166). Rushdie in writing that ‘the illusion itself is reality,’ and thereby acknowledging the hypnotic grip of the magic emitted by the cinema, both questions and acknowledges the power of the medium as a component of a hybrid post-colonial Indian culture.

*Midnight’s Children* is post-colonial as the main body of the narrative occurs after India becomes independent. However, as has been discussed, Rushdie’s use of the cinema in relation to magic realism raises interesting questions in relation to India’s culture which is moulded by indigenous fictions and those of the West. The narrative framework of *Midnight’s Children* consists of a tale—comprising his life story—which Saleem Sinai recounts orally to his wife-to-be Padma. This self-referential narrative (within a single paragraph Saleem refers to himself in the first and third person: ‘And I, wishing upon myself the curse of Nadir Khan....’; “I tell you,” Saleem cried, “it is true....”) recalls indigenous Indian culture, particularly the similarly orally recounted *Arabian Nights*. The events in Rushdie’s text also parallel the magical nature of the narratives recounted in the *Arabian Nights* (consider the attempt to electrocute Saleem at the latrine, or his journey in the ‘basket of invisibility’).

## 20.7 LET US SUM UP

In *Midnight’s Children*, the narrative comprises and compresses Indian cultural history. ‘Once upon a time,’ Saleem muses, ‘there were Radha and Krishna, and Rama and Sita, and Laila and Majnu; also (because we are not



affected by the West) Romeo and Juliet, and Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn'. Characters from Indian cultural history are chronologically intertwined with characters from Western culture, and the devices that they signify Indian culture, religion and storytelling, Western drama and cinema are presented in Rushdie's text with post-colonial Indian history to examine both the effect of these indigenous and non-indigenous cultures on the Indian mind and in the light of Indian independence. This constitutes the magic and the realism in the novel.

## **20.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss the mode of magic realism as employed by Rushdie in his magnum opus *Midnight's Children*.
- Q2. Interpret *Midnight's Children* as a romance.
- Q3. Analyse the use of cinema and cinematic screen by Rushdie in this novel.
- Q4. Comment upon the use of magic realist devices in *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie.
- Q5. Discuss the role of Mary Pereria in *Midnight's Children*.

## **20.9 SUGGESTED READING**

- Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. *Magical Realism and The Fantastic – Resolved Versus Unresolved*. New York and London: Antinomy Garland, 1985.
- Lois Parkinson & Faris, Wendy B. (eds.): *Magical Realism – Theory, History, Community*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Dell'Aversano, Carmen. "Worlds, Things, Words: Rushdie's Style from Grimus to *Midnight's Children*." *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-Colonial Literature in English*. Ed. Elsa Linguanti et al. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999.

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***THE SHADOW LINES – AN OVERVIEW***

- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Objectives
- 21.3 *The Shadow Lines* :a book of several perspectives
  - 21.3.1 *The Shadow Lines* :postcolonialism, gender and nationalism
- 21.4 *The Shadow Lines* :the narrator and the narrative technique
  - 21.4.1 *The Shadow Lines* : A historical narrative
  - 21.4.2 *The Shadow Lines* : A novel on partition
- 21.5 *The Shadow Lines*:borderless nations
- 21.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.7 Glossary
- 21.8 Short Answer Questions
  - 21.8.1 Multiple Choice Questions
- 21.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 21.10 Suggested Reading

**21.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Shadow Lines* is a novel written by an award-winning Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer, was born in 1956, is the author of ten highly acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction which include the Booker

Prize shortlisted *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and (book one of the Ibis Trilogy), *River of Smoke*, and *The Glass Palace*. His first published novel was *The Circle of Reason*, the immediate predecessor to the novel *The Shadow Lines*. Other popular books he has written include *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004, *River of Smoke*, Ghosh continues to write to this day. He has won numerous prizes, some of which are the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Pushcart Prize and the Grinzane Cavour Prize. He divides his time between New York and India.

*The Shadow Lines* was published in 1988. The novel, second of a three-part series, was written to capture the thoughts and ideas of many people/characters, constantly switching views and perspectives. Mainly for this reason, the book is named *The Shadow Lines*. The main idea of the novel is- that different people have different views, but none of those views are capable of being completely understood by another being. The main character of the novel is the narrator, a boy, his uncle is named Tridib. Major events like World War II and the Partition of India, are in the background.

*The Shadow Lines* is divided into two parts- 'Going way' and 'Coming Home'. The story follows a boy through his life. The boy grows up in Calcutta. Calcutta, or Kolkata, is a megacity of India. It is actually the capital of an Indian state i.e. West Bengal. Later the boy moves to Delhi in India for his education. Delhi is a Union Territory and another cosmopolitan megacity of India. In the end, he moves to London and the author tells the reader about his experiences in London, England.

The boy's family is actually connected through friendship to the Price family in London. The main character, the young boy, loves to listen to his uncle's stories. His uncle, Tridib, is an interesting and an attractive person in the eyes of the main character i.e. the young boy. The young boy thinks that his uncle has a lot of knowledge and exhibits interesting perspectives. However, the young boy's grandmother, Tha'mma, does not agree with him. She thinks Tridib is wasting his connections since he refuses to use the family connections.

The young boy has sentimental feelings for Ila, but he is too scared to tell her. However, one day Ila gets to know the young boy's feelings for her, even though he did not mean to exhibit his feelings to her. Sadly, Ila quickly leaves the young boy in favor of the Prince family's son.

Tha'mma wants more than anything to reunite her family. Therefore, she goes to Dhaka to fetch her uncle. Tribid is now in love with Maya and sacrifices his life for her....

## **21.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:-

1. To acquaint the learner with an overview to the novel *The Shadow Lines*.
2. To introduce the learner the novel *The Shadow Lines*, as a book of multi-perspectives.
3. To introduce the learner with the role of the narrator and narrative technique in the *The Shadow Lines*.
4. To provide a background reading to *The Shadow Lines*, so that the learner can understand the novel better.
5. To provide the learner with background to major events like World War II and the Partition of India.
6. Written assignments for practice with key so that the learner can do self-evaluation.
7. Suggesting list of books for further reading.

## **21.3 THE SHADOW LINES :A BOOK OF SEVERAL PERSPECTIVES**

The novel, *The Shadow Lines*, constructs several perspectives of time and events. It is a narrative constructed out of a complicated, constantly criss-crossing network of memories of people, it never pretends to tell a story. It brings people together and at the same time, throws them apart. The novel *The Shadow Lines*, contains episodes that are clearly visible on one

perspective and nonexistent on another, incidents that exist in the memory of one, and therefore in another's imagination. In a creative way, the novel invites the reader to invent one, out of the memories of those involved, memories that hold mirrors of differing shades to the same experience.

Out of a complex network of memories, relationships and pictures, Amitav Ghosh builds an extremely vivid, funny and moving story. Exposing the idea of the nation state as an illusion, an arbitrary dissection of people. Ghosh depicts the absurd manner in which a home can suddenly become an enemy.

### **21.3.1 *The Shadow Lines* :postcolonialism, gender and nationalism**

Whilst the main focus of this novel is postcolonialism and in particular the fragile and transitory status of boundaries and frontiers, a key concept within postcolonial studies is how gender impacts on this topic. It is particularly interesting how two characters, the narrator's grandmother Tha'mma, and his cousin Ila, impact the theme of the novel, in particular with their attitudes towards nationalism.

Tha'mma epitomises the views of the Nationalist movement and India's nationalist identity. She has a passionate and blind love for her nation, even though she is a migrant from Dhaka and therefore not strictly Indian - of course, this is a key concept in postcolonialism, how the "Imagined Communities" of nations are formed and how belonging is defined.

## **21.4 *THE SHADOW LINES* :THE NARRATOR AND THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE**

*The Shadow Lines* is a story told by a nameless child narrator using mnemonic process. It's a nonlinear narrative, fragmentary, episodic and incomplete. This style of writing is both unique and captivating; unfolding ideas together as time and space combine and help the narrator understand his past better and look for a new meaning.

*The Shadow Lines* has a theme of geographical borders,at the same time describes the borders that divide people who share the same cultural

background. Maps and geographical borders play a significant role in enforcing imperialist power. While borders in *The Shadow Lines* appear to be mere shadows because they divide people who share the same regional and cultural identity.

Amitav Ghosh's narrator, a young boy, travels across time through the stories of those around him, crossing over the unreliable contours of memory, unmindful of physical, political and chronological borders. But with time as he ages, he is haunted by a seemingly random act of violence. Bits and pieces of tales, both half-remembered and imagined, come together in his mind until he arrives at an intricate, interconnected picture of the world where borders and boundaries mean nothing, mere shadow lines that we draw dividing people and nations.

The book chronicles one series of events lived differently by different people. The narrator has this unusual fascination for a distant cousin Tridib, the eldest son of an Indian diplomat abroad, Tridib who never "lives" the story, except through memories of others — the narrator's, brother Robi's, and lover May's. He is a link that connects them, a shadow line that never materialises. Beginning with the narrator's memories of his early interactions with Tridib, who had "given me eyes" to see the world with, the narrative keeps travelling back and forth in time as well as space, moving along with the train of thoughts that shift wildly from Calcutta's Gole Park to Ballygunge, and farther into London's Brick Lane of the War, or Lymington Road of today. The outlines of these places are as vivid to the reader as to those who lived in them, or those who didn't actually live in them, but could nevertheless invent them through memories of those who did.

#### **21.4.1 *The Shadow Lines* : A historical narrative**

Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* is a historical narrative which deals mainly with the national borders and geographical boundaries that separate people. The novel also records violence that followed the riots of Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964. The title, "*The Shadow Lines*" has many connotations; it does not only refer to borders between countries. Ghosh

chooses his title to suggest that the borders which separate people are mere “shadows”, and nothing more than artificial lines created by politicians. Building upon this, Ghosh stresses the arbitrariness of such cartographic demarcations. He illustrates this point through Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother. When she travels to Calcutta with her family in the plane, she naively asks “whether she would be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane” (Ghosh, 1988: 167). Tha’mma does not imagine any line in between the borders; she is actually looking for visible indication of demarcation. She says:

“But if there aren’t any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where’s the difference then? And if there’s no difference both sides will be the same; it’ll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us”. (Ghosh, 1988: 167)

Tha’mma reveals the meaninglessness of the borders. When she asks her son how she can know if she is entering a new nation, it becomes difficult for her to comprehend the idea that the border is not on the frontier, but rather inside the airport. She cannot believe that there are no external marks or trenches to identify the borders between Calcutta and Dhaka. She is also disturbed that she has to go through many procedures to pass between these two countries.

#### **21.4.2 *The Shadow Lines* : A novel on partition**

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh metaphorically presents the story of the partition of Tha’mma’s ancestral house in Dhaka. The story of this house and partition started when Tha’mma was still young. The house has been divided with wooden partition wall going through doorways. The two parts of the family accepted this partition of the house to stop the continuous quarrels between them. Ironically, they could not find the

peace they were searching for; instead, this partition of the house created bitterness between the two families. Ghosh uses this allegory of the house partition to represent the political partition of the nation.

### **21.5 THE SHADOW LINES: BORDERLESS NATIONS**

The narrator argues that if the politicians draw the border lines on the political maps, this does not mean that they actually divide the nation into two nations. Another important issue in Ghosh's discussion is maps and cartography. The whole narrative is woven around the historical incidents of violence resulting from border divisions, maps, and cartography. Political maps have a great power in imperialism; they can be considered as a way in which colonizers exert superiority over the colonized. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said describes imperialism as "an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control" (Said, 1993 :14). Through these maps, the colonizer oppresses, and the colonized is submitted under control. For Said maps are "weapons of imperialism" which are used in colonial promotion. As Ghosh highlights the shadowiness of the borders and boundaries, he also emphasizes the uselessness of maps. When the narrator returns from London, fifteen years after Tridib's death, he finds Tridib's old Atlas. The narrator starts to draw an imaginary circle on the map and discovers that a place like Chang-Mai in Thailand is much nearer to Calcutta than Delhi is and Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. This also explains the idea that the borders drawn between the countries and the circles the narrator draws on the map are both imaginary and mere shadow.

Ghosh also reveals this theme of border's absurdity through Tridib, the narrator's uncle, who believes that the borders drawn by politicians do not really perform as anything more than being shadows. These borders will never be able to separate people who share the same history and culture. For him, it is the riots and the factors leading to them that separate people. One might imagine that these border lines would divide people, but ironically, they bring them closer together because their memories remain undivided.



Ghosh's approach toward borders and geographical demarcations is that they are arbitrary and invent divisions between people and nations. This point is clearly revealed by Tha'mma's uncle, Jethamoshai when Tha'mma persuades him to return to Calcutta to accompany his extended family, he told her: "I don't believe in this India-Shindia . . . Suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here" (Ghosh, 1988: 237).

The futility of the border lines is evident in Jethamoshai's speech as he believes in the rootedness of identities and nations. He questions the ability of these lines between nations to divide people because he realizes that once a man starts to move, there would be no end to that. The narrator also realizes the futility of the constant line drawing by the politicians as it does not separate anything or anyone but only provokes acts of violence on both sides of the border. He expresses his own opinion about the uselessness of these border lines which separate countries on the geographical maps, when he says:

"They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of the lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates . . . The simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines- so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other" (Ghosh, 1988: 257).

He finds himself locked into the "symmetry" which binds him to Dhaka even more closely than when Dhaka and Calcutta were joined in the British India. He uses the image of "looking-glass" to suggest that Dhaka and Calcutta are connected to each other as images in a mirror; one reflects the other.

## 21.6 LET US SUM UP

*The Shadow Lines* is a novel written by an award-winning Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer, was born in 1956, is the author of ten highly acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction. *The Shadow Lines* was published in 1988. The main idea of the novel is- that different people have different views, but none of those views are capable of being completely understood by another being. The main character of the novel is a boy, who is seen growing up throughout the novel. Major events like World War II and the Partition of India, are in the background. *The Shadow Lines* is divided into two parts- 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home'. The story follows a boy through his life. The boy grows up in Calcutta. Calcutta, or Kolkata, is a megacity of India. It is actually the capital of an Indian state i.e. West Bengal. Later the boy moves to Delhi in India for his education. Delhi is a Union Territory and another cosmopolitan megacity of India. In the end, he moves to London and the author tells the reader about his experiences in London, England. The boy's family is actually connected through friendship to the Price family in London. The main character, the young boy, loves to listen to his uncle's stories. His uncle, Tridib, is an interesting and an attractive person in the eyes of the main character i.e. the young boy. The book *The Shadow Lines*, constructs several perspectives of time and events. Out of a complex network of memories, relationships and pictures, Amitav Ghosh builds an extremely vivid, funny and moving story. Exposing the idea of the nation state as an illusion, an arbitrary dissection of people, Ghosh depicts the absurd manner in which a home can suddenly become an enemy.

Whilst the main focus of this novel is postcolonialism and in particular the fragile and transitory status of boundaries and frontiers, a key concept within postcolonial studies is how gender impacts on this topic. *The Shadow Lines* has a theme of geographical borders, at the same time describes the borders that divide people who share the same cultural background. Maps and geographical borders play a significant role in enforcing imperialist power. While borders in *The Shadow Lines* appear to be mere shadows because

they divide people who share the same regional and cultural identity. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh metaphorically presents the story of the partition of Tha'mma's ancestral house in Dhaka. The story of this house and partition started when Tha'mma was still young.

### **21.7 GLOSSARY**

1. non-fiction–prose writing that is informative or factual rather than fictional
2. World War –II – a global war that lasted from 1939 to 1945
3. Partition – Partition of India in 1947 was the division of British India into two independent dominion states
4. West Bengal – A state of eastern India, west of Bangladesh
5. Union Territory – A type of administrative division in India which is ruled directly by the Union government (central Govt. hence it got the name Union territory)
6. Cosmopolitan- influenced by the culture of other countries
7. Mnemonic – also known as a memory aid, a tool that helps remember an idea or phrase with a pattern of relatable associations
8. Perspective – opinion or attitude towards something
9. Sentimental – connected with emotions
10. Postcolonial – occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule
11. Gender – the fact of being male or female
12. Nationalism- a feeling of love or pride for your own country
13. Transitory – existing for a short time
14. Epitomize–to be a typical of something
15. Passionate – showing or caused by a very strong feeling
16. Narrative technique – methods that writers use to give certain artistic and emotional effects to a story

17. Imperialist – someone who supports imperialism, imperialism is a system in which a country rules other countries
18. Chronological – arranged in the order in which events happened
19. Historical narrative – writing history in a story based form
20. Cartographic – science or art of making or drawing maps
21. Allegory – a story etc. in which each character or event is a symbol representing an idea or a quality such as truth, evil, death etc.
22. Arbitrary- not seeming to be based on any reason or plan and sometimes seeming unfair

### **21.8 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Q.1) Who is the writer of *The Shadow Lines* ?

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Q.2) What do you know about Amitav Ghosh?

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Q.3) When was *The Shadow Lines* published?

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Q.4) What do you know about the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*?

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Q.5) Which major historical events are in the background of *The Shadow Lines*?

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Q.6) In how many parts is *The Shadow Lines* divided ?

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Q.7) Name the two parts in which *The Shadow Lines* is divided ?

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Q.8) Name the two women characters of *The Shadow Lines* who are related to the narrator?

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Q.9) Name the four places where the narrative keeps travelling back and forth in time as well as space in *The Shadow Lines*?

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Q.10) Which parts of Eastern India and Bangladesh are depicted in *The Shadow Lines* showing violence and riots, also specify the time?

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Q.11) In *The Shadow Lines*, what does Ghosh metaphorically present along with the story of the partition.

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Q.12) Which allegory Ghosh uses in *The Shadow Lines*, to represent the political partition of the nation?

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Q.13) What do you know about Tridib?

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**Possible Answers**

A-1) *The Shadow Lines* is a novel written by an award-winning Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh.

A-2) Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer, was born in 1956, is the author of ten highly acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction.

A-3) *The Shadow Lines* was published in 1988.

A-4) The narrator is the main character of the novel, who is seen growing up throughout the novel.

A-5) Major events like World War II and partition are in the background of *The Shadow Lines* .

A-6) *The Shadow Lines* is divided into two parts.

A-7) *The Shadow Lines* is divided into two parts- ‘Going Away’ and ‘Coming Home’.

- A-8) The two characters, related to the narrator are his grandmother Tha'mma, and cousin Ila.
- A-9) The narrative keeps travelling back and forth in time as well as space, moving along with the train of thoughts that shift wildly from Calcutta's Gole Park to Ballygunge, and farther into London's Brick Lane of the War, or Lymington Road of today.
- A-10) The novel *The Shadow Lines*, records the violence that followed the riots of Calcutta and Dhaka in 1964.
- A-11) In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh metaphorically presents the story of the partition of Tha'mma's ancestral house in Dhaka.
- A-12) Ghosh uses this allegory of the house partition to represent the political partition of the nation.
- A-13) Tridib is the narrator's uncle.

### 21.8.1 Multiple Choice Questions

Q-1) In which year Amitav Ghosh, was born \_\_\_\_\_ ?

- (a) 1971
- (b) 1973
- (c) 1956
- (d) 1976

Q-2) Amitav Ghosh is the author of .....highly acclaimed works of fiction and non-fiction.

- (a) 10
- (b) 11
- (c) 12
- (d) 13

- Q.3) Amitav Ghosh's, Booker Prize shortlisted work is .....
- (a) *River of Smoke*
  - (b) *The Glass Palace*
  - (c) *The Shadow Lines*
  - (d) *Sea of Poppies*
- Q.4) Amitav Ghosh's, first published novel was .....
- (a) *River of Smoke*
  - (b) *The Circle of Reason*
  - (c) *The Shadow Lines*
  - (d) *Sea of Poppies*
- Q.5) Amitav Ghosh's, *The Circle of Reason*, was the immediate predecessor to the novel .....
- (a) *River of Smoke*
  - (b) *The Circle of Reason*
  - (c) *The Shadow Lines*
  - (d) *Sea of Poppies*
- Q.6) Amitav Ghosh's, .....was published in 2004
- (a) *The Hungry Tide*
  - (b) *The Circle of Reason*
  - (c) *The Shadow Lines*
  - (d) *Sea of Poppies*
- Q.7) In which year *The Shadow Lines* was published ?
- (a) 1971
  - (b) 1973



- (c) 1988
  - (d) 1989
- Q.8) The narrator's family is connected through friendship to the Price family in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (a) Ballygunge
  - (b) Calcutta's Gole Park
  - (c) Lymington Road
  - (d) London
- Q.9) The narrator has sentimental feelings for ..... .
- (a) Jethamoshai
  - (b) Ila
  - (c) Maya
  - (d) Tha'mma
- Q.10) Tribid is now in love with ..... .
- (a) Jethamoshai
  - (b) Ila
  - (c) Maya
  - (d) Tha'mma
- Q-11) .....epitomises the views of the Nationalist movement and India's nationalist identity.
- (a) Jethamoshai
  - (b) Ila
  - (c) Maya
  - (d) Tha'mma

Q.12) Tha'mma's uncle is .....

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Maya
- (d) Tha'mma

**Answers**

- 1) (c) 1956
- 2) (a) 10
- 3) (d) *Sea of Poppies*
- 4) (b) *The Circle of Reason*
- 5) (c) *The Shadow Lines*
- 6) (a) *The Hungry Tide*
- 7) (c) 1988
- 8) (d) London
- 9) (b) Ila
- 10) (c) Maya
- 11) (d) Tha'mma
- 12) (a) Jethamoshai

**21.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1) How does class politics play in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* ?
- Q.2) What is the significance of 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' in *The Shadow Lines* ?
- Q.3) Discuss about the role of the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*.
- Q.4) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a historical novel.

- Q.5) 'Borders are imaginary lines', discuss in the context of *The Shadow Lines*.
- Q.6) Discuss the narrative technique in *The Shadow Lines*.
- Q.7) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel on Partition.
- Q.8) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a postcolonial work.
- Q.10) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel on multi-perspectives.

### 21.10 SUGGESTED READING

1. Amaral, I. (1994) New Reflections on the Theme of International Boundaries , in C. Schofield (ed). *Global Boundaries: World Boundaries, Volume* ,New York: Routledge. Pp. 16-22.
2. Bhatt, Indira Nittayandam. *The Fiction of Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi. Creative Fictions: 2001.
3. Khair, Tabish. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Delhi. Permanent Block: 2003, 183.
4. Mondal, Anshuman. *Amitav Ghosh*. Manchester and New York. Manchester University Press: 2007.
5. Roy, Rituparna. *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*. Amsterdam. Amsterdam University Press: 2010.
6. Ghosh, Amitav. (1988) *The Shadow Lines*, Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher.
7. Said, Edward. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto & Windus.
8. Google, Wikipedia and e resources available on google search engine

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***THE SHADOW LINES – AN OVERVIEW***

- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Objectives
- 22.3: *The Shadow Lines* : Reminiscences of a youth
  - 22.3.1 *The Shadow Lines*: personality and identity in childhood
  - 22.3.2 *The Shadow Lines*: delicate world of girl child
- 22.4 *The Shadow Lines* : Memories of many characters
  - 22.4.1 *The Shadow Lines* :Divided Nations But Undivided Memories
  - 22.4.2 *The Shadow Lines* : Migration
- 22.5 *The Shadow Lines* : Nationalism
  - 22.5.1 *The Shadow Lines* : Borders and Communal Riots
  - 22.5.2 *The Shadow Lines* :India’s Struggle for Independence
- 22.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.7 Glossary
- 22.8 Short Answer Questions
  - 22.8.1 Multiple Choice Questions
- 22.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 22.10 Suggested Reading

## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's fiction depicts strong themes of humanism, cosmopolitanism, communalism, colonial power and history. His themes involve emigration, exile, cultural displacement and uprooting. He illuminates the human ironies, deep-seated ambiguities and existential dilemmas of human condition. Amitav Ghosh, in an interview, said, "Nobody has the choice of stepping away from history" and "For me, the value of the novel, as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life-history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality".

*The Shadow Lines* (1988) was published four years after 84 anti-Sikh communal riots that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Ghosh vividly portrays violence in Calcutta and Dhaka which is valid even today. The novel travels through almost seventy years touching the memories of people, which the narrator recollects and narrates with a dual point of view as an adult and as a child. Though the novel primarily focuses on Calcutta, Dhaka and London, it seems to echo the sentiments of whole South-east Asia, with lucid overtones of Independence and the pangs of Partition.

Beyond doubt, *The Shadow Lines* is a realistic novel with innovations and complexities. A major theme in the novel is the theme of partition. The novel pictures the post-partition scenario of India and the following violence. Set against the backdrop of the Second World War and the communal riots of 1964 in some parts of India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The aftermaths of 1939 War fictionalizes the man-made divisions. It clearly presents to the readers that the partition that resulted in the division of a nation into two parts could not actually divide the memories of the people who were forced to migrate to the either side.

*The Shadow Lines* weaves fact and fiction in a very gripping narrative of the lives of the people living in the post-partition time. The narrative mirrors lives across nations and spans almost half a century of recent Indian history.

The story is a fine blend of cultural differences and social norms. Tabish Khair in his book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* presents the idea of the novel, *Shadow Lines* romanticizes the imaginations as a whole. (183)

## **22.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:-

1. To acquaint the learner with an introduction to the novel *The Shadow Lines*.
2. To introduce the learner with variegated themes of the novel *The Shadow Lines*.
3. To introduce the learner with detailed analysis of major themes in *The Shadow Lines*.
4. Written assignments for practice with key so that the learner can do self evaluation.
5. Suggesting list of books for further reading.

## **22.3 THE SHADOW LINES : REMINISCENCES OF A YOUTH**

The novel is constructed on the memories and experiences of a young boy growing in Calcutta and later on in Delhi and London. The narrator acts as an observer of the whole situation. His character takes shape gradually from his interaction with other characters of the novel. The novel narrates the story of three generations spread over Calcutta, London and Dhaka. Characters from different religions, culture and nationalities have been woven together in a tangible world. The narrator's family is settled in Calcutta where his grandmother is a head mistress of a school. Family of Mayadebi, on the other hand, is a globe trotter with Tridib being an exception. He lives in his ancestral house and frequently visits Gol Park with his acquaintances. These two families are friends with an English family the Tresawsens. The friendship began when Lionel Tresawson was in India and developed interest in spiritualism. He started attending meetings of the Theosophical Society in Calcutta. He met Mr. Justice Chandrasekhar Dutta Chowdhary, Tridib's

grandfather, at such a séance conducted by a Russian Lady. They developed friendship thereafter. And this friendship was strengthened by their successors. So, their memories connect even though their nationalities differ. The lines drawn between different countries have the least impact on the emotions and feelings of the people. The question that Amitav Ghosh puts forth is whether cultures can be contained within the boundaries made by a few politicians.

### **2.3.1 *The Shadow Lines: personality and identity in childhood***

At the psychological plane, the book roots personality and identity in childhood. The narrator stands out as an adult rooted in his childhood experiences. Whenever he experiences life, his reaction to it stems out of his childhood impressions. How does he take cities like London, Calcutta or Dhaka or people like his cousin Ila, or acquaintances like May or Nick -everything springs from his childhood perceptions. It seems so natural. It seems the only honest way of taking life and its experiences. So, if I may take the conventional critical term, childhood is a major theme of this book. The treatment of the subject is simply overwhelming. Tridib is the narrator's older cousin. His impact on the narrator's life is immense. Tridib and the narrator-child have a special bond. They have in a way, conspired to look at the world with their own eyes or rather Tridib's eccentric, rational, detached eyes. When Tridib tells the narrator about his childhood at London, the child-narrator tries to imagine Tridib as a small child. He tries hard but cannot imagine Tridib as a small boy and finally 'I had decided he had looked like me' (3). So while listening stories of London, Cairo, and other exotic places, the narrator travels, identifying himself completely with the bigger, (almost perfect to his child's eyes) role model. The narrator's identification with his hero i.e., Tridib is so intense that when asked for a response, the narrator says 'I was nervous now: I could see that he (Tridib) was waiting to hear what I'd have to say

and I didn't want to disappoint him' (28). Thus, begins his training at looking at things by Tridib's standards.

### **22.3.2 *The Shadow Lines*: delicate world of girl child**

Another subtle aspect of childhood is specific world of the girl child. It is lovely. Girls and their eternal longing for beauty and home are delicately picturized. Girls equate beauty with desirability and acceptance. Ila tells her own sad experience at school in London where Nick does not come to help her. She narrates it through her doll's name, Magda. Ila and the narrator are playing house-house and Magda is their child. Magda, their little kid, has gone to school and everyone is struck by Magda's beauty. We may easily read Ila in place of Magda because it is her own failure to get Nick's attention that she is actually narrating, 'You couldn't blame them for staring: they'd never seen anyone as beautiful as Magda.' And her very next sentence links beauty in a girl to her popularity and likeability, 'And they liked her too: they all wanted to be friends with her-girls, boys, and teachers, all of them' (73). It is the eternal feminine datum that beauty gets you everything, just everything. This game also tells about the urge of children to grow up, be adults, play Mamma and Papa and for once be in the controlling, guiding position.

When we see the world through the eyes of the narrator child, we come to realize their worries as well. Nothing frightens kids more than anxiety and agitation in adults; adults are expected to hold their world together. When May is expected at Railway station, Tridib gets nervous. 'Tridib was less sanguine now; he was beginning to bite his fingernails. I (narrator-child) was close to tears' (104).

Another rare peep into child-psychology comes when the child-narrator gets to know that Tridib had died. Tridib was very close to him, his friend, philosopher and guide. His influence on the narrator as a child was completely absolute. Yet when he listens of his death,



‘I felt nothing-no shock, no grief. I did not understand that I would never see him again; my mind was not large enough to accommodate so complete an absence’ (239). In our lives also, when children for the first time ask, ‘what is dying’ or ‘why Dadaji or Naniji is lying like that’ or ‘why are you crying,’ we do not know what to say. We do not realize that children do not know what is meant by death. The mention of Tridib’s death brings us to him.

#### **22.4 THE SHADOW LINES : MEMORIES OF MANY CHARACTERS**

The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is endlessly fascinated by the relationship between memories as they exist in people’s minds and memories that are transformed into stories and passed on through the spoken word. As a child, he lives for the stories his uncle Tridib tells him of living in England, as well as other stories about the Price family, which is the family that Tridib and his parents stayed with. *The Shadow Lines* has been constructed on the memories and experiences of various characters, most important being the narrator. The memories of the narrator are related to Tridib, his family and acquaintances. The memories that have nothing to do with the boundaries demarcated in the maps. These memories are spread across time and place. Memory and imagination work in accord in *The Shadow Lines*. The narrator’s concrete imagination dwells heavily upon Tridib’s memories and experiences. The narrator goes to London for his doctorate work but he feels that he is not new to the place. It is a place which is already known to him. He has seen London through the eyes of his mentor and inspiration Tridib. Tridib’s vivid account of London and the narrator’s extraordinary imagination makes him feel that he has already visited the place before. The narrator stays in London for about a year but his life is most affected by Dhaka that he never personally visits in his life. The narrator has seen Dhaka through the eyes of his grandmother only. And it is the tragedy that takes place in Dhaka which changes his life forever. He loses his mentor Tridib on the roads of Dhaka when he is killed by a rioting mob along with Tha’mma’s uncle.

#### **22.4.1 *The Shadow Lines*: Divided Nations But Undivided Memories**

The title '*The Shadow Lines*' is very significant as it shows the shadow lines between nations that can be surpassed only through emotional bonding. And this transcendence is clearly shown through the characters of Dutta-Chowdhary and Tresawsens and later Prices also. The past, the present and the future gel so inextricably that all the lines of demarcation are completely wiped out. The nameless narrator of the novel is highly in awe of his uncle Tridib and is trying to come to terms with the past and the present. He is very keen to find out about the death of Tridib who has been his mentor whole life. Tridib is the person who gave him "worlds to travel in" and "eyes to see them with". It is Tridib who has taught him how to use his imagination with precision.

#### **22.4.2 *The Shadow Lines* : Migration**

The nations were divided on the pretext of religions and millions of people migrated from one part to the other. During this migration thousands of people lost their lives and millions were rendered homeless. But the memories of the people could not be divided. People who migrated to the either side always had the memories of their place of birth. They always had in their minds the picture of their nation where they were born and brought up; the nation where they grew up playing in the mud and running in the streets with friends. The line that was drawn by the politicians to divide one nation into two could never divide the sentiments and memories of the people. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* very interestingly presents this fact to the readers through different characters, Tha'mma being the most obvious one.

#### **22.5 THE SHADOW LINES : NATIONALISM**

Amitav Ghosh presents different opinions of different people on nations and the notion of nationalism. Tha'mma clearly has a very high notion of nationalism. On the other hand, Ila, narrator's cousin, has an entirely different view of nationalism. She is more concerned with her personal freedom as

opposed to Tha'mma's nationalist freedom. Ila's view point seems to be modern and post-independent. She presents an antithesis to Tha'mma. This is why she is so abhorred by her lover's grandmother. The narrator is secretly in love with the modern and open minded Ila but this love is never reciprocated. Ila is more concerned about western nationalism than the Indian nationalism. Ila says to her cousin, "nothing really important ever happens where you are" representing total western disregard of the calamities faced by third world countries. For her anti-fascist wars are more important than the famines and rioting that India suffers from. It's more significant for her what is happening in the western world. She has almost no regard for the sufferings of the people of India or other third world countries. This view point of hers makes her completely unlikable to Tha'mma.

The lines drawn between different nations do not really affect the opinions and feelings of the people living there. Tha'mma was born in Dhaka but her heart is completely Indian. On the contrary, Ila was born in India but the problems in India are not her concern. She is more towards the western nationalism. Again we see that lines that divide nations cannot really divide the minds of the people and their memories Tha'mma epitomizes nationalist movements of India and has been an inspiration for the narrator. He uses his grandmother's eyes to see her life in Dhaka as a young girl, her uncle and cousins, the other side of the big house where everything was upside down. Tha'mma represents India's national identity in the Nationalist Movement. She is a migrant from Dhaka but her ardent love of India cannot be questioned. She goes back to Dhaka after about 20 years to bring her nonagenarian uncle to Calcutta since there is a revolution going on in Dhaka. In Dhaka she realizes how alien she has become to the place where she was born. She feels as if she is a foreigner. Tridib at this point makes it more vivid when he says, "But you are a foreigner now, you're as foreigner here as May – much more than May, for look at her, she doesn't need a visa to come here" ( 195). The remark of Tridib shocks the readers.

### **22.5.1 *The Shadow Lines* : Borders and Communal Riots**

Tha'mma's visit to Dhaka gives us a peep into her psyche and raises a lot of questions about the lines drawn between nations. While filling in a form in Dhaka, Tha'mma swiftly fills in her nationality as 'Indian' without any hesitation but she starts pondering while filling in her birth place as Dhaka (Bangladesh). There are a series of questions that arise in her mind. Does birth in a country give you the right to nationality? How does your nationality change if the nation is demarcated? Do the lines that divide nations also divide memories? And like wise. The author does give a very plausible answer to these questions through the character of Jethamoshai, Tha'mma's uncle. And eventually he becomes the victim of the communal rioting in Dhaka. Narrator's mentor and inspiration Tridib also dies in the incident. The death of Ukil Babu, Tha'mma's uncle clearly throws forward another question i.e. Are people safe even in their country? Ukil Babu boasts about his country and says he will die where he was born but did he ever expect to die like this?

### **22.5.2 *The Shadow Lines* : India's Struggle for Independence**

Tha'mma, though born in Dhaka in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), is a true Indian at heart. She used to dream when she was in college to be a part of the militant groups which were fighting for India's freedom. She was fascinated by the acts of dare-devilry performed by the freedom fighters against the British imperialists. She didn't know much about the freedom struggle but she was so ardent a lover of nationalism that she was ready to even wash utensils, cook food and wash clothes if she could become a part of the freedom movement. One of her classmates was arrested by the police one day as he was a member of such a group and was assigned the task to kill an English magistrate. At that time, Tha'mma felt remorse because she had missed an opportunity to take part in the freedom movement.

## 22.6 LET US SUM UP

*The Shadow Lines* (1988), published four years after 84 anti-Sikh communal riots that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. *The Shadow Lines* weaves fact and fiction in a very gripping narrative of the lives of the people living in the post-partition time. The narrative mirrors lives across nations and spans almost half a century of recent Indian history. The novel is constructed on the memories and experiences of a young boy growing in Calcutta and later on in Delhi and London. The narrator acts as an observer of the whole situation. His character takes shape gradually from his interaction with other characters of the novel.

At the psychological plane, the book roots personality and identity in childhood. The narrator stands out as an adult rooted in his childhood experiences. Whenever he experiences life, his reaction to it stems out of his childhood impressions. Another subtle aspect of childhood is specific world of the girl child. It is lovely. Girls and their eternal longing for beauty and home are delicately picturized. Girls equate beauty with desirability and acceptance. Ila tells her own sad experience at school in London where Nick does not come to help her. She narrates it through her doll's name, Magda. Ila and the narrator are playing house-house and Magda is their child. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is endlessly fascinated by the relationship between memories as they exist in people's minds and memories that are transformed into stories and passed on through the spoken word. The title '*The Shadow Lines*' is very significant as it shows the shadow lines between nations that can be surpassed only through emotional bonding. And this transcendence is clearly shown through the characters of Dutta-Chowdhary and Tresawsens and later Prices also. The nations were divided on the pretext of religions and millions of people migrated from one part to the other. During this migration thousands of people lost their lives and millions were rendered homeless. Amitav Ghosh presents different opinions of different people on nations and the notion of nationalism. Thamma clearly has a very high notion

of nationalism. On the other hand, Ila, narrator's cousin, has an entirely different view of nationalism. Tha'mma, though born in Dhaka in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), is a true Indian at heart. She used to dream when she was in college to be a part of the militant groups which were fighting for India's freedom.

## 22.7 GLOSSARY

1. Humanism - a rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters.
2. Cosmopolitanism - Cosmopolitanism is the ideology that all human beings belong to a single community, based on a shared morality. A person who adheres to the idea of cosmopolitanism in any of its forms is called a cosmopolitan or cosmopolite.
3. Communalism - Communalism usually refers to a system that integrates communal ownership
4. Colonial power - The policy or practice of a wealthy or powerful nation's maintaining or extending its control over other countries, especially in establishing settlements or exploiting resources
5. exile - the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons.
6. Emigration – act of leaving one's country to live in another
7. Uprooting - move (someone) from their home or a familiar location.
8. irony - the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal *meaning*, a usually humorous or sardonic literary style or form characterized by *irony*.
9. ambiguities - the possibility of being understood in more than one way
10. existential dilemmas- to exist or not to exist and some fantastic in-between possibilities

11. rhetoric – a way of writing or speaking that is intended to impress or influence people but is not always sincere.
12. Sexuality - A person's sexuality is their sexual feelings
13. communal riots - a form of violence that is perpetrated across ethnic or communal lines
14. aftermath - the period that follows an unpleasant event or accident, and the effects that it causes
15. spiritualism- relating to deep feelings and beliefs, especially religious beliefs
16. Theosophical Society - an organization formed in the United States in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky to advance Theosophy
17. datum - something given or admitted especially as a basis for reasoning or inference.
18. Transcendence - quality of being able to go beyond normal limits or boundaries
19. Nonagenarian - a person who is between 90 and 99 years old
20. dare-devilry - daring, adventure, boldness, recklessness, temerity
21. identity - who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others

## **22.8 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

- Q.1) What are the strong themes in Amitav Ghosh's fiction ?
- Q.2) What are the themes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*?
- Q.3) What is the connection between *The Shadow Lines* and anti-Sikh communal riots ?
- Q.4) How many years in time does the novel, *The Shadow Lines* travel ?
- Q.5) Where is the narrator's family settled? What is his grandmother?

- Q.6) How friendship began between Lionel Tresawsen and Tridib's family?
- Q.7) What is Ila's childhood doll's name?
- Q.8) Discuss the role of Tridib in the narrator's life ?
- Q.9) Which woman character has been an inspiration for the narrator?  
What does she epitomize?
- Q.10) What did Tha'mma dream when she was in college?

**Possible Answers**

- A. 1) Amitav Ghosh's fiction depicts strong themes of humanism, cosmopolitanism, communalism, colonial power and history.
- A. 2) Some of the themes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* are emigration, exile, cultural displacement and uprooting.
- A. 3) *The Shadow Lines* (1988), was published four years after 84 anti-Sikh communal riots that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.
- A.4) The novel travels through almost seventy years touching the memories of people, which the narrator recollects and narrates with a dual point of view as an adult and as a child.
- A.5) The narrator's family is settled in Calcutta where his grandmother is a head mistress of a school.
- A.6) The friendship began when Lionel Tresawsen was in India and developed interest in spiritualism. He started attending meetings of the Theosophical Society in Calcutta. He met Mr. Justice Chandrasekhar Dutta Chowdhary, Tridib's grandfather, at such a séance conducted by a Russian Lady. They developed friendship thereafter.
- A.7) Ila's childhood doll's name was, Magda.



- A.8) Tridib is the person who gave the narrator “worlds to travel in” and “eyes to see them with”. It is Tridib who has taught him how to use his imagination with precision.
- A.9) Tha'mma epitomizes nationalist movements of India and has been an inspiration for the narrator.
- A.10) Tha'mma, used to dream when she was in college to be a part of the militant groups which were fighting for India's freedom.

### 22.8.1 Multiple Choice Questions

Q.1) *The Shadow Lines* (1988), published four years after 84 anti-Sikh communal riots that shook New Delhi in the aftermath of the assassination of Prime Minister,—————.

- (a) Sh. V.P.Singh
- (b) Sh. Jagjivan Ram
- (c) Mrs. Indira Gandhi
- (d) Sh. Rajeev Gandhi

Q.2) —————in his book *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* presents the idea of the novel says that the novel *Shadow Lines* romanticizes the imaginations as a whole.

- (a) Tabish Khair
- (b) Anshuman Mondal
- (c) Bhatt Indira Nittayandam Bhatt
- (d) Rituparna Roy

Q.3) As a child, he lives for the stories his uncle Tridib tells him of living in England, as well as other stories about the—————.

- (a) Tha'mma family
- (b) Tresawsen

- (c) Mayadebi family
  - (d) Price family
- Q.4) Ila is more concerned about \_\_\_\_\_-than the Indian nationalism.
- (a) orientalism
  - (b) Marxism
  - (c) western nationalism
  - (d) patriotism
- Q.5) Tha'mma represents India's national identity in the \_\_\_\_\_ Movement.
- (a) Nationalist
  - (b) home
  - (c) independence
  - (d) family
- Q.6) Tha'mma goes back to Dhaka after about \_\_\_\_\_ years?
- (a) 10
  - (b) 20
  - (c) 30
  - (d) 40
- Q.7) Tha'mma goes to Dhaka to bring her nonagenarian uncle to Calcutta since there is a revolution going on in \_\_\_\_\_.
- (a) London
  - (b) Calcutta
  - (c) Dhaka
  - (d) England

- Q.8) While filling in a form in Dhaka, Tha'mma swiftly fills in her nationality as —————without any hesitation but she starts pondering while filling in her birth place as Dhaka .
- (a) British
  - (b) Bengali
  - (c) Indian
  - (d) Bangladeshi

Answers

- A.1) (c) Mrs. Indira Gandhi  
A.2) (a) Tabish Khair  
A.3) (d) Price family  
A.4) (c) western nationalism  
A.5) (a) Nationalist  
A.6) (b) 20  
A.7) (c) Dhaka  
A.8) (c) Indian

**22.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q.1) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel of reminiscences of the youth.  
Q.2) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel representing personality and identity in childhood.  
Q.3) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel representing borders and communal riots.  
Q.4) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel of India's Struggle for Independence.  
Q.5) Elaborate on *The Shadow Lines* portraying the delicate world of girl child.

- Q.6) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a work of memories of many characters.
- Q.7) Discuss *The Shadow Lines* as a novel of divided nations but undivided memories.
- Q.8) Discuss the themes of Migration and Nationalism in *The Shadow Lines*.

#### **22.10 SUGGESTED READING**

1. Bhatt, Indira Nittayandam. *The Fiction of Amitav Ghosh*. New Delhi. Creative Fictions: 2001.
2. Mondal, Anshuman. *Amitav Ghosh*. Manchester and New York. Manchester University Press: 2007.
3. Roy, Rituparna. *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*. Amsterdam. Amsterdam University Press: 2010.
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5. Kaul, Suvir. "Separation Anxiety: Growing Up Inter/National in The Shadow Lines." *The Shadow Lines*. Educational Edition. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995. pp.268-286.
6. Mee, Jon. "'The Burthen of Mystery': Imagination and Difference in The Shadow Lines."

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***THE SHADOW LINES - CHARACTERS***

- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Objectives
- 23.3 Characters definition
  - 23.3.1: Some Important Characters in a Nutshell
- 23.4 Detailed analysis of major characters
  - 23.4.1: Tridib
  - 23.4.2: Tha'mma's
  - 23.4.3 Narrator
- 23.5 Important Quotes in The Shadow Lines
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Glossary
- 23.8 Short Answer Questions
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- 23.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 23.10 References
- 23.11 Suggested Reading

**23.1 INTRODUCTION**

Amitav Ghosh expertises in the representation of the characters in *The Shadow Lines*, which was preceded by *The Circle of Reason* and

followed by *The Calcutta Chromosomes*. Characters from different religions, culture and nationalities have been woven together in a tangible world. His central figures are travellers and diasporic exiles. It is a story of a middle class Indian family based in Calcutta. The boy narrator presents the views of the members of his immediate and extended family, thus, giving each a well-defined character. The novel narrates the story of three generations spread over Calcutta, London and Dhaka. The narrator's family is settled in Calcutta where his grandmother is a head mistress of a school. The narrator acts as an observer of the whole situation. His character takes shape gradually from his interaction with other characters of the novel.

However, Tha'mma, narrator's grandmother is the memorable character in the novel, giving a distinct idea of militant nationalism and the enthusiasm with which the people worked towards nation building just after independence. Tha'mma's character is very much close to the Indian society. She hates Ila to such an extent that she puts her grandson's career in jeopardy to humiliate Ila when she writes a letter to the principal of the narrator's school saying that the narrator visits prostitutes. It is chiefly through her character that Ghosh delivers the most significant message of the novel; the vainness of creating nation states, the absurdity of drawing lines which arbitrarily divide people when their memories remain undivided. All the characters are meticulously sketched.

In Tridib, the narrator's uncle, Ghosh draws one of the most fascinating characters of our times. Narrator's fascination with him is understandable. It is Tridib who gives him "worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with" (S.L. 20). Ghosh subtly tries to undo the myth that boundaries demarcate as there are no barriers in imagination. Ila is central to the narrator's coming of age. Her portrayal is crucial to showcase the pragmatic cosmopolitanism of the people who live aloof from their native place.

## **23.2 OBJECTIVES**

The main objectives of this lesson are:-

1. To acquaint the learner with an overview to the novel *The Shadow Lines*.
2. To introduce the learner with various nuances and background of a "character".
3. To introduce the learner with detailed analysis of major and minor characters in *The Shadow Lines*.
4. Written assignments for practice with key so that the learner can do self evaluation.
5. Suggesting list of books for further reading.

### **2.3 CHARACTER DEFINITION**

Importance of a character cannot be denied. Characters create the story and are important to the development and progress of the story. A character is a person, animal, being, creature, or thing in a story. Writers use characters to perform the actions and speak dialogue, moving the story along a plot line. A story can have only one character (protagonist) and still be a complete story. This character's conflict may be an inner one (within him/herself), or a conflict with something natural, such as climbing a mountain. Most stories have multiple characters interacting, with one of them as the antagonist, causing a conflict for the protagonist.

Major characters are important figures at the centre of the story or theme. The major character is sometimes called a protagonist (main character, around which the whole story revolves) whose conflict with an antagonist (this character, or group of characters, causes the conflict for the protagonist) may spark the story's conflict. Additionally, the antagonist could be a part of nature, such as an animal, the weather, a mountain or lake etc. Minor characters are often static or unchanging, they remain the same from the beginning of a work to the end. There are minor characters in a story. Their actions help drive the story forward. They may impact the decisions the protagonist or antagonist make, either helping or interfering with the conflict.

### **2.3.1: Some Important Characters in a Nutshell**

- **Tridib** - The protagonist is a middle class boy who grows up in a middle-class family; he is the narrator's uncle. He is in love with May.
- **Tha'mma** (the narrator's grandmother) - She was the headmistress of a girls' school in Calcutta. She is a very strict, disciplined, hard-working, mentally strong and patient lady. She is the one who wants to bring her uncle, Jethamoshai, to India to live with her, eventually leading to his and Tridib's deaths by a mob in Dhaka.
- **Ila** - She is the narrator's cousin who lives in Stockwell, London. The narrator is in love with her, but she marries Nick.
- **May** - She is the Price family's daughter. She is in love with Tridib and blames herself for his death.
- **Nick** - He is the Price family's son, distinguishable by his long blond hair. He wants to work in the 'futures industry'. He marries Ila during the course of the novel, but it is later found that he is allegedly having an affair. He worked in Kuwait for a brief period of time but quit his job (it is implied that he may have been fired for embezzlement).
- **Mayadebi** - She is the narrator's grandmother's younger sister and Tridib's mother.

## **23.4 DETAILED ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS**

### **2.4.1: Tridib**

is the narrator's uncle. He's about twenty years older and is a very skilled storyteller. He often tells the narrator stories about the year he lived in London with the Prices. Tridib is such a unique character that again it is difficult to limit him with adjectives. He is a good student. He is eccentric. He is tricky. He is a loafer. He is sincere. He is all these and much more. But above everything else he is the man who gave the narrator the keen ability to perceive things, to go for 1



It is not that Tridib is trying to bulldoze his presence on the narrator. In the area where the narrator lives, Gariahat and Gole Park in Calcutta, Tridib is very well known on the streets. All pan shop owners, sweet shop owners, boys on the street know Tridib because the place is his favourite 'adda' or 'haunt', we may say in English. The narrator is enveloped in the protective presence of Tridib, 'I was grateful for the small privileges his presence secured for me on those streets: For the odd sweet given to me by a shopkeeper of his acquaintance; For being rescued from a fight in the park by some young fellow who knew him' (SL,8). The narrator has a pure child-like love for Tridib. As a child he bursts with pride at Tridib's show of intellect and superior knowledge on those roadside haunts. The narrator's sense of pride expands when Tridib treats him like an equal, like an adult and shares secrets with him. He fiercely defends Tridib when people ridicule him on his back for all his made-up or real wonder stories. The child in the narrator is so dominant that when years later May, Tridib's beloved, spots him in London in the crowd after her performance in an orchestra, 'suddenly she smiled, rose on tiptoe, pulled my head down and kissed me on my cheeks' (SL,15). He is an adult here, treated as a child.

**2.4.2: Tha'mma's** character is very much close to the Indian society. She hates Ila to such an extent that she puts her grandson's career in jeopardy to humiliate Ila when she writes a letter to the principal of the narrator's school saying that the narrator visits prostitutes. But we can't say that the perception is completely wrong though it definitely is opposed to the Indian nationalism. Ila acquires such an opinion because of the treatment she gets as a woman in India. There are a lot of restrictions put on her while she is in India. She is once forced out of a cabaret bar in the Grand Hotel in Calcutta by her uncle Robi. This clearly shows how restricted and constrained the lives of women are in India. And these

restrictions and constraints force Ila to form biased opinion towards the third world countries like India.

Tha'mma is the narrator's grandmother. As a young woman in British India, she desperately wanted to be a part of the terrorist groups that fought for India's independence from Britain. When Partition happened in 1947, however, Tha'mma was too busy raising the narrator's father as a single parent to think much of it. When her husband died, Tha'mma became fiercely independent and refused help from everyone, including her younger sister, Mayadebi. Eventually, Tha'mma told herself that her relatives actually refused to help her, so she actively distanced herself from much of her family. Throughout the novel, she's cautious about family relationships, given that as a child, she saw her father and uncle-feud and finally build a wall through their house to resolve it. She's also a stickler about using one's time wisely, as a result of having to support herself and put her son through school alone. Because of this, she dislikes Tridib, who she believes to be a gossip. After she retires, Tha'mma withdraws and cedes control of the household to the narrator's mother. In a sudden shift in character, Tha'mma decides in her early sixties that it's her duty to bring her elderly uncle Jethamoshai home to India, given to the rising tensions between India and Pakistan. The prospect of returning to Dhaka is a difficult one for her: she doesn't understand what Partition was for if the border itself isn't even visible, and she struggles to cope with the sudden realization that her birth in Dhaka means that she was born in East Pakistan. After Jethamoshai and Tridib die in the riot, Tha'mma sells her favorite gold chain to fund the war effort with Pakistan. She becomes nasty to the narrator when she deteriorates while he's in college, and calls Ila a whore.

### **23.4.3 Narrator**

The narrator was born in Calcutta, India in 1953, where he lives

with his parents and his grandmother, Tha'mma. He spends his entire childhood in Calcutta and spends a lot of it with his favorite uncle, Tridib. Tridib tells him stories, pointing out faraway cities in his atlas and telling him often about living in London as a child. The narrator idolizes Tridib's way of living and looking at the world, which is a problem when the narrator is around his cousin Ila. Though the narrator loves Ila romantically, he struggles regularly to try to make her see the importance of Tridib's stories. He and Tridib decide that because Ila traveled so much as a child, she didn't need to rely on stories like the narrator did, since he never left Calcutta. Though the narrator is often self-centered and unaware of the scope of the world, he is also very tuned into the inner workings of his family. He understands, for example, that Tha'mma has a deep sense of pride, and he uses his knowledge to his advantage. After Ila tells the narrator about an English boy named Nick Price, the narrator understands that Nick is his rival for Ila's affection. Eventually, Ila and Nick get married, which is heartbreaking for the narrator. He feels trapped by his unwavering love for Ila, as he knows she'll never love him back. Over the next several years in London, the narrator reconnects with Ila; Nick's sister, May; and Robi in London. He has a brief sexual encounter with May, who used to be romantically linked to Tridib. May enlightens the narrator as to the real cause of Tridib's death in Dhaka, and the narrator realizes that the terrifying riot he experienced in Calcutta in 1964 was just like the one that killed Tridib in Dhaka.

## 2.5 IMPORTANT QUOTES IN THE SHADOW LINES

1. ***Tha'mma's Quotes in The Shadow Lines:*** *The Shadow Lines* quotes below are all either spoken by Tha'mma or refer to Tha'mma.
  - "She becomes nasty to the narrator when she deteriorates while he's in college, and calls Ila a whore".

- "I would have been frightened, she said. But I would have prayed for strength, and God willing, yes, I would have killed him. It was for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free".
  - "But I knew I had made a mistake the moment I said it; I should have known that she would have nothing but contempt for a freedom that could be bought for the price of an air ticket. For she too had once wanted to be free; she had dreamt of killing for her freedom".
  - "But you know, the strange thing was that as we grew older even I almost came to believe in our story".
  - "The price she had paid for that pride was that it had come to be transformed in her imagination into a barrage of slights and snubs; an imaginary barrier that she believed her gloating relatives had erected to compound her humiliation".
  - "But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same [...] What was it all for then- Partition and all the killing and everything-if there isn't something in between?"
  - "Everyone lives in a story, he says, my grandmother, my father, his father, Lenin, Einstein, and lots of other names I hadn't heard of; they all lived in stories, because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose [...]".
2. **Narrator's Quotes in *The Shadow Lines*:** quotes below are all either spoken by The Narrator or refer to the Narrator.
- "I tried to tell her, but neither then nor later, though we talked about it often, did I ever succeed in explaining to her that I could not forget because Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with; she, who had been travelling around the world

since she was a child, could never understand what those hours in Tridib's room had meant to me [...]"

- "I felt a constriction in my throat, for suddenly it seemed to me that perhaps she was not so alien, after all, to my own small, puritanical world, in which children were sent to school to learn how to cling to their gentility by proving themselves in the examination hall".
- "For Ila the current was real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates".
- "I could guess at a little of what it had cost her then to refuse her rich sister's help and of the wealth of pride it had earned her, and I knew intuitively that all that had kept her from agreeing at once was her fear of accepting anything from anyone that she could not return in exact measure".
- "She had given me away, she had made public, then and for ever, the inequality of our needs; she had given Ila the knowledge of her power and she had left me defenceless, naked in the face of that unthinkable, adult truth: that need is not transitive, that one may need without oneself being needed".

### **23.6 LET US SUM UP**

In *The Shadow Lines*, characters from different religions, culture and nationalities have been woven together in a tangible world. The narrator, Tridib and Tha'mma are some of the major characters of the novel. It is a story of a middle class Indian family based in Calcutta. The boy narrator presents the views of the members of his immediate and extended family, thus, giving each a well-defined character. *Tha'mma*, narrator's grandmother is the memorable character in the novel, giving a distinct idea of militant nationalism and the enthusiasm with which the people worked towards nation building just after independence. *Tha'mma's*

character is very much close to the Indian society. In Tridib, the narrator's uncle, Ghosh draws one of the most fascinating characters of our times. Narrator's fascination with him is understandable. Ila, May, Nick, and Mayadebi are some other important characters.

### **23.7 GLOSSARY**

1. Tangible - real and not imaginary; able to be shown, touched, or experienced
2. Diasporic - any group that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland, especially involuntarily, as Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
3. exiles - the condition of someone being sent or kept away from their own country, village
4. militant - engaged in warfare or combat
5. nationalism - an ideology and movement that promotes the interests of a particular nation
6. jeopardy - in danger of being damaged or destroyed
7. vainness - egotistical, unimportant
8. Fascination - Fascination is the state of being greatly interested in or delighted by something.
9. Pragmatic - A pragmatic way of dealing with something is based on practical considerations
10. cosmopolitanism - the ideology that all human beings belong to a single community, based on a shared morality
11. eccentric- unconventional and slightly strange
12. loafer - a person who avoids work and spends his/her time idly
13. marvari - a native or inhabitant of Rajasthan in India

14. mundane - dull
15. haunts - a place frequented by a specified person
16. currency - the fact or quality of being generally accepted or in use
17. archaeologist - someone who studies the buildings, graves, tools, and other objects of people who lived in the past
18. bulldoze - to destroy buildings and make an area flat with a bulldozer
19. orchestra - a group of performers on various musical instruments
20. feud - an argument that has existed for a long time between two people or groups
21. stickler - one who insists on exactness or completeness in the observance of something
22. cedes - to allow someone else to have or own something
23. barrage - the action of continuously firing large guns to protect soldiers advancing on an enemy

### **23.8 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Q.1) Describe *The Shadow Lines* briefly with special reference to its characters.

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Q.2) How many generations spread over which places in *The Shadow Lines* are portrayed?

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Q.3) Where is the narrator's family and what is his grandmother ?

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Q.4) What does the narrator's grandmother do to keep him away from Ila ?

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Q.5) Define character and why the writers need a character ?

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Q.6) Differentiate between antagonist and protagonist?

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Q.7) Who is Ila?

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Q-8) Who is May?

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Q.9) Who is Mayadebi?

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Q.10) Who is Tridip?

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Q.11) Use four adjectives to describe Tridib .

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Q.12) Where do Jethamoshai and Tridib die?

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Q.13) What does Tha'mma sell to fund the war effort with Pakistan?

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Q.14) When and where was the narrator born?

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Q.15) What is heartbreaking for the narrator?

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Possible Answers: -

- A-1) *The Shadow Lines* is a story of a middle class Indian family based in Calcutta. Its central figures are travellers and diasporic exiles.
- A-2) The novel narrates the story of three generations spread over Calcutta, London and Dhaka.
- A-3) The narrator's family is settled in Calcutta where his grandmother is a head mistress of a school.
- A-4) Narrator's grandmother hates Ila to such an extent that she puts her grandson's career in jeopardy to humiliate Ila when she writes a letter to the principal of the narrator's school saying that the narrator visits prostitutes.
- A-5) A character is a person, animal, being, creature, or thing in a story. Writers use characters to perform the actions and speak dialogue, moving the story along a plot line.

- A-6) Protagonist is the main character, around which the whole story revolves . An antagonist is a character, or group of characters, causing the conflict for the protagonist. Additionally, the antagonist could be a part of nature, such as an animal, the weather, a mountain or lake etc.
- A-7) Ila is the narrator's cousin who lives in Stockwell, London. The narrator is in love with her, but she marries Nick.
- A-8) May was the Price family's daughter. She is in love with Tridib and blames herself for his death.
- A-9) Mayadebi was the narrator's grandmother's younger sister and Tridib's mother.
- A-10) Tridib was the narrator's uncle. He is in love with May.
- A-11) Tridib is such a unique character that again it is difficult to limit him with adjectives. He is a good student. He is eccentric. He is tricky. He is a loafer. He is sincere.
- A-12) Jethamoshai and Tridib die in the riot .
- A-13) Tha'mma sells her favorite gold chain to fund the war effort with Pakistan.
- A-14) The narrator was born in Calcutta, India in 1953.
- A-15) Ila and Nick get married, which is heartbreaking for the narrator .

### 23.8.1 Multiple Choice Questions

Q-1) *The Shadow Lines*, which was preceded by-----?

- (a) *The Hungry Tide*
- (b) **Sea of Poppies**
- (c) *The Circle of Reason*
- (d) *Calcutta Chromosomes*

Q-2) *The Shadow Lines*, was followed by \_\_\_\_\_

- (a) *The Hungry Tide*

- (b) *The Circle of Reason*
- (c) *The Calcutta Chromosomes*
- (d) *Sea of Poppies*

Q-3) The novel narrates the story of three generations spread over Calcutta, London and -----

- (a) Ballygunge
- (b) Calcutta's Gole Park
- (c) Dhaka
- (d) London

Q-4) Tha'mma's character is very much close to the -----society .

- (a) Ballygunge
- (b) Calcutta's Gole Park
- (c) Dhaka
- (d) Indian

Q-5) Tha'mma hates ..... .

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Maya
- (d) Thamma

Q-6) Tha'mma writes a letter to the principal of the narrator's school saying that the narrator visits -----

- (a) farmers
- (b) black market
- (c) underworld
- (d) prostitutes

Q-7) A story can have only one character ----- and still be a complete story.

- (a) hero
- (b) protagonist
- (c) villain
- (d) antagonist

Q-8) The major character is sometimes called a protagonist (main character, around which the whole story revolves) who conflicts with an ----- (this character, or group of characters, causes the conflict for the protagonist)

- (a) hero
- (b) protagonist
- (c) villain
- (d) antagonist

Q-9) ----- is the narrator's grandmother's younger sister and Tridib's mother.

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Maya
- (d) Mayadebi

Q-10) ----- is the Price family's son, distinguishable by his long blond hair.

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Nick
- (d) Price

Q-11) ----- worked in Kuwait for a brief period of time but quit his job (it is implied that he may have been fired for embezzlement).

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Nick
- (d) Price

Q-12) ----- is the Price family's daughter. She is in love with Tridib and blames herself for his death.

- (a) May
- (b) Ila
- (c) Maya
- (d) Mayadebi

Q-13) Ila is the narrator's cousin who lives in-----.

- (a) Ballygunge
- (b) Calcutta's Gole Park
- (c) Dhaka
- (d) Stockwell, London

Q-14) Ila marries -----

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Nick
- (d) Price

Q-15) Tha'mma was the headmistress of a girls' school in -----

- (a) Ballygunge
- (b) Calcutta

- (c) Dhaka
- (d) Stockwell, London

Q-16) Tha'mma is the one who wants to bring her uncle, -----to India to live with her, eventually leading to his and Tridib's deaths by a mob in Dhaka.

- (a) Jethamoshai
- (b) Ila
- (c) Nick
- (d) Price

#### Answers

- 1) (c) *The Circle of Reason*
- 2) (c) *The Calcutta Chromosomes*
- 3) (c) Dhaka
- 4) (d) Indian
- 5) (b) Ila
- 6) (d) prostitutes
- 7) (b) protagonist
- 8) (d) antagonist
- 9) (d) Mayadebi
- 10) (c) Nick
- 11) (c) Nick
- 12) (a) May
- 13) (d) Stockwell, London

- 14) (c) Nick
- 15) (b) Calcutta
- 16) (a) Jethamoshai

### **23.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q-1) Define and discuss "character" and types of character.
- Q-2) Comment on the role of women characters in *The Shadow Lines*.
- Q-3) Who is the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*. Elaborate his role .
- Q-4) Give a character sketch of Tridip and his influence on the narrator.
- Q- 5) Draw a pen picture of male characters in *The Shadow Lines*.
- Q-6) Amitav Ghosh is a master in the art of creating characters. Justify.
- Q-7) Discuss the importance of minor characters in *The Shadow Lines*.

### **23.10 REFERENCES**

- 1. Ghosh, Amitav. (1988) *The Shadow Lines*, Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher.

### **23.11 SUGGESTED READING**

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