



**M.A. ENGLISH - I YEAR**  
**DKE14 : COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE**  
**SYLLABUS**

**Poetry : Detailed**

- Nissim Ezekiel : Good bye party for Miss Pushpa .T.S  
Wole Soyinka : I think it rains  
Rabindranath Tagore : Endless Time

**Poetry : Non-Detailed**

- Kamala Das : My Grandmother's House  
Michael Ondaatje : Speaking to you  
Henry Lawson : The Blue Mountains  
Ravi Sathasivam : My, Lord when you sit on my Throne

**Prose : Detailed**

- Chinua Achebe : The Novelist as Teacher

**Prose : Non-Detailed**

- Dr. Radhakrishnan : An Ideal Before the Youth  
MulkRaj Anand : Two Leaves and a Bud  
Jhumba Lahiri : The Namesake  
Kiran Desai : The Inheritance of Loss

**Drama : Detailed**

- Sharon Pollock : Walsh

**Drama : Non- Detailed**

- Mahesh Dattani : Tara



## Nissim Ezekiel's "Goodbye party for Miss.Pushpa.T.S."

### Note on the Poem

"Goodbye party for Miss.Pushpa.T.S." is a satirical poem. It is a parody. It is called a very Indian poem in English. It is on the English language spoken by people from Bombay. The rambling style of English used by the Indians is presented in the poem. This poem, in order to be understood and appreciated, needs to be read aloud.

The speaker addresses the friends. He says that their dear sister is going abroad in a few days. Hence they have met to convey their good wishes (bonvoyage).

All people know how sweet is Miss Pushpa. She is sweet in her behaviour. She is good at heart too. Miss Pushpa has a smiling face. She would smile for no reason. The impulse to smile is there in her. She belongs to a respectable family. Her father was a famous advocate. The speaker does not know where he was an advocate.

The speaker digresses to tell of the experiences of his visit to Surat. He reverts to the topic of Miss.Pushpa. She is popular. Whenever the speaker asked Pushpa to do some job, she used to readily do that. That showed her good spirit. The speaker affirms that he appreciates her good spiritedness.

According to the speaker, Miss.Pushpa has the habit of never saying 'no' to any. The speaker says that Miss.Pushpa leaves for her betterment and they all wish her well. He asks other speakers to speak and tells that Miss.Pushpa will sum up.

Nissim Ezekiel's poem "Goodbye Party for Miss. Pushpa. T.S." is in faulty English. This is done deliberately to show how Indians use the English Language without application of their mind. The present continuous tense is an obsession with them and usage of words are reflective of their thoughts in their respective mother tongue. Ezekiel uses parody, a device. It imitates, a kind of mimicry and exposes the weakness of the subject dealt with. The expression "going abroad" is presented in the poem as "is departing for foreign"

The grammatical rule now that the simple present tense should be used to convey characteristics is flouted when the speaker says "Miss Pushpa is



smiling and smiling/even for no reason/ but simply because she is feeling". Further "respectable family" is vulgarised into "high family". An English listener would think that the family must be on a hill or mountain top or any other high place. Added to this is the Indian custom of deviating from the subject matter. The speaker talks on his visit to Surat while talking of Pushpa. The poem give additional instances of the past and present and future tenses. Example: "Just now only / I will do it". All these instances make us laugh and they are likely to be more humorous to the natives of English.

The speaker makes a clown of himself in speaking faulty English. He is ignorant of nuances of the English language. The irony is that he is ignorant of his ignorance, when he says " You are all knowing friends, / What sweetness is in Miss.Pushpa / I don't mean external sweetness / but internal sweetness", those who know English proper have be bend down in shame. The speaker unknowingly commits nonsense. He casts aspersions on Pushpa when he says: "She is most popular lady / with men also and ladies also"

Thus the speaker reveals his foolishness in handing the English language which leads to dangerous meaning. Of course he does not intend it. But the language does the damage.

### **WOLE SOYINKA'S " I THINK IT RAINS"**

"I think it rains" is one of the mystical poems written by Wole Soyinka, an African writer. Here the poet compares the smoke from a cigarette to a rain that wets the parched land. The smoke of cigarette calms and relaxes the mind of a depressed smoker. In the same way rain flourished and relaxes the dry land.

The Poet says

" I think it rains

That tongues may loosen from the parch

Un cleave roof tops of

the mouth hang

heavy with knowledge"



The modern man's head is filled with knowledge. Hence he is depressed and cannot communicate his feelings. He is stiff and dry like a parched land. The smoker's roof top is also dry, though his intellectual capacity is high.

The sudden cloud of smoke settles on his roof top. He has already had a circle of Grey within his mouth. The spirit gets circulated throughout his body.

The smoker is compelled to resume the smoking habit. It seems like a rain coming upon him to relinquish his heat or depression. It opens the closures of mine. It releases the binding factors that renders man a desperate one. It teaches him "Purity of sadness".

As the smoker transcends himself from the earthly level into other world of his desires, he is completely transformed. The poet call this transformation as "cruel baptisms". The smoker is flight of imagination puts himself in the shoes of someone whom he takes as a model. Due to Rain, reads come up and they are flexible. In the same ways, a smoker does not allow himself to draw himself completely. He bends down but not completely. He escapes the sordidness of the reality.

### **TAGORE'S POEM - ENDLESS TIME**

Rabindranath Tagore is one of the greatest poets and writers in modern Indian literature. In this poem he speaks about the nature of time. We mortal beings believe that time has certain limitations and we usually fees the need to accomplish a lot before our life comes to an end as we believe that there is time only till we meet our death. The poet presents the idea that time is endless and is in the hands of the almighty, who is the creator. He further adds that for God there is no limit to time as he has seen centuries pass by and will continue to do so for centuries to come. Time is infinite for the almighty. We mortal seems to be in a hurry to do as much as possible, fearing that we might be late to do certain things and may lose out on certain opportunities. In doing so, we tend to get impatient when we feel like time is running out of our hands and yet there is a lot to achieve. The poet wants to convey that time is divine, yet one must not cling to it. We must value time as it is a precious thing but must also learn to live for the moment.

#### **Structure**

The poem has been written in Early Modern English as we can see the use of words like 'thy' 'thou' and ' thine'. It has no rhymes or a regular rhythm.



Metaphor has been used in the poem. The comparison of passing of ages to the blooming and fading of flowers and centuries passing by like a 'small wild flower' and two such examples.

The poet uses a sarcastic tone in the stanza where he says 'we have no time to lose' as he is indicating the impatience of men and is actually speaking about the infinite nature of time.

The last line of the poem leaves the reader with a sense of uncertainty as the poet might hint at the metaphysical aspects of reincarnation or afterlife. He may also simply mean to say that the doors of God are always open for everyone.

### **Analysis:**

"Time is endless in thy hands, my lord  
There is none to count thy minutes"

This poem begins with the poet addressing the almighty and saying that time is endless in his hands as he is the creator of time. There is no one who can count the minutes as the life of mortals comes to an end, but time doesn't. The poet says that for God, time is infinite. It has no beginning and no end.

" Days and nights and ages bloom and fade like flowers.  
Thou knowest how to wait.

Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower."

Days and nights pass and time goes on for ages. The poet says that the almighty patiently watches as ages pass by and for him they're like watching the blooming and withering of flowers. Centuries after centuries follow each other. The metaphor "wild flower" is used for someone who travels constantly and does not settle at one place. The passage to time is being compared to the same as time does not stop at any point and it keeps going on for centuries,

" We have no time to lose.  
and having no time we must scramble for a chance.  
We are too poor to be late."

The poet uses a sarcastic tone in this stanza as he says that men act like there is no time. They feel that it is very limited and they must act quickly in order to not miss out on opportunities. Men do not want to risk being late in



accomplishing things and usually want to rush through everything as they feel they have time only till their life comes to an end.

“ And thus it is that time goes by  
while I give it to every querulous man who claims it  
and thine altar is empty of all offering to the last.”

Men keep complaining about the pace at which time keeps passing as they feel it keeps facing ahead. The poet talks about the impatient nature of men. They usually rush through things and forget to value each moment. Time is divine and for God it is infinite.

“ At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate of shut  
but I find that yet there is time.”

In the last stanza of the poem, the poet talks about the end of one's life when they feel that their time has come to an end. It is only at the time of death does one realize that even though they may cease to exist, time goes on for ages and it cannot be stopped or held onto.

“but I find that yet there is time.”

In this line the poet leaves a kind of uncertainty as he might mean that life goes on even after death or he might be hinting at the process of reincarnation. He might also mean that at the end of our lives we find the gates of heaven open for us and we realize that time is divine in nature and will continue to go on.

## **SUMMARY**

The poet says that time is in the hands of the almighty and is infinite in nature. One cannot count his minutes as time has no beginning and no end. Days and night pass by and so do ages, just like flowers keep blooming and withering. God has watched all this patiently over centuries which seem to follow one after the other. Time does not stop at any point. We mortal beings feel the need to rush through things as we feel we have no time to waste and have to accomplish a lot in this one lifetime. We do not want to miss out on opportunities and in our rush we often forget to value each moment. Men tend to get impatient with time as they feel it keeps passing by and there is a lot one has to do before their life comes to an end. It is only at the time of



death that one realises that time is divine in nature and his existence may come to end but time will continue to go on for ages.

### **THEME**

The basic idea being conveyed through this poem is that of the infinite nature of time. The poet says time is endless and is in the hands of creator God. Time has no beginning and no end and hence cannot be stopped. It goes on for ages and ages even after one perishes. One's life comes to an end and it is then that one realises that time will continue to exist and he may not know what happens after his death but one door always opens after another closes.

Story" and "Yaa Allah". She embraced Islam in 1999 at the age of 65 and assumed the name, Kamala Suraiyya. She was also politically active She launched a national political party "Lok Seva" party. She unsuccessfully contested the Indian Lok Sabha elections in 1984. She won many awards including the Sahitya Akademi Award.

### **About the poem:**

Kamala Das recalls her ancestral home and her dead grandmother in this poem. The poem is a confession, comparing her present mental state being unconditionally loved by her grandmother.

### **II. Paraphrase of the poem:**

There is a house where I lived once. It was my grandmother's house. I received lots of love in that house. My grandmother died. The house became silent. Snakes moved among books. I was too young to read. My blood became cold like the moon. Now I often think of going back there.. I want to look intently through the windows. I just want to listen to the sounds of the cold wind blowing outside. Or in a desperate moment I want to pluck some memories of the house and bring them back to my present home. The memories will live with me in my bed-room and lie like a brooding dog. I was so proud of myself that I received so much love. I have lost my way now. I go about begging at strangers' doors to receive love, at least in small quantities.



## **Write an essay on the nostalgic element in the poem ‘My grandmother’s House’**

Kamala Das was a prominent Indian woman writer who wrote in English and Malayalam. She wrote chiefly of love with its own betrayal and consequent anguish. Some of her poems deal with nostalgia for her childhood.

“My Grandmother’s House” is a poem about the memories of the poet’s childhood spent in her grandmother’s house. She received lots of love from those around her. She spent some of her happiest moments in that house. The love was pure and uncomplicated. Then her grandmother died. The house became silent and cold. The poet was very upset. She thought she saw snakes among the books. She was then too young to read. Her blood turned cold like the moon.

Many years have passed. She has met with many disappointments and failures in her adult life. Now she wants to go back to her past and recollect the happy times she spent in her grandmother’s house. Once again she wants to look through the windows and enjoy the world outside. She wants to listen to the whispers of the frozen air. In a desperate moment she wants to pick up an armful of memories of her past and bring them over to her present house. She would lie awake and mull over those memories.

No one can believe she lived in such a house of love. She is so proud of her early years at her grandmother’s house :

Now she feels she has lost her way as an adult. She has to confront many betrayals and failures in her relationships. Love has become such a complex emotion. There is nothing healthy or honest about man-woman relationships these days. So she has become a beggar, begging at stranger doors for love. She hopes to receive love at least in small quantities. But she is not sure she would succeed.

“My Grandmother’s House” is a poem of nostalgia. The poet makes a comparison of the past with her present.

## **MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S POEM “SPEAKING TO YOU”**

“Speaking to you” is a poem describing the post modern situation. In this modern age, every one has failed to speak or communicate with others. The



Poet feels that he is drained of his natural love and emotions. Hence, he cannot write natural poems. He is cut off from all communications and links. The poet compares his present alienated situation with a beautiful image of being separated by rain. He acts under compulsion or artificial motivation so he says”

“and the rain  
of separation  
surround us lock  
tock like Go tablets”

He is compelled to move on aimlessly. Mechanically he moves on without realising the meaning of his physical movement. The modern man has been reduced to the level of sleep walker. He can be stimulated only by “Go tablets”. There is no self consciousness on the modern man. Hence, he can be compared to a “hollow man”. Here the poet points out at the mechanical existence of modern man who cannot act on his own. He is addicted to modern technologies. His spirit has been stilled by science.

The poet brings the whole world under this miserable, when he observes  
“ Everyone has learned  
to move carefully”

Modern man has to be moved careful and hence he is in tension in every movement. Nobody can trust a Fellow being, because everyone assumes masks. There is no real genuine face. Also there is no natural love or casual gesture in a modern man. Everywhere people are hypocrites and assume artificial identity.

There is no laughter or dancing in the modern world. Man has given up his natural talents and emotions like laughing and dancing. He plays to the tune of modern man’s expectations. He cannot retain his original self as he has completely surrendered his self to the modern society and tis whims. The stillness and the frozen nature of natural emotions speak about the miserable state of modern man. “Behind trees of law” indicates that human laws forbid Man from communicating with others. Human civilisation screens man’s real identity. So man has been stilled like a tableau. The old days of laughter’s remains only in the state of tableau.

The Poet turns to the domestic life of a modern man. Though the poet has a lot of love for his family, he finds his wife suffering. She is angry and dissatisfied with every aspect of domestic life. The whole family is in disarray. The disintegration of the modern family is hinted at the poem. Even the



children are not natural. They pretend to be wise and healthy like a shrub. But they suffer from many mental physical disabilities. So the poet is hopeless about their future. He wonders "how anything can grow from this?". The poet expresses his despair at the future generation of the modern man.

The poet hints at the violent aggressive nature of the modern youngsters. They do not believe in peaceful talk, but they believe in aggressiveness and bloodshed. Even in the modern mass medias, murder and violent scenes are portrayed and murderous heroes are celebrated. So the poet fees:

“ all the wise blood  
Poured from little cats  
Down in the sink”

Even little works hurts them. So they are provoked into much anger and violent murder.

So the poet concludes the poem with a plea that he does not want “ body” but he prefers only a quiet companion. Thus the poet longs for a peaceful relationship and not a physical relationship.

### **HENRY LAWSON'S " THE BLUE MOUNTAINS"**

The Blue mountains describes the natural beauty of the blue mountains and the course of stream flowing through various passages

First, the poet describes the blue mountain. The colour of the peak is “ashes”. It is straight and tall. There are many ferns dripping with moisture. As the poet climbs the sandstone wall, his feet slips on the mosses. The cliffs are standing like ramparts round the valley's edge. But there are branches openings in the ledge. Dawn the rocky land, there are many ferny dells. They are hidden in shady depths. Inside the dells, there is no dust or heat.

A stream flows down the hills tirelessly. It flows calmly and at the same time it seems to leap over the hill bravely. As it pairs down, it is lost in spray of water. The breeze flows calmly in the mountain. As the water strikes the rock in the midway, it reaches the valley by means of leaping movements.

As the poet observes the course of the stream, it changes its colour in the western part. Its blue colour blends with the crimson red behind the far Dividing Range. Now it is time for sunset. The sun's red rays change the colour of the stream water.



Once a wild river, now it becomes a soft and mellowed one, when it reaches the down stream. The ragged edges becomes soft. The rising moon shows its placid face on the ledges.

It is a beautiful description of a mountains cape and the stream down pouring into a valley. It reminds one of human life which passes many problems and reaches the destination of death finally.

### **RAVI SATHASIVAM'S**

#### **' MY LORD , WHEN YOU SIT ON MY THRONE'**

It is a religious poem conveying the spiritual transformation of the poet. He explains the process through which he attains his salvation.

When the poet sits on his own throne, he was very selfish. He felt proud and he was thinking too much of himself. Without being aware of the omnipotence of the Lord , he gave much importance to his own self. So he committed many mistakes. He did not offer God residence in his heart. He never visited church nor listened to the words of God. Satan was ruling his mind. He was all involved in material world rather than spiritual world. So his life was filled with pain and endless strifes. Then only he realised the value of God and His love. When he offered his throne to Good, God protected him from all evils, pain, lust, greed, anger and egoism. The Lord gave him heaven and His words purified his heart. When he lifted his hands to God, He helped him, and the poet's eyes were filled with tears. The Lord forgave the repentant poet of his sins. The Lord loves him as a man. The poet realises that God will wipe out all his sins and give him heavenly life. He requests the readers to have faith in God and live peacefully.

### **CHINUA ACHEBA: THE NOVELIST AS TEACHER**

"The Novelist as Teacher" is an exploration of the role of the writer in general and of the African writer in particular.

There is much difference between the European writer and his African counterpart. The European writer with beard and outlandish dress tries to hook the attention of the readers through his strange exterior. He plays only a peripheral role. Achebe's concern is quite different. He says that it is a writer's responsibility to fulfil the tasks that the society imposes on him. A



writer is not a parasite, living on the society. He should be a teacher, guiding people who are groping in the dark.

Achebe refers to the expectations of some students and teachers. A student by name Baba Yero Mafindi once wrote to him, appreciating his novels. Achebe's novels teach young generation. Another wrote a funny letter that Achebe's novels would be useful if he appended answers to the questions in exams. He is a mediocre student who wants a guide for Achebe's "Things Fall Apart". A lady teacher wanted Achebe to present in his novels such young men who would resist parental pressure and marry the woman of his own choice. The teacher does not like Achebe's novel. 'No longer at Ease' because, the young men in this novel yields to his father's wish and turns back on his lover. The teacher cannot attune herself to Achebe's realism.

Achebe says that a writer should not become an object slave, catering to the whims of the audience. He should have his own vision to promote. A Nigerian journalist attacks what he branded " the soulless efficiency of industrialisation" But Achebe is a realist. He is free from clichés. He says that efficiency is essential for the development of Africa.

Achebe says that change is the law of life. Flux and reflux are inevitable. In the past, Maypole dance was the only outlet for an African woman. But now even school girls dance voluptuously western dances during festivals. Women used only earthen pots to carry water in the past. But now it has disappeared. They use metal wares.

Achebe does not welcome all changes. Westernisation has bred contempt in the minds of Africans towards their culture. A black boy avoided writing about African dusty wind harmattan, but he loves western season of winter. For him both palm tree and harmattan have pristine beauty.

Achebe welcomes movements like African democracy and socialism. They are calculated to restore African culture to its pristine glory. Achebe sides with patriots like Ezekiel and Ghanaian philosopher William Abraham. Achebe is hopeful that African culture has a bright future.



## **Dr. S.Radhakrishnan's AN IDEAL BEFORE THE YOUTH**

About the Author:

Dr.S.Radhakrishana was the president of India. He reaffirms the values of ancient culture and traces their relevance to the modern age in all his writings. What ideal does Dr.S.Radhakirshnan set before the youth?

Introduction

Dr.S.Radhakrishnan absorbs new ideas and ideals. At the same time he remains whatever is of value in ancient culture. Thus he bridges the old and the new.

The limitation of science

Science and technology open up vast avenues of employment opportunities. Science has utilisation value. Dr.Radhakrishnan admits these plus points. At the same time he emphasizes the limitations of science also.

Science develops such good qualities as disciplined pursuit of truth, open mindedness, freedom from prejudice, hospitality to new ideas, etc. But these qualities are incidental side-effects only. The greatest limitation of science is that it is amoral. Barbarous crime involving destruction on a huge scale are committed only by scientifically and technologically trained people. In our age there is only a thin razor's edge dividing civilization from barbarism. We are tottering on the verge of total extinction. Science gives us knowledge, not wisdom or gnanam, We can save ourselves only through making proper moral judgements.

**How can we save ourselves from catastrophe (total annihilation) ?**

Radhakrishnan says that we can save ourselves only by reading classics which deal with the life and destiny of the human race. Only great poets, philosophers and artists can guide us in the right direction. History, with its changing scenes, can tell us about ' the power and powerlessness' of man and the nature of the Supreme.

**Radhakrishnan on students and teachers:**

Radhakrishnan says that our students have lost touch with Indian culture. Their restlessness is due to their cultural rootlessness. By defying their authority, students endanger their future. They should develop habits of fortitude, self-control and balance.



The relationship between the teacher and the taught is a sacred one . Excellent education can be provided only by a well-trained teacher. Talented teachers can be drawn to the teaching profession only if they are paid well. Teachers who are paid inadequately try to enhance their income by writing textbooks and seeking examinations. Another flaw of our educational system is the inordinate increase in the number of students in a class so as to maximise profits. Educational institutions have become commercialized.

Radhakrishnan on the spirit of democracy:

The spirit of democracy must pervade our universities. Our youth must be trained in democratic ways in our educational institutions. They can learn the ideas of justice, equality, fraternity and freedom by studying ancient classics. In this way they can learn to counter the spirit of enjoyment with the spirit of sacrifice.

## **OUTLINE STORY OF 'TWO LEAVES AND A BUD'**

### **Journey Into The Unknown**

The story of Two Leaves and a Bud is the story of a poor peasant's fateful journey into an unknown land in search of a living. The peasant called Gangu is a strong, industrious and shrewd member of the Rajput clan and lives with his brothers in a village of Hoshiarpur District in the Punjab. But he finds himself deprived of his only means of livelihood in advanced age when his brothers mortgage the family's landed property and mus-house in order to repay their debts. At this juncture a cunning planter's agent named Buta lures him by false pretences to go to work as a coolie in the Macpherson Tea Estate of distant Assam. Gangu is shrewd enough not to take the crafty Buta at his word, but the lack of any employment opportunity in a farm or factory for an aged man like him compels Gangu to accept Buta's offer. Consequently, he embarks on a hazardous journey into the unknown land of Assam in the company of his wife, Sajani, and the two children, the fourteen-year-old Leila and the eight-year-old Buddha. Buta also accompanies him on the toy train to Assam in order to reassure him that he will be given a very good remuneration, a fine house, a plot of land and a loan by the kind-hearted British managers of the tea estate in lieu of his services. The peasant Gangu is delighted at the



prospect of getting a piece of land to cultivate rice, but he dreads the prospect of seeking a loan. The proverb 'once bitten twice shy' applies to him so well.

### **Gangu's Disillusionment**

Gangu's wife, Sanani, keeps quiet but his children, Leila and Buddhu, look eager and excited while going to Assam by a toy train. However, the old Gangu regrets that he is going to live and die in the thickly forested, damp and dreadful land of distant Assam, already three days' and three nights' journey from his village in the Punjab. He imagines he is in a green hell inhabited by evil spirits, wild animals and poisonous reptiles, with the two-horned God of Death, Yama towering supreme, a skull in his left hand and a sword in his right one. Unfortunately, what he imagines turns out to be true at the end.

Soon after his arrival at his destination Gangu realizes that he has been duped by the crafty Buta who receives a commission from the Shashi Bhusan Bhattacharya for recruiting him as an indentured coolie. Instead of getting the good remuneration promised by Buta, Gangu gets only half a rupee a day for working hard in the plantation with his whole in the unhygienic surroundings of the coolie lines where the epidemics of cholera and malaria are very frequent; and, instead of getting a plot of land or a loan in times of need, he gets ill-treatment from the hard-hearted and snobbish British managers and their Indian subordinates. Thoroughly disillusioned with his situation, Gangu asks himself: "Did all the sahibs who come to own this land get their labourers by letting lies pass for truth, did they make deceit a virtue and exalt the worst to the best, make every forceful talker like Buta into a sardar, and liberate all the selfishness that any charlatan could use for his own purpose?" The Seth who buys cheap things from the Tibetan producers of grain and sells them to the coolies reminds Gangu of the universal exploitation of labour by capital: Gangu looked upon them through the dark layers of his own bitterness, and tried to penetrate into the fastness of their minds, and beyond them to the villages, where the tense insistence of their loins had driven the plough deep, deep, into the earth, where they had sprinkled the seed and waited for the rain from heaven to irrigate their furrows, where they had watched the opening of the buds and gazed at the flowering of the crop into fruit, with smiles broad as the rays of the Himalayan sun. He knew the meaning of their toil, he had known the beauty of that magic which was in the hard-yielding earth, he knew



the love with which men spent themselves so that they could reap the fruit, and the disillusion consequent upon selling it or bartering it to a hard, un-understanding, small-hearted, mean bania or city-broker. He yearned towards the Tibetans, and bursting with indignation and remorse at their suffering, and his own, wallowed in the welter of a music that made him dumb with its turbulence.

### **A Prison**

Gangu befriends his neighbour Narain soon after entering his room in the coolie lines and learns all about the life of a coolie in the tea plantation from him. Narain tells Gangu that he too was brought there by a planter's agent on a contract for three years from the famine-stricken state of Bikaner but has not been allowed to return home even after twelve years. He further tells Gangu that he gets only half a rupee a day for working there, that he has got neither any plot of land nor any loan from the planters, and that he has resigned himself to his sad lot as an indentured coolie as he cannot escape it. He finally says, "I suppose it was in our kismet. Nut at home it was like a prison and here it is slightly worse.... First water, afterwards mire! This prison has no bars, but it is nevertheless an unbreakable jail. The chowkidars keep guard over the plantation, and they bring you back if you should go. ....It is all right, brother.... one gets food here at least, and one might have died of famine in the state of Bikaner." Gangu is so shocked to learn about Narain's imprisonment in the tea plantation that he hardens his face into a knot of anguish which is not to be untied again, but he gets ready to accept all kinds of humiliations as a coolie over there.

### **The British Managers and Dr.Havre**

Gangu soon comes to know that the Macpherson Tea Estate is managed by two Britishers, namely, Croft-Cooke and his assistant Reggie Hunt. Croft-Cooke is professionally sincere and morally upright, but Reggie Hunt is brutish and lustful. Yet both treat the Indian coolies as beasts of burden and use them for their profit without giving them proper wages and basic amenities. Both live luxuriously in spacious and well-furnished bungalows on the highlands, while they force the Indian coolies to languish in their dark and dingy rooms on the bank of a river in the valley. Both enjoy their leisure by drinking, dancing



and polo-playing at the Tea Estates Club where Indians are not allowed to enter. However, the British doctor John de la Havre treats the Indian coolies very sympathetically and makes plans for the supply of clean drinking water and sanitary fittings to their rooms so that they may not be exposed to the epidemics of cholera and malaria. But Croft-Cooke tells him that the higher authorities will not sanction money for the execution of his plans for the well-being of the Indian coolies in times of depression. Dr. John de la Havre is very much agitated about the ill-treatment meted out to the Indian coolies by the British managers and asks himself impatiently: "Yes, why not let the natives run their own show? It is their country. And we have no right to it." He also jots down a similar question in his diary: "why didn't it occur to anyone – the simple obvious thing that people don't need to read Marx to realize here? The black coolies clear the forests, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money-grabbing, slave-driving, soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies...." Of course, de la Havre is deeply in love with Croft-Cooke's daughter, Barbara and she too loves him for his tender and truthful attitude to life. But neither the snobbish Croft-Cooke nor his comfort-loving wife, Margaret, approves of their love-affair.

### **Gangu's Cup of Woes**

Gangu's cup of woes is swiftly filled up by a series of mishaps. First, his wife, Sajani, dies of malaria and he has to borrow money from a trader for her cremation; secondly, he is brutally beaten up by Sardar Neogi and Reggie Hunt for intervening in the quarrel between the latter's two mistresses; and, thirdly, his only well-wisher in the tea estate, namely, Dr. John de la Havre is summarily dismissed from service by Croft-Cooke for prompting the Indian coolies to stage a demonstration against the brutal behaviour of Reggie Hunt. Consequently, de la Havre's love-affair with Barbara comes to an abrupt end and he leaves the place as a disheartened man. The demonstration of the Indian coolies is treated as a mutiny by Croft-Cooke and suppressed with the help of the bombers of the Royal Air Force summoned from Calcutta. A tiger-shoot is stage-managed to please Sir Geoffrey Body, the governor of Assam, who visits the Macpherson Tea Estate to demonstrate to the disgruntled Indian coolies the power and glory of the British Government.



## **Gangu's Murder**

However, Reggie Hunt finds himself cold-shouldered by his own community in a foreign country. He is treated as a black sheep by his colleague not only for having provoked the coolies' demonstration by his ill-treatment but also for having caused Dr. John de la Havre's dismissal. But Reggie Hunt thinks, Croft-Cooke and his companions cannot be unhappy with him on account of his amorous dealings with the coolie women, because they themselves would have ravished them in their youth. He also thinks that he is perfectly justified in keeping a mistress, because he cannot keep a wife on an annual income of four hundred and fifty pounds only. He finally thinks his behaviour is as good as it can be under the pulls and pressures of his situation. His life has been devoid of love and affection; his step-mother kept him at school even during the holidays in his childhood so that he could not meet his father and win his favour; his colonel dismissed him from service for insubordination when he was working as an officer of the London Regiment at Nowshera on the North-Western Frontier; and now Croft-Cooke is not pleased with him even though he is discharging his responsibility as an assistant manager very faithfully in a hot and damp country. It is true that he treats the Indian coolies very severely, but it is also true that he does so to goad those lazy beasts into action. He knows that his bearer Afzal and the sardars of the tea estate like him for his strength and determination. So he resolves to make himself happy in his own way. A sport of polo, a woman and a drink and to hell with Croft-Cooke.

Reggie Hunt goes out for a walk in order to pull himself out of the dumps. He finds Gangu's fourteen-year-old daughter Leila plucking tea leaves all alone in the garden and persuades her to have sex with him. But she is frightened by his advances and runs away from him. He follows her to her house and asks her brother Buddhu to prompt her to come to him, but Buddhu raises a hue and cry to see him running after his sister. Frustrated and frightened, he shoots blindly in front of him, kills Gangu, and runs away. He is tried for the murder of Gangu, but the British judge, Mr. Moberley, concurring with the majority view of a jury of seven Europeans and two Indians, finds him 'not guilty' of murder and discharges him! After all, the king can do no wrong from the British point of view. Thus, Gangu meets the terrible end that he feared in the beginning of his story.



## THE THEME OF 'TWO LEAVES AND A BUD'

### Marxist Humanism

According to William Walsh, "Mulk Raj Anand is passionately concerned with the villages, with the ferocious poverty and the cruelties of caste, with orphans, untouchables and urban labourers. He writes in an angry reformist way, like a less humorous Dickens and a more emotional Wells, of the personal suffering induced by economics-really economics, one feels, even when he is writing of caste. His sharpest, best organized novel is *Untouchable* (1935) which was very highly thought of by E.M.Forster. It is an interesting combination of hard material, narrow specific theme, and throbbing Shelleyan manner. The action, occupying a single day, is precipitated by a great 'catastrophe', an accidental 'touching' in the morning. Everything that follows is affected by it, even the innocent and vividly realized Hockey Match. Of the three solutions hinted at to the problem of the untouchable-Christ, Gandhi, and Main Drainage-it is the last which is most favoured by Anand. He is a committed artist, and what he is committed to is indicated by Bashir's mockery in *Untouchable*: 'Greater efficiency, better salesmanship, more mass-production, standardization, dictatorship of the sweepers, Marxian materialism, and all that'. 'Yes, yes', is the reply, 'all that, but no catch-words and cheap phrases, the change will be organic and not mechanical.'" ('Indian and the Novel', *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford, B. The Present, 1983, pp. 248-49). Indeed, Mulk Raj Anand is a Marxist humanist who writes novels in order to bring to light the brutal exploitation of the poor by the rich in organized society and thus to pave the way for the establishment of an egalitarian social order in which all men and women may live together by destroying the differences of caste, class and creed.

### The Exploitation of the Indian coolie

The theme of *Two Leaves and a Bud* is the brutal and irremediable exploitation of the Indian coolies by the British managers to tea plantations in Assam during the 1930s when India was a part of the British Empire. It is succinctly stated by the Marxist British doctor John de la Havre when he says, "the contents of a cup of tea are the hunger, the sweat and the despair of a million Indians!" (Mulk Raj Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Mayfair Paperbacks, 1998, p. 22). It is amplified by him through a quotation from Dr.V.H.Rutherford's report on the position of the coolies in the tea plantations



of Assam: “On the tea plantations of Assam a man gets 8d., for eight hours a day, a woman 6d., and a child 3d.; in the tea factories the worker earns 9d. for an eight hour working. The coolie suffers not only this low level of wages but frequently from indebtedness to his employers in outlandish districts where he is dependent upon the shops provided by the employers for his foodstuffs, fuel, etc. This indebtedness, together with the isolation of the plantation, renders it difficult for him to seek employment elsewhere, and this practically reduces him to a life of economic slavery. His treatment often borders on the inhuman and his chances of justice and redress are chimerical” (Ibid., p. 126). Thus, “the present system of plantation labour is a curse and a crime. It is a monstrous crime against humanity. All that was said, generations ago, by the Wilberforces and Cannings and Garrisons and Lincolns against the hideous shame of slavery, could be repeated and added to, in respect to what is transpiring today on the tea, coffee, rubber, and other plantations in India”. (Ibid., p. 125).

### **The Exploiters**

The main exploiters of the Indian coolies are the British managers of the tea estates who use them as beasts of burden for their profit with the full backing of the British Government. They recruit poor peasants as coolies through their agents of sardars by promising to pay them high wages, fine houses, plots of land and loans in lieu of their services. But after recruiting them they force the coolies to work hard in the plantation for a pittance, make them live in brick-built rooms without light, ventilation and sanitation, allot no plots of land to them unless they submit their wives and daughters to them, flog or kill them wantonly, and do not allow them to return home even after the termination of the period of their contract. They themselves live luxuriously in spacious and well-furnished bungalows, enjoy their leisure by drinking, dancing and card-playing at the exclusively English Tea Estates Club, and maintain a distance from the Indians whom they consider to be barbarians in point of intellect and civilization. They think, the white man is accepted by the amorphous millions of India because he has courage, strength and determination, because he keeps justice between them and prevents them from cutting each other's throats, and because he gives them money to buy such luxuries as beads, bangles, knives, calico, cotton and tobacco, and civilizes



them. They would have overrun the white race because of their predominance in numbers if they had not been kept in check. They must be taught to become human beings, for they are a thousand year behind. And the white race can only rule them by putting the fear of God into them and by dealing with them severely when they play any monkey tricks, and with generosity when they behave.

### **The Black Sheep**

Dr. de la Havre is treated as a black sheep by the managers of the Macpherson Tea Estate, because he treats the Indian coolies as human beings and makes plans for the supply of clean drinking water and sanitary fittings to their huts in order to protect them against the epidemics of cholera and malaria. The manager, Croft-Cooke, makes it plain to him that neither the higher authorities will sanction money for the execution of his plans for the material well-being of the Indian coolies in times of depression nor the Indian coolies themselves are accustomed to the use of the amenities he wishes to provide them. Even his friend Tweetie says, "You know, after all, the coolie is favoured here to some extent. We respect his customs and conventions. He is housed and fed. He can keep goats and fowls. His tastes are simple, and he is probably not unhappy. His ideas are few, his vocabulary small and limited. He may be oppressed, no one, in truth, could deny that, I suppose, but he doesn't feel it as we should". As Dr. de la Havre fervently wants the Indian coolies to be treated as respectable human beings, he is disheartened by the imperialistic and callous attitude of his colleagues towards them. He asks himself impatiently, "Yes, why not let the natives run their own show? It is their country. And we have really no right in it." He jots down a similar question in his diary: "Why didn't it occur to anyone the simple obvious thing that people don't need to read Marx to realize here? The black coolies clear the forests, plant the fields, toil and garner the harvest, while all the money-grabbing, slave-driving, soulless managers and directors draw their salaries and dividends and build up monopolies". He is shocked to observe that his countrymen proudly stand for liberty but do not hesitate to enslave the Indian coolies: "But the poor, bloody coolies sweat their guts out, working for four farthings a day, to the tune of Reggie Hunt guffaws. Hurrah for the Britons who never, never shall be slaves. Three cheers for the man who imprisons old



Gangu on the plantation by false pretences, keeps him well-guarded and refuses to give him a strip of land which he promised by contract. But what's a contract with a slave? Less than a scrap of paper! And that's your Empire!".

### **Universality of exploitation**

Dr. de la Harve is sharp enough to see that the British capitalists exploit not only the Indian coolies but also the labourers of their own community. By open loot and bribery and corruption, and by drawing large dividends from the Company's shares, they build up large fortunes. And when all this booty has piled up in the homes of the British Capitalists, they invest it in the manufacturing industries of Bradford and Manchester, where adult workers have a sixty-five hour week for a shilling, and children under nine do two shifts a day! The working classes starve while the middle classes entrench themselves in their cozy country homes. Thus, the exploitation of labour by capital is a universal phenomenon. But, then it is a wrong without a remedy. In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Mulk Raj Anand shows that the peaceful demonstration of the Indian coolies against the brutal treatment given to them by Reggie Hunt is treated as a mutiny and suppressed as such with the help of the bombers of the Royal Air Force. Dr. de la Havre is dismissed for siding with the rebellious Indian coolies, and Sir Geoffrey Boyd, the Governor of Assam, pays a visit to the Macpherson Tea Estate to demonstrate to the disgruntled Indian coolies the power and glory of the British Government! Above all, Reggie Hunt, the villain of the piece, gets away with the murder of Gangu, because the predominantly European jury and the British judge, Mr. Moberley, find him 'not guilty' of the murder of an Indian coolie! In this way the brutal exploitation of the Indian coolies by the British managers of the tea estates of Assam goes on unabated and turns out to be a wrong without a remedy.

## **JHUMPA LAHIRI : THE NAMESAKE**

### **How Gogol is Named**

Gogol Ganguli, the protagonist of *The Namesake*, is on a quest: He is compelled to reinvest himself, to achieve a sense of dignity that will overcome the embarrassment of his name. Born in the United States, he is the son of Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli, who were married in India in the traditional way,



by parental arrangement. They strive to preserve their Bengali culture while freeing their children to become successful Americans. Unlike immigrants of earlier generations, who turned their backs on the old country, knowing they would never return, the Ganguli family travels frequently and with fluid ease between the United States and India, fully at home in neither place.

Gogol's name is a bizarre accident of fate. Ashoke, as a young man in India, survives a terrible train accident and is saved only because the rescuers notice the crumpled page of a book falling from his hand. This is a page from the short stories of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. This accident marks Ashoke physically with a lifelong limp and emotionally with a sense of mystery about his survival when all others in the same railroad car perished.

When his son is born in Boston. Ashoke must name the child on the birth certificate before the infant is released from the hospital. Indian Children are given a pen name for the family, with formal or "good" name chosen later, when the child's personality has been formed. Ashima's grandmother in India has been chosen to name the boy, but her letter has not yet arrived. Ashoke names his son for the author whose book saved his life.

### **CULTURAL AND EMOTIONAL ALIENATION**

The name is, for Gogol, a symbol of cultural alienation-neither Indian nor American but Russian. Worse still, he learns in high school, the author, although a genius was mentally disturbed and suicidal. The narrative spans the first thirty-two years of Gogol's life, following him as a young child, then a school boy, continuing through his college years and his early career as a architect. While Gogol is a focus of the story, the narrator, writing in the third person as a distant observer, departs from this position at times to explore the lives of other major characters who are on their own journeys, trying to make a sense of their lives.

Ashoke earns his degree in engineering and comes a tenured professor at a small-town New England college and the family establishes home on Pemberton Road. A man of the working world, Ashoke successfully adapts to American ways in his public life. However, he and Ashima socialize only with their Bengali friends-immigrants who share their traditions. Ashoke and Gogol are outwardly respectful to each other, but Ashoke is puzzled and saddened by his son's emotional distance. Ashima, a homemaker in the old world tradition, is torn between the old ways and the new. She wears the sari throughout her



life and cooks Indian food but adopts American customs for the sake of her children. Her thanksgiving turkey is seasoned with garlic and cumin, and she decorates an artificial Christmas tree.

The scenes in Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel are fraught with tension between the two cultures. This causes conflict in the family life. Ashima often accedes to her son's wishes but sometimes stands her ground with indignation. When Gogol returns from a field trip with a grave rubbing from a puritan cemetery which he intends to display on the refrigerator, Ashima is horrified. In Hindu tradition, the body is burned; she finds it barbaric that Americans display artifacts of the dead in the place where food is cooked and consumed.

Ashoke. In poignant scene, presents his son with a hard cover volume of Gogol's short stories, a special edition ordered from England and intended to commemorate the significance of his name, Gogol, the thoroughly Americanized teenage preoccupied with his favourite Beatles recording, is indifferent to his father's gift. Ashoke quickly leaves the room, where he is not welcome. Although Gogol will eventually learn this story, the author conveys a powerful sense of loss for a moment of love that might have united father and son.

The Gangulis maintain close ties with their families in India by telephone. The middle-of-the-night overseas calls invariably bring news of a death in the family, revealing Ashima's sense of loss and separation from loved ones and her native traditions. Only on her return to India does she feel secure. However, Gogol and his younger sister, Sonia, are bored and annoyed by their noisy, intrusive Bengali relatives. They crave their hamburgers and pizza and hot showers. When they return to the United States, they purposely forget their Indian experience – it seems irrelevant to their lives.

### **Gogol Becomes Nikhil**

Although Gogol is enrolled in school under his formal name, Nikhil, it seems to him and he continues to call himself Gogol, much as he hates his name. His sister calls him by the unfortunate nick names of Goggles. When he is eighteen and a freshman at Yale University, he changes his name legally to Nikhil. His room-mates and later his adult friends, know him as Nikhil, but occasionally a family member calls him Gogol and this requires an embarrassing explanation.



## **Clash of Cultures**

Gogol's headlong affair with Maxine Ratliff in New York City, where he works as an architect, illuminates the clash between the two cultures that is at the heart of this story. Maxine is an editor of art books; she and her parents are upscale Americans whose lifestyle would make a good feature story in a trendy magazine. Maxine's mother is a textile curator at the Metropolitan Museum and her father a lawyer. The Ratliffs are as different from the Ganguli's as it is possible to imagine. What Gogol's parents refuse to acknowledge that he might have a sex life, the Ratliffs are at ease with Maxine and Gogol's affair, conducted casually in their home. The Ratliffs have frequent dinner parties, featuring small portions of elegantly prepared food. They are wine connoisseurs and often appear to be mildly intoxicated. The Gangulis are teetotalers and Gogol has never seen them display physical affection. They entertain their Bengali friends in large, noisy gatherings with an overabundance of food, which they chew with their mouths open.

Seduced by their contrasting lifestyle and infatuated with Maxine, Gogol moves into the Ratliffs' tastefully decorated Manhattan town house. In one scene, Gogol and Maxine stop briefly at the home on Pemberton Road on their way to a vacation in New Hampshire. Ashima is hurt that they will spend the holiday with Maxine's family but responds with polite hospitality. Gogol sees that his mother is overdressed and has cooked too much food. Ashima is deeply offended when the young woman calls her by her first name but suffers the insult without comment.

## **Traditional Indian Marriage**

The death of Ashoke is a wrenching experience for Gogol and a turning point in his life. During a visiting professorship at an Ohio University, Ashoke is felled by a fatal heart attack. Ashima, who has remained in the family home, is notified by telephone from the hospital; she finally reaches Gogol at the Ratliff home. Gogol must identify his father's body in the morgue and clear out the apartment where his father had lived temporarily. The precisely detailed description of Ashoke's body, the hospital rooms and the bare furnishings of the apartment are a stark reminder to Gogol of his loss, his discovery that he has never truly known his father. The scenes recall an earlier event when young Gogol and his father had walked on the sands of Cape Cod to the



lighthouse, as far as they could go. Ashoke said, "Remember that you and I made this journey, that we went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go."

After Ashoke's death, Maxine and Gogol gradually drift apart. Gogol's reaction seems remote and puzzling: "His time with her seems like a permanent part of him that no longer has any relevance, or currency. As if that time were a name he'd ceased to use. After the period of mourning for Ashoke, Gogol agrees, at his mother's request to meet Moushumi, the daughter of Bengali friends whom he has known since childhood. The two are attracted to each other, begin an affair and marry in a traditional Indian ceremony, Moushumi, however, has had previous affairs and a troubled history of mental breakdowns. She inexplicably sabotages her marriages through an affair with an older, less attractive man.

The conclusion reaches for a symmetry that resolves the conflicts in the narrative. Ashima sells the family home and will spend half the year in Calcutta with her friends and relatives, the other half with her children in the United States. Sonia is engaged to Ben, a man of mixed Jewish and Chinese ancestry and this promises to be a successful union. Gogol, as he helps to dismantle the home on Pemberton Road, rediscovers the volume of short stories, his father's birthday gift and begins to read.

## **GOGOL'S HERITAGE**

As a portrait of imagination and personal quest for identity, the novel raises interesting questions. Given the genuine pain the Ashima and Ashoke suffer in attempting to reconcile their cultural heritage with the American dream, it is worth considering whether Gogol's angst over the oddity of his name should evoke the reader's sympathy. Ashoke's common sense interpretation of Gogol's complaints when he announces he will change his name is instructive: "The only person who didn't take Gogol seriously the only person who tormented him, the only person chronically aware of and afflicted by the embarrassment of this name ... was Gogol." As Gogol takes up his father's gift and begins to read, there is hope that he has reached a mature resting place between the two cultures that are his heritage.



### **Write a critical appreciation of Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel, The Namesake**

Jhumpa Lahiri's "lyrical as well as "mouth-watering" narrative has been praised for having dug into the issues of assimilation to a new country. It has offered a glimpse into the problems of immigrants from moving and detailed accounts of everyday life. Michiko Kakutani, one of the most respected reviewers at the New York Times, writes:" Jhumpa Lahiri's quietly dazzling new novel, ' The Namesake', is that rare thing: an intimate closely observed family portrait that effortlessly and discreetly unfolds to disclose a capacious social vision. Audrey van Buskirk, writing for Seattle's the stranger however, had only one complaint: she wanted more- It is a compliment to Lahiri and to the richness of the book that you wish the novel were longer."

### **The Gangulis in America**

The year is 1968, and Ashima, a newly-married Bengali woman who has recently moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband, is about to give birth. Her husband, Ashoke, accompanies her to the hospital in a taxi. In the waiting room of the hospital, Ashoke remembers how in 1961, as he was travelling from Calcutta to Jamshedpur to visit his grandfather and collect the books he was to inherit from the retired, now blind, professor, he was involved in a near-fatal train accident. On the train he had been reading a collection of short stories by the Russian author Nikolai Gogol, when the locomotive engine and seven bogies derailed, causing Ashoke's car to be flung into a nearby field. Rescue workers found Ashoke, buried under the debris, because a page of the book he clutched in hand.

The baby is born the next morning, Ashima and Ashoke want to wait to name their first child until a letter arrives from Ashima's grandmother in Calcutta with two name options: one for a boy and one for a girl. It is the Bengali tradition to have a respected elder choose the name of a child. However when it is time to leave the hospital, the letter has not arrived. So they make up a pet name(daknam) until they can officially name(bhalonam) their baby as per the grandmother's wishes. Ashoke chooses Gogol, the name of the author whose story ('The Overcoat") he was reading when the train crashed seven years ago.

Ashoke and Ashima hold a rice ceremony for Gogol when he is six months old with their Bengali friends and acquaintances attending. One of



them, Dilip Nandi, acts as the baby's honorary uncle and feeds him. Six months later, the Gangulis are planning a visit to India. Ashima's brother Rana calls with the bad news that their father has died of heart attack. Ashima is extremely upset and they decide to go to Calcutta- six weeks earlier than they had planned- for the funeral.

By 1971, the Gangulis have moved from Harvard Square to a university town outside Boston. After two years in university-subsidized housing, Ashima and Ashoke decide to buy a home of their own. The house is on Pemberton Road and there are no Bengali neighbours. A daughter, Sonia, is born when Gogol is five. In the years following, Ashima loses his mother and Ashoke loses both his parents and the news is communicated to them from India through midnight calls; they begin dreading these calls which invariably convey bad news.

### **Gogol in School**

On the first day of Gogol's kindergarten, his parents tell Mrs. Lapidus, the principal, that she should call Gogol by his formal name. "Nikhil". But she overhears them referring to him as "Gogol" and asks him what he would like to be called when he answers 'Gogol', it sticks.

On Gogol's fourteenth birthday, his father comes into his room and gifts him a hardbound copy of the Shortstories of Nikolai Gogol. But Gogol is interested more in the in the music of the Beatles than in looking at the book and appreciating his father's thoughtful gesture; he is disinterested when Ashoke begins to tell him about his railway accident and how he was found by the rescue workers with the page of 'The Overcoat' by Gogol clutched in his hand. But he stops because Gogol cannot yet understand the significance of his name. Ashoke leaves disappointed and Gogol stashes the book away. The next year the Gangulis go to Calcutta for eight months as Ashoke is up for sabbatical at the university. When they return, Gogol and Sonia prefer to forget the experience.

Gogol begins his junior high school in the fall, taking English with Mr.Lawson, who assigns the class to read the short story, 'The Overcoat' Mr.Lawson acquaints Gogol and the entire class with the life and times of the "eccentric genius" that Nikolai Gogol was. Gogol starts hating his name all the more now. So the summer before he leaves for college at Yale, Gogol goes to



probate court and legally change his name to Nikhil. However, it is a while before he starts feeling like Nikhil.

### **Gogol on His Own**

At Yale, Gogol starts dating a girl named Ruth, but they grow apart when she goes to study at Oxford. The next Thanksgiving, Ashoke explains to his son how he came to be called Gogol—about the train accident in which he was almost killed. Gogol asks him if he reminds him of the night that he almost died, his father says no; Gogol reminds Ashoke of “everything that followed.”

Gogol qualifies as an architect from Columbia and starts working in New York. He lives in a tiny apartment there. He then begins to date Maxine Ratliff, an assistant editor of books. Maxine’s parents, Gerald and Lydia, are incredibly wealthy; they interact with Gogol in a casual but intelligent way that is totally opposed to the behaviour of his own parents. He begins spending most of his time at their home rather than at his own apartment and he feels effortlessly incorporated into their lives. Eventually, he virtually moves into the Ratliff home. Ashima calls to ask him to visit them to see his father off before he leaves to spend nine months at research project at a university outside Cleveland, but the most Gogol will do is to stop for lunch with Maxine on their way to her parents lake house in New Hampshire.

### **Ashoke’s Death**

While Ashima is addressing Christmas cards one quiet day, Ashoke calls in the afternoon to tell her that he is at the hospital for a checkup. His stomach has been bothering him all day, so he had driven himself to the hospital. After two hours, she has not heard from her husband she calls the hospital and an intern informs her that Ashoke tries to contact Gogol at his office as well as his apartment, but it is Sonia who locates him at the Ratliff house.

Gogol flies to Ohio to identify his father’s body and clean out his apartment. The next morning, he flies home to Boston to be with his mother and Sonia. During the ten days of mourning, most of their friends come to their place to sit with them. While Gogol flies back to New York, Sonia decides to stay with her mother for a while.



## **Gogol Marries Moushumi**

A year after Ashoke's death, Gogol has broken up with Maxine, following which he has a torrid affair with a married woman named Bridget. Ashima then encourages him to call Moushumi Mazoomdar, the daughter of friends whom Gogol has grown up around at family parties. Moushumi tells him of her bohemian lifestyle when she moved to study French literature in Paris and then moved to New York to follow her then fiancé Graham, an American. They visited Moushumi's grandparents and other relatives in Calcutta and their marriage was fixed. But Moushumi had a fight with Graham at the last moment and the wedding was off. Moushumi had taken the rest of the semester off from NYU and mourned, finally returning to school in the fall. It was then that she had met Gogol.

Gogol and Moushumi start dating and within a year they get married at a traditional Bengali ceremony arranged and planned by their parents. They move into an apartment of their own and get used to married life. They go to Paris together where Moushumi presents a paper at Sorbonne, while there, Gogol feels lonely most of the time as Moushumi is busy and so at home in the city.

## **Gogol- Moushumi Divorce**

Two days after their first wedding anniversary, Moushumi comes across a resume at the university from a man named Dimitri Desjardins, whom she had dated once when she was at high school. Moushumi locates him and starts having an affair with him on Mondays and Wednesdays, after her class at the university. Gogol knows nothing of his wife's affair with Dimitri, but he senses that something is amiss in their marriage. He divorces Moushumi after she confesses the affair.

## **Ashima's Plan**

A year later, before Christmas of the year 2000, Ashima is preparing food for her last Christmas Eve party in the United States. She has now decided to spend six months in India, with her brother and his family in Calcutta and six months with her own children and potential grandchildren in the States. Sonia and her half-Jewish, half-Chinese boyfriend are getting married next January in Calcutta and Gogol and Moushumi have decided to get a divorce.



Gogol arrives at the rail station before Ashima, Sonia and Ben are there to receive him. He recalls how he had found out about Moushumi's affair with Dimitri Desjardins during a casual conversation and she had left Pemberton Road the next day after the Christmas party last year, and when Gogol returned to New York she had cleared out of their apartment.

Party guest, mostly their Bengali friends the Gangulis have known over the years, arrive. This is the first Christmas party Ashima is hosting after Ashoke's death and her last in America. Ashima wants a keepsake photography of the noisy get-together and Gogol goes to his old bedroom to fetch his camera. There he discovers amid a stash of books the volume of Gogol's short stories his father had gifted him on his fourteenth birthday. He regretfully realizes that he hadn't read even a single story from the book, which his father had inscribed: "The man who gave you his name, from a man who give you your name." He takes his time, not going downstairs with the camera just yet; he sits down and begins to read 'The Overcoat'

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel provided the readers with a picture of the life of expatriates. Lahiri explores the idea of cultural and personal isolations and identities through various characters, whose cultural isolation results in the personal. Her stories ('Interpreter of Maladies') also draw upon difference aspect of her own Indian background and project the life of the second-generation Indians like Lahiri herself- people who are torn apart by their hyphenated identities. And this she has projected that successfully in *The Namesake*.

### **Identify and describe the themes explored by Jhumpa Lahiri in *The Namesake***

Various aspects and challenges of immigration and assimilation are explored by Jhumpa Lahiri in her first novel, *The Namesake*.

Lahiri offers insight into the everyday life of one family, the Gangulis, who came to the United States but live separate from the American Culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri has identified and explored several themes. They are: i) Relationships between Parents and Children; ii) Name and Identity; iii) Language Barrier; iv) Alienation; v) United States versus India; vi) Tension between Life and Death; and vii) Nostalgia



### **i) Relationships between Parents and Children**

The Theme of the relationship between parents and children becomes prominent, as Gogol grows old enough to interact with his parents as a child. While Ashima is pregnant with Sonia, Gogol and Ashoke eat dinner together and Ashoke scolds Gogol for playing with his food. He says, “At your age I ate tin”, to draw attention to how grateful Gogol should be for having the food to eat. The relationship between Ashima and Ashoke the their own parents is also mentioned as they find out that their parents have died; Ashoke’s parents both die of cancer, Ashima’s father dies of massive heart attack and her mother of kidney disease. They learn about these deaths from midnight phone calls in India.

As Ashima addresses Christmas cards, she is wistful that Sonia and Gogol did not come home to celebrate Thanksgiving with her. Their need for independence is contrary to the need she felt at their age to be near her family. Gogol begins to feel tender towards his father after his death, while his attitude towards him while was alive was generally impatient. As Gogol drives Ashoke’s car to the rental office of his apartment building, he wonders if a man outside the building mistakes him for his father. The thought is comforting to him. He now understands the guilt and uselessness his parents had felt when their own parents had passed away across the world, in Calcutta.

Moushumi and her parents and Bengalis like the Gangulis. Because she is a woman, Moushumi’s parents had been presenting Bengali suitors to her throughout her teenage years, none of whom she was interested in. This experience alienated her from her parents, since she did not want to take their advice about whom she should marry and since then she resented them for trying to control her destiny in that way.

In the last chapter of the novel, Gogol considers what it took for his parents in the United State, so far from their own parents and how he himself has always remained close to home; they bore it” with a stamina he fears he does not possess himself”. He does not think he can bear being so far away from his mother for so long when Ashima decides to divide her time between India and the United States.



## ii) Name and Identity

The important theme of name and identity is introduced in the very beginning of the novel, when Ashima calls out for her husband from the bathroom. She does not use his name when she calls for him, since ‘it’s not the type of thing Bengali wives do.’ Their husbands’ names are considered too intimate to be used. In Chapter 2, the Bengali tradition of pet names (*daknam*) and ‘good’ names (*bhalonam*) is explained. Only close family friends use the pet name in the privacy of the home. While the ‘good’ name is used in formal situations like work. Ashima and Ashoke have to give their son a pet name as they wait for the “good” name suggestions to arrive from Ashima’s grandmother in Calcutta, but the letter never comes.

The theme of name and identity is important in Chapter 3, when Gogol starts kindergarten. His parents intend for him to go by “Nikhil” at school and “Gogol” at home, but Gogol is confused; he doesn’t want a new name: “He is afraid to be Nikhil, someone he doesn’t know who doesn’t know him.” As a child, he associates a new name with a new identity. Gogol is not bothered by the unusual nature of his name until he is eleven and realizes, on a class trip to a cemetery, that his name is unique. He makes rubbings of the other gravestones with names he has never heard because he relates to him.

By his fourteenth birthday, Gogol has come to hate his name and resents being asked about it. There are many difference names for Gogol and Sonia to remember for their relatives in Calcutta, “to signify whether they are related to their mother’s or their father’s side, by marriage or by blood.” At the college party, Gogol is reluctant to introduce himself to Kim as “Gogol”, so he say his name is Nikhil. It gives him the confidence to kiss her: “It hadn’t been Gogol who had kissed Kim.... Gogol had nothing to do with it.”

Ashima has never uttered Ashoke’s name in his presence; the reader is reminded of this fact as she signs his name to their Christmas cards. It creates a rift between Ashoke’s name and his identity, at least has identity to his wife. Even after Ashoke dies, as Ashima explains to their friends what happened to him, she refuses “even in death, to utter her husband’s name”. She does not understand his identity as linked to his name.

Moushumi and Gogol bond over their Bengali identities and how they are a source of confusion for Americans. “They talk about how they are both routinely assumed to be Greek, Egyptian, Mexican – even in the



misrendering they are joined.” Neither of them thought they would date another Bengali seriously, since it was something both their parents wanted for them so badly. They know that their relationship with appeal to their Bengali parents and they find this both comforting and surprising; they never thought they would please their parents in that way.

The theme of name and identity emerges in Chapter 9 while Astrid, Donald and the guest at the dinner party discuss what to name Astrid’s baby. Moushumi reveals to the guests nonchalantly that Nikhil was not always named Nikhil. This offends him because it feels like a betrayal of an intimate detail only she knew to people he doesn’t like.

### iii) Language Barrier

The language barrier that is to be the source of much struggle for Ashima and Ashoke is evident when they arrive at the hospital for Gogol’s birth. After she has been given a bed, Ashima looks for her husband, but he has stepped behind the curtain around their bed. He says, “I’ll be back,” in Bengali- a language neither the nurses nor the doctor speaks. The curtain is a physical barrier, but it represents the symbolic barrier created by speaking Bengali in the United States.

The words the American husbands at the hospital speak to their wives demonstrate the culture barrio between India and the United State. They say that they love their wives and comfort them with intimate words, while Ashima knows that she and Ashoke will not exchange those types of words since “this is not how they are”.

The language barrier arises as an issue as Gogol and Sonia grow older. Ashima and Ashoke send them to Bengali language and culture classes every other Saturday, but “it never fails to unsettle them, that their children sound just like Americans, expertly conversing in a language that still at times confounds them, in accents they are accustomed not to trust.”

In Chapter 8, after his date with Moushumi, Gogol makes the decision to speak to his taxi driver in Bengali. He feels the impulse to connect with another Indian after having embraced his childhood memories with Moushumi.



#### iv) Alienation

The theme of alienation, of being a stranger in a foreign land, is prominent throughout the novel. Throughout her pregnancy, which has been difficult, Ashima is afraid about raising a child in “a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little, where life seems so tentative and spare.” Her son, Gogol will feel a home in the United States in a ways that she never does. When Gogol is born, Ashima mourns the fact that her close family does not surround him. It means that his birth, “like most everything else in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true.” When she arrives home from the hospital, Ashima says to Ashoke in a moment of angst, “I don’t want to raise Gogol along in this country. It is not right. I want to go back.”

Ashima feels alienated in the suburbs; this alienation of being a foreigner is compared to “ a sort of lifelong pregnancy”, because it is “ a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts ... something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect.” Gogol also feels alienated, especially when he realizes that “no one he knows in the world, in Russia or India or America or anywhere, shares his name. Not even the source of his namesake.”

The theme of alienation is tied to loneliness in Chapter 7, with regard to Ashima. She is living along in the house on Pemberton Road and she does not like it all. She “feels too old to learn such a skill. She hates returning in the evening to a dark, empty house, going to sleep on one side of the bed and walking up on another.” When Maxine comes to stay with the Gangulis at the end of the mourning period for Ashoke, Gogol can tell “she feels useless, a bit excluded in this house full of Bengalis.” It’s the way he is used to feeling around her extended family and friends in New Hampshire.

The theme of alienation appears in Moushumi’s life, as she describes to Gogol how she rejected all the Indian suitors with whom her parents tried to match her up. She tells him. “She was convinced in her bones that there would be no one at all. Sometimes she wondered if it was her horror of being married to someone she didn’t love that had caused her, subconsciously, to shut herself off.” She went to Paris so she could reinvent herself without the confusion of where she fit in.

Gogol feels alienated sometimes in his marriage to Moushumi when he finds remnants of her life with Graham around the apartment they now share



together, he wonders if “ he represents some sort of capitulation or defeat”. When they go to Paris together, he wishes it were her first time there, too, so he didn’t feel out of place while she feels so obviously comfortable.

Ashima feels alienated and alone after showering before the party. She “feels lonely suddenly, horribly, permanently alone and briefly, turned away from the mirror, she sobs for her husband.” She feels “both impatience and indifference for all the days she must live.” She does not feel motivated to be in Calcutta with the family she left thirty years before nor does she feel excited about being in the United States with her children and her potential grandchildren. She just feels exhausted and overwhelmed without her husband.

#### v) **United States versus India**

The tension between the way things are in the United States and the way things are in India is apparent in the character of Mrs. Jones, the elderly secretary Ashoke shares with other members of his department at the university. She lives alone and sees her children and grandchildren rarely; this is “a life that Ashoke’s mother would find humiliating”. As the Ganguli children grow up as Americans, their parents give in to certain American traditions. For his fourteenth birthday, Gogol has two celebrations: one that is typically American and one that is Bengali.

The theme of the United States versus India is apparent during the wedding between Moushumi and Gogol. Their parents plan the entire thing, inviting people neither of them has met and engaging in rituals neither of them understands in the “watered down Hindu ceremony”. They don’t have the type of intimate, personal wedding their American friends would have planned.

The difference between Bengali and American approaches to marriage is clear in Ashima’s evaluation of Gogol’s divorce from Moushumi. She thinks, “Fortunately they have not considered it their duty to stay married, As the Bengalis of Ashoke and Ashima’s generation do.” In her view, the Pressure to settle for less than “their ideal of happiness” has given way to “American common sense”. Surprisingly, Ashima is pleased with the outcome, as opposed to an unhappy but dutiful marriage on her son.



## **vi) Tension between Life and Death**

Ashoke decided not to tell Gogol about his near-death experience because he realizes that Gogol is not able to understand it yet. This decision points to the tension between life and death: “Today, his son’s birthday, is a day to honour life, not brushes with death. And so, for now, Ashoke decides to keep the explanation of his son’s name to himself.

The Tension between life and death is prominent, especially as Gogol deals with the death of Ashoke, his father. He thinks about how “ they were already drunk from the book party, lazily sipping their beers, their cold cups of jasmine tea. All the time, his father was in the hospital, already dead.” As Gogol takes the train from Boston back to his life in New York, he thinks of the train accident his father had been a victim in so long ago.

The tension of life versus death is apparent to Gogol as he gets ready for his wedding. “Their shared giddiness, the excitement of the preparation, saddens him, all of it reminding him that his father is dead.” His father’s presence is apparent in contrast to the celebration of his new life with Moushumi.

## **vii) Nostalgia**

As the novel progresses, the characters begin to feel more and more nostalgic about earlier times in their lives. Gogol feels nostalgic when his mother and Sonia come to the train station to see him off. He remembers that the whole family would see him off every time he returned to Yale as a college student: “his father would always stand on the platform until the train was out of sight.”

Gogol begins to feel more and more nostalgic as his marriage with Moushumi progresses. In Paris, he wishes he could stay in bed with Moushumi for hours, the way used to, rather than having to sightsee by himself while she prepares for her presentation. During the dinner party at the home of Astrid and Donald, Gogol becomes nostalgic for when he and Moushumi were first dating and they spent an entire afternoon designing their ideal house.

Nostalgia is prevalent in the last chapter of the novel, as Ashima prepares for the last Christmas party she will ever host at Pemberton Road. She remembers when Gogol and Sonia were small helping her prepare food for these parties: “Gogol’s hand wrapped around the can of crumps, Sonia always wanting to eat the croquettes before they’d been breaded and fried.” As Sonia



her fiancé Ben, Gogol and Ashima assemble the fake Christmas tree together, Gogol remembers decorating the first plastic tree his parents had bought at his insistence.

## **KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS**

### **1. Write a critical appreciation of Kiran Desai's novel , the Inheritance of Loss**

As might be expected from the rich input of her cultural background, Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai, is a born story-teller. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), is a fresh look at life in the sleepy provincial town of Shahkot in India. At 35, Desai is the youngest woman to win the coveted Booker Prize for her second novel. *The inheritance of Loss* (2006) after her critically acclaimed first novel which won a Betty Trask award when it was published in 1998. Desai spent eight years writing her second novel. Much has been made of the parallels between the book and Desai's family history but *The inheritance of Loss* is not an autobiography. Desai herself has said that in places it's about experience within her family- such as the experience of immigration and going back to India.

### **A Diasporic Novel**

*The Inheritance of Loss* can be viewed as a Diasporic novel. The various themes which are intertwined in the novel are globalization, multiculturalism, insurgency, poverty, isolation and issues related to loss of identity. The issues and conflicts mentioned in the novel are portrayed in a subtle and intriguing manner through the central characters. The theme of Diaspora in the world of literature describes loss of identity and isolation witnessed by the Indian writers who are settled abroad. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Kiran Desai have given insight into what it means to travel between the West and the East.

### **The Narrative**

The novel is set in modern day India, and the story is narrated to depict the collapse of established order due to insurgency. In 'The inheritance of Loss', Desai portrays the issue of poverty and globalization not being an easy solution for the problems of trapped social middle classes.



The narrative revolves around the inhabitants of Kalimpong, a town in the north-eastern Himalayas, an embittered old Judge, his granddaughter Sai, his cook and their rich array of relatives, friends and acquaintances, and the effects on the lives of these people brought about by the Gorkha uprising. Running parallel to the story set in India we also follow the vicissitudes of the cook's son Biju as he struggles to realise the American Dream as an illegal immigrant in New York its predecessor, the book abounds in rich sensual descriptions. These can be sublimely beautiful, such as the images of flourishing of nature at the local convent in spring: *Huge, spread-open Faster lilies were sticky with spilling antlers; insects chased each other madly through the sky, zip, zip, zip; and amorous butterflies, cucumber green, tumbled past the jeep windows into the deep marine valleys.*

They can also be horrific, such as in descriptions of the protest march:

One jawan was killed to death, the arms of another were chopped off, a third was stabbed, and the heads of policemen came up on stakes before the station across from the bench from under the plum tree, where the towns people had rested themselves in more peaceful times and the cook sometimes read his letters. A beheaded body ran briefly down the street, blood fountaining from the neck...

### **A Tragi-Comic Tale**

The inheritance of *Loss* is much more ambitious than *Hullabaloo* in its special breadth and emotional depth. It takes on huge subjects such as morality and justice, globalization, racial, social and economic inequality, fundamentalism and alienation. It takes the reader on a sea-saw of negative emotions. There is pathos—which often goes hand in hand with revulsion—for example in the judge's adoration of his dog Mutt, the disappearance of which rocks his whole existence, set against his cruelty to his young wife. There is frequent outrage - at the deprivation and poverty in which many of the characters live, including the cook's son in America; and there is humiliation, for example, in the treatment of Sai by her lover-turned-rebel, or Lola, who tries to stand up to the Nepalese bullies.

Against these strong emotions, however, Desai expertly injects doses of comedy and buffoon-like figures. One of these is Biju's winsome friend Saeed, an African (Biju "hated all black people but liked Saeed") with a slyer and much



more happy-go-lucky attitude to life. Whereas Biju finds it difficult to have a conversation even with the Indian girls to whom he delivers a take-away meal, Saeed has “had may girls”.

*“ Oh myee God!” he said. “ Oh myee Gaaaawd! She keep  
Calling me and calling me, “ he clutched at head,” aaiii...  
I don’t know what to do!!...  
“It’s those dreadlocks, cut them off and the girls will go.”  
“But I don’t want them to go!”*

Much of the comedy also arises from the Indian miss or overuse of the English language. “Result unequivocal,” the young Jemubai wired home to India on being selected for the ICS in England.

*“What,” asked everyone, “does that mean?” It sounded as if there was a problem, because “un” words were negative words, those basically competent in English agreed. But then, Jenubhai’s father consulted the assistant magistrate and they exploded with joy, his father transformed into a king holding court, as neighbours, acquaintance, even strangers, streamed by to eat syrup-soaked sweets and offer congratulations in envy-soaked voices*

Bose, the judge’s friend from his London days, is a wonderfully optimistic but pompous individual, made all the more ridiculous by his overuse of British idioms – “ Cheeri-o, righ-o, tickety boo, simply smashing, chin-chin, no siree, how’s that bottoms up, I say!.”

### **Effects of Multiculturalism and Globalization**

One of our most insightful novelists, Kiran Desai illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of postcolonialism with a tapestry of colourful characters: and embittered odd judge; Sai, his sixteen- years old orphaned granddaughter; a chatty cook: and the cook’s son Biju, who is hopscotching from one place to another in miserable living conditions in New York.

The novel is partly set in India and partly in the USA. Desai describes it as a book that “tries to capture what it means to be an immigrant,” and goes on to say that it also explores, at a deeper level, “ what happens when a Western element is introduced into a country that is not of the West”- which happened during the British colonial days in India, and is happening again” with India’s new relationship with the states.” Her third aim is to write about “What happens when you take people from a poor country and place them in



a wealthy one. How does the imbalance between these two worlds change a person's thinking and feeling? How do these changes manifest themselves in a personal sphere, a political sphere, overtime?"

And she says, "These are old themes that continue to be relevant in today's world, the past informing the present, the present revealing the past." The book paints a act of immigration and how the postcolonial war creates despair resulting in a sense of isolation inherited by each character in the novel. In a generous vision, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, Desai present the human quandaries facing panoply of characters. This majestic novel of a busy, grasping time – every moment holding out the possibility of hope or betrayal --- illuminates the consequences of colonialism and global conflicts of religion, race, and nationalism.

### **Disparate Characters in Search of Identity**

The novel is set in 1988 in India at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga, where the Indian border meets that Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim, and Bhutan, and where people of many classes and cultures collide in their shared struggle to survive. It presents the story of one family as a symbol of the global issued related to colonization and the resulting search of identity.

As we read the novel, we meet the retired judge, Jemubhai Patel, whose isolated house, Cho Oyu, near the foot of the mountains is home also to his beloved dog Mutt and his cook. The judge and the cook have lived together in apparent symbiosis for many years when the judge's orphaned granddaughter Sai comes to live with them. Her arrival marks the beginning of conflicts that defines the novel. Also central to the story and Gyan, Sai's Nepali tutor, and Biju, the cook's son who has travelled to America in hopes of escaping poverty and making enough money to eventually rescue his father from servitude.

The central conflict of novel revolves around the Nepali's fight to gain education, health care, and other basic rights in India. Early in the story, a group of young insurgents storm the judge's house and steal his rifles, literally robbing him of the signs of the Western education and professional occupation. When the tutor, Gyan, with whom Sai has begun a romantic relationship, joins the insurgency, Sai fights herself caught in the middle of war of class and caste, and discovers that she has also become a symbol of wealth that Gyan despises.



While Gyan and insurgents are fighting a battle for rights and freedom in India, Biju, the cook's son, is fighting for his own survival and struggling to maintain his own identity as he adapts to the life in the US. As he hops from one menial job to the next, Biju discovers that America's opportunities are not as plentiful as he expected, and he has given up a servant's life in one country only to find the same life in a new country, where he faces constant poverty and exploitation. He even notes that, though poverty in America is substantially less severe than in India.

Desai presents the similarities between the judge, Gyan, and Biju- as they fight to find their identities and reconcile themselves with their histories. The Characters in the novel are bewildered and disillusioned by the world, with no initiative to speak of, not any capacity to learn; quite often they are not even paying attention.

Almost all the characters have been stunted by their encounters with the West. As a student isolated in racist England, the future judge feels "barely human at all" and leaps "when touched on the arm as if from one umbrella intimacy." Yet on his return to India, he finds himself despising his beautiful Indian wife. Arguable the most beautiful portions of the book are the nuggets Desai paints of the cook's son who gets by on the barest of bare from one minimum wage job to the order in New York City. Desai describes one of the Indian restaurants Biju works at:

*In the Gandhi café, the lights were kept low, the better to hide the stains. It was a long journey from here to the fusion trend, the goat cheese and basis samosa, the mango margarita. This was the real thing, generic Indian, and it could be ordered complete, one stop on the subway line or even on the phone: gilt and red chairs, plastic roses on the table were synthetic dewdrops.*

### **Shared Legacy**

What binds these disparate characters are shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation. For the character

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, escape is impossible and misery is their birthright. Sai's parents – before they die—are filled with the same loneliness as their daughter; the son whose mother is bidding him farewell botches his goodbye, and we learn that "Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn't adulterated by another contradictory emotion." (The son later becomes



the judge, trapped into a loveless marriage that descends into rape and other abuses) The cook is an old man with no fulfilment in his own life, desperate that his son do better than he did; this pressure is eventually Biju's undoing. Sai's tutor before Gyan in Noni, an aspinster who "never had love at all". And so on, for the entire cast. "had produced all of them.". They are variations on an absence of dignity: children, criminals, and buffoons. And too often that's all they are—or at least the rest is hidden, the civilized sheen of Desai's prose obscuring the extent of the violence done to their lives by circumstances.

### **Plot : Eye for Detail**

The plot of the novel is fascinating. However, its real charm lies in its atmospheric descriptions and inquiry characters with whom the reader quickly identifies. Desai is a careful observer of behaviour, both in India and in the US, with a fine eye for details dispassionately, illustrating her themes without making moral judgements about her characters. Here there are no saints or villains, just ordinary people trying to lead the best lives they can, using whatever resources are available to them.

Intensely human, Desai's characters, like people from all cultures, make huge sacrifices for their children, behave cruelly towards people they love, reject traditional ways of life and old values, rediscover what is important to them, suffer at the hands of faceless government officials, and learn and grow, and make decisions, sometimes ill-considered about their lives. Dealing with all levels of society and different cultures, Desai shows life's humour and brutality, its whimsy and its harshness, and its delicate emotions and passionate commitments in a novel that is both beautiful and wise.

The book's language, scenarios and juxtapositions are funny, threatening, vivid and tender all at the same time. The comic element is always intertwined with irony, as characters struggle with a world bigger than themselves, a world that only ever seems to accept them partially, and rarely on their own terms. The novel's elaborate structure takes the reader into the world of nationalism and migration, which seems contemporary and timeless, familiar and unpredictable. Chapters alternate between India and the US, juxtaposing the slow pace of life in the hills with the frantic movements of an illegal immigrant's existence, maintaining a degree of suspense until discontinuous narratives collide.



## Backup

Kiran Desai writes an elegant and thoughtful study of families, the losses each member must confront alone, and the lies each tell himself/herself to make memories of the past more palatable.

It is also true that the book does not have a sense of movement that has shaped the continent's history---- in this case the freedom struggle and movement for Gorkhaland. The backdrop to the action in the novel is political unrest in Kalimpong where Nepali Gorkhas are campaigning--- at first quietly and then with increasing force --- for an independent Gorkhaland. The uprising brings a new wave of change to the main characters as conditions become significantly worse and much of what they've come to take for granted is brought into doubt. Desai has been condemned by local people for portraying them as ignorant and violent, and for being condescending.

The book has a growing sense of despair and decay as if the people, like the houses they live in and the property they own, are succumbing to the damp mould of a monsoon season.

*The inheritance of Loss* is an inward-looking novel, with far more internal monologues and passages of description than exchange of dialogue, which, despite the rough patches, plays to Desai's strengths. As in much immigrant writing, Kiran Desai is an outsider to all the worlds that form a part of landscape. She is merely the observer passing through. But her knowledge of alienation makes the protagonists' search for a sense of belonging more real.

*The inheritance of Loss* depicts in its many details the tragedies of a third world country just free from colonialism. The main theme of the novel also appears to be the influence of the West on India and how Indians are wounded by the policies of the West. These influences have oppressed and degraded India. Against the gigantic backdrop of the Himalayas so savage with beauty, and yet the stillness of its towering ranges directly draws upon the boring and mundane life of its characters with tumultuous inner sided and shades. The novel give us delectable details of the beauties of the natural world. The sound of the wind, the pattering of the rain, the gurgling of the pipes, the creaking and clattering of old Cho Oyu mansion, the happy snoring of the faithful dog Mutt, sometimes makes reading so refreshing that one can breath the crisp Himalayan air and feel surrounded by the looming dark forest. Desai has



presented in this book such lovely details that many a time it feels so much like “our world”.

The novel depicts very well in Jemubhai the dilemmas of post colonialism. The judge’s perfect manners and demeanour is very much British but he cannot get himself free from the shackles (which he thinks to be so) of traditional Gujarati and Indian mentality. He feels guilty of ill-treating his wife Nimi, or shoving away the “holy coconut throwing in the water custom”. He seems to be a man who is caught between the past and the present, between his days in London and his slow and mundane life in the crumbling Cho Oyu, between his daughter and his granddaughter Sai, between the Nepalis struggling for their land and freedom and his own British world of thick volumes of English literature, of crones at teatime and the choice of white sauce and brown sauce for dinner, and his lovely dog Mutt. But soon Kalimpong becomes the hub of political and violent activities. The Nepalis’ Struggle to get their own rights and land slowly creeps into the lives of the characters, the cook, the judge, Sai, Lola, Noni and gnaws and questions their very being.

The movement does not even spare Biju, the cook’s son in America, who comes back only to be robbed of all his money and belongings. But yet the reader finds a quaint satisfaction in the union of father and son in the backdrop of disturbed land in Kalimpong. At least Biju fees safe and at peace compared to his lonely life as a waiter thrown from one basement kitchen to another.

The progress of the human heart is clearly depicted in Sai. Her yearnings and passion for Gyan, the long wait, the clash of English values and Nepali struggle only make her realize and look at life more closely, the very human soul which has been quite frozen and regularized with strict orders in the missionary convent school in Dehra Dun.

### **Dark and Pessimistic**

The novel, though rich details and presenting a picturesque mosaic of life, at times falls prey to monotony and boredom, The darkness and the inner conflicts sometimes weigh too much upon the mind and soul, But that’s what a good writer should be capable of, and Kiran Desai has been successful in touching and describing the depths of human emotion and thought. The picture drawn of India is intricate and fascinating. The characters are complex



and the writing is flawless. However, the whole picture painted in the narrative leaves no room for hope, no room for joy, no room for even a tiny bit of beauty.

**2. Jemubhai, the judge, is torn between a colonial and postcolonial world. Bring out the dilemma that he faces and how it affects his attitude to life.**

Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, the judge, is a Cambridge-educated Anglophile who leads a retired life in an old crumbling house. Cho Oye, in Kalimpong with his cook, his pet dog Mutt, and his orphaned granddaughter Sai. He is bitter and self-contained, still leading a colonial life, and hoping to pay his “debts” to the past by looking after Sai who, after the death of her parents in a car crash in Moscow, has come to live with him.

**Humble Beginnings**

Jemubhai comes from the rural town of Piphit in Gujarat, where his father used to tutor and rehearse people to appear as false witnesses in court and who had all the hopes pinned on his academically brilliant son. Jemubhai fulfilled his ambition of going to England to study further through a marriage of convenience to the beautiful eldest daughter, Bela, of the wealthy merchant Bomanbhai Patel, who hosted a lavish wedding and provided the fare for Jemubhai to sail for England. The Twenty year old Jemubhai hardly interacted with his fourteen year old wife. now renamed Nimi, before he left for England, except for a bicycle ride on the slope when no one was at home.

Jemubhai suffered racist treatment in England and kept to himself there, except for occasional conversations with his landlady, Mrs.Rice. He hardly interacted with any Indians, especially girls, during his five year stay in England. After he had cleared the coveted ICS “by default” ( he was last on the list of successful candidates) because the British wanted to “Indianise” the ICS.

As an Ics Probationer in London for two years, Jamubhai met his only friend in England, Bose, a fellow probationer, who often corrected his pronunciation and introduced him to the life of an ICS officer. Bose’s advice and instructions made Jemubhai become taciturn and silent; he developed a typical British stiffer upper-lip that people took for his attitude of superiority and superciliousness while it was a cover to mask his own inferiority and lack of self-confidence. He developed an abiding passion for everything British and a strong aversion to everything that was traditional and conventional. This



manifested itself in his behaviour and attitude when Jemubhai to India to an overjoyed father and family.

### **His Ill-treatment of His Wife**

Jemuubhai was received with much greater fanfare than he was seen off when he returned home. He looked down on everything in his surroundings including his wife, his father and his relations. His lovemaking to Nimi was nothing short of a violent act of rape when he found out that she had innocently stolen his powder puff and hit it beneath her breasts in her blouse. This was the beginning of his marital discord.

Posted in a Up village, Jemubhai lived up to the life of an Anglophile in the wilderness, following a set routine at odds with the ground realities. Nimi sits and suffers at home, suffering negligence and ill-treatment at her husband's hands because she cannot measure up to his expectations except for occasional violent lovemaking sessions. He hates her when she grows pus-filled pimples on her face and orders her to stay inside the house all the time, warning her that people will be scared to see her when she steps out of the house. When he finds Nimi's footprints on the toilet seat, he grabs her and ducks her head in the toilet bowl to punish her and teach her how to use the British WC.

Crisis erupts when Nimi innocently joins a group of Congress women, led by the "politically astute" Mrs.Mohan to a welcome committee for Nehru at the Bonda railway station. The news reaches the district commissioner who summons and warns Jemubhai about his wife's activities that might jeopardize his career. A lived Jemubhai returns home and berates Nimi for her "stupidity" and when she retaliates by calling him "stupid" instead, he thrashes her mercilessly, and turns her out of the house. He "returns" a three months' pregnant Nimi to her parental home.

Nimi's father is dead by now. Her uncle looks after her during her pregnancy and childbirth and when she has rested enough, requests Jemubhai to call her back. Jemubhai refuses and Nimi spends the rest of her life at the mercy of her brother-in-law. Jemubhai ever insults and hurts his old father when the latter comes to him pleading on Nimi's behalf and the embarrassment this is causing to the family. The father refuses Jemubhai's offer of money and leaves. This is the last we hear of him and Nimi. The judge



accuses everyone around him of living by out dated traditions and values, forgetting the fact that he is himself a product of the system.

### **His Daughter**

Jemubhai even refuses to see his newborn daughter, convinced that she much be like her mother. He keeps making excuses for not having her with him on the plea of constant travel, an unsettle life, and lack of good schools at the place where he is posted. Jamubhai leads an isolated, lonely life with his cook, who caters to his day-to-day needs and suffers his highhanded behaviour but remains loyal to him till the end.

Jemubhai's unnamed daughter joins St. Augustine's convent in Dehra Dun and after graduation, falls in love with a pilot Homi Mistry, who has been brought up in a orphanage. This further alienates the judge from his daughter. Homi Mistry is selected for the Indo-Russian joint space mission. The couple leaves for Moscow ,leaving behind their daughter Sai in the same boarding school where her mother had studied. It is after the death of her parents in a car crash in Moscow that Sai comes to live with her grandfather at Cho Oyu, a crumbling mansion at the foothills of the Himalayas in Kalimpong, where the judge has been living since his retirement. Jemubhai Patel views this as a chance of repaying his past "debts" through Sai.

### **Jemubhai and Sai**

Jemubhai fees that his granddaughter, having studied in a convent school, is unfit to go to a local school and hobnob with the commoners. He engaged private tuitions for her with a neighbourhood spinster Noni, who has never had love in her life. She and her sister, the widow Lola, are friendly to Sai and encourage her to go out and realize her potential. When Noni is unable to cope with science and mathematics, the judge engages an ethnic Nepali young man Gyan to tutor Sai at home.

When he observes Sai and Gyan getting close, the judge looks upon Gyan as a social climber and berates him. Miffed, Gyan, who is lost between his loyalties to Sai and the ongoing Gorkhaland movement, squeals to his cronies about the guns and other firearms at Cho Oyu and the judge is robbed. Knowing the realities of the postcolial India and the operation of justice in the country after independence, the crusty, old judge gradually reconciles himself to the loss of his rusted firearms. He seems hardly to interact with Sai after the incident though she remains steadfastly loyal to him



### **Jemubhai and Mutt**

Jemubhai is, however, inconsolable when his pet dog Mutt is stolen. He has been attached to her as she has been a constant companion of his lonely days. He retreats into a shell but leaves no stone unturned to search for her as Mutt is more than a dog to him. He is offended when people call Mutt a “kutti”(bitch) and tell him that it is too insignificant creature to be bothered about when the entire hillside is up in flames because of the ongoing GNLf agitation and resultant violence for a separate homeland by the ethnic Nepalis.

### **Jemiubhai and the Cook**

The cook has been there with the judge since he was a lad of nine and joined his father in the judge’s kitchen at a salary of five rupees a month. He has been a witness to all the vicissitudes of his employer’s life but paints a rosy and flattering picture of the judge to all his friends and acquaintances as well as Sai. The judge is not concerned with the life that the cook’s son leads as an illegal immigrant in America; he doesn’t even bother to enquire about Biju throughout the narrative. Instead, he takes out his frustration and anger on the cook by mercilessly beating him when the latter is unable to locate Mutt.

A shell of his former imposing self, Jemubhai Patel lives the life of a recluse on what was earlier a magnificent estate in Kalimpong. The old man is not blind to the decay around him; in fact he embraces it as it reflects his own decay. The cook’s son is united with him at the end of the novel but one wonders when the embittered old judge will accept his lovelorn and confused granddaughter as his own.

### **3. Write a character sketch of Sai, highlighting her relationship with Gyan**

She is the sixteen-year-old granddaughter of Jemubhai Patel, the judge, who is spending his days of retirement in the crumbling and derelict Cho Oyu mansion at the foothills of the Himalayas in Kalimpong. Studying at St. Augustine’s Convent in Dehra Dun, Sai comes to live with the judge when her parents die in an automobile accident in Moscow. The judge sees in her arrival as an opportunity to “erase his debts” to the past when he had ill-treated his wife, his father and his clan, as well as his daughter, Sai’s mother.



## Looking Forward to Freedom

Sick of the strict order at the convent the nuns' out dated concept of sin, Sai is now a free bird, albeit confined to Cho Oyu and its neighbourhood. She starts feeling at home in her new surroundings because of the landscape and the new friends she makes. The judge largely keeps to himself and his Anglophile ways, all his requirements being looked after by his faithful and loyal cook. The interaction between Sai and her crusty, stiff upper-lipped grandfather is limited to the English-style meals at which she tries her best to help the harried cook.

Realizing his responsibility towards his teenage granddaughter, the judge finds her superior to attending a common school. He therefore arranges for private tuition with a neighbourhood spinster Noni. The cook drops her to Mon Ami, where Noni lives with her widowed sister Lola, completes his errands in the market and picks her up after the tuition. Sai is taken care of by Lola and Noni, and she develops a bond with them, as also with their other neighbours, the Swiss missionary Father Booty and the jovial Uncle Potty who loves his drink. They all go to town in Father Booty's jeep to exchange library books, have lunch, and return home with their weekly supplies every week.

Lola and Noni encourage Sai to have a life of her own as she still has time; they want her to have an individual entity and experience the first flush of love, especially Nona who hasn't had it "at all". Her tuition continues till one day Nona finds herself unable to cope with science and mathematics, and advises the judge to engage another tutor for Sai.

## Sai and Gyan

This when the twenty-year-old Gyan, an ethnic Nepali, enters Sai's life. He is a poor but bright student who is recommended by the principal of his college to the judge. Gyan has to trudge up and down the hills for two hours to coach Sai in science and mathematics three days a week in order to help his family living down in the hillside *busti* in a ramshackle hut. He hates the judge's condescending attitude towards him and his people as well as Sai's flippancy, but he bears it all for the sake of the paltry payment he gets. The cook is always sitting there as he tutors Sai as he has been asked to observe the two by the judge.



When the novel opens, we see an anxious and expectant Sai waiting for Gyan on a rainy evening. Adolescent love has developed between the two and they spend most of their time cooing, kissing and generally indulging in innocent fun, away from the prying eyes of the old cook. Sai has come to care more for Gyan than problems in science and mathematics that he endeavours to solve for her during the so called coaching sessions in the living room of Cho Oyu. The two have started meeting on the sly outside Cho Oyu. Having known everything about Sai, her parents and the judge, Gyan tells her about his ancestors and their exploits in war but keeps mum about his own father who, we are told, teaches in a faraway plantation. Sai is intrigued.

But instead of Gyan, four young Nepali insurgents visit Cho Oyu that evening and rob the judge of his old, rusted guns and other firearms, besides gorging on his hospitality. It is later learnt that it is Gyan who, miffed with the judge's behaviour and after a lovers' tiff with Sai, has squealed to his cronies in the GNLF movement about firearms at Cho Oyu. Divided between his loyalties to Sai, his family and the ongoing insurgency, Gyan is a confused soul. He refuses to acknowledge her during a GNLF protest march in the market and warns her sternly with his eyes to keep away from him. He has joined the protest march to give voice to the injustice the ethnic Nepalis face in education, healthcare and jobs in the region where they form eighty per cent of the population. Gyan recalls his own unsuccessful interview for a job in Calcutta and the humiliation he faced. This adds an edge to his growing frustration and makes him join the movement that is growing violent by the day.

When Gyan goes to apologize to Sai a few days later, they fight again and he stops going to Cho Oyu altogether. The Gorkhaland agitation intensifies and there is mayhem everywhere. However, unable to bear his absence any longer, Sai bravely steps out of Cho Oyu and looks for Gyan at all his haunts. Finally, she travels downhill to the *busti* where Gyan lives and traces him to a derelict hut. Gyan is livid. He ill-treats Sai and orders her to go back. Word soon spreads of a respectable girl, obviously in love, having come to see Gyan and been turned away. His grandmother upbraids him for having divided loyalties towards Sai and the GNLF movement, warning him that he will come to rue his involvement with the insurgents, like his father. She forbids him from joining the GNLF march in Darjeeling the next day. When the cronies come



looking for him, she makes excuses that Gyan has diarrhoea and they wouldn't like him shitting all through the march. There is violence, mayhem and firing during the march but since Gyan is not present there, his life is saved.

She waits for Gyan to return to her at the end of the novel. She is torn between hope and despair as she waits for the GNLG goons to strike again as she prays for strength to leave her surroundings but is ostensibly unable to gather. But she hopes that "she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it"

## **WALSH PLAY SUMMARY**

### **About Walsh**

Walsh is written by Sharon Pollock, a Canadian playwright. The tragedy premiered in November of 1973. The play focuses on the real life interactions between an exiled tribe of Sioux, led by Chief Sitting Bull, and the North-West Mounted Police, led by Commissioner James Walsh. The friendships that develop between the tribe and the NWMP conflicts with the orders Walsh has to send the Sioux back to America, where they will be slaughtered.

The fifteen-person cast help to teach the audience about a historical event they may not have known about. The play uses the historical events to discuss issues of Canadian identity, cultural differences, and morals.

### **Prologue**

The play begins at the chronological endpoint. All of the characters in the prologue, except for Walsh, Clarence, and Harry, do not appear in the main play. The script gives specific instructions for which actors should be used for each of these roles ( In theatre, this is known as doubling) The scene is told from Walsh's point of view. Clarence does not participate in the scene. He is a figment of Walsh's imagination.

A sorrowful wind blows across the stage as unkept workers enter a lonely tavern/brother in Dawson, Yukon. All of the workers look at Walsh as he makes his way onto the stage. Jennie and Ian prepare a place for him. An encounter with the Prospector almost stops him, and he can't look at Clarence. It seems Walsh's mind is troubled.

Jennie sings to entertain her guests. Walsh requests Break the news to Mother before Harry enters, complaining of the cold and asking for food. There isn't any. Harry takes out his wallet, but the others tell him to put it



away or Walsh might take some of his money. Bills plays GarryOwen on his harmonica. The tune disturbs Walsh, who drops his drink. The drink is quickly replaced. Harry and Walsh inform the rest of the characters that GarryOwen was General Custer's marching song. The paperboy comes in to sell the paper, but Walsh refuses to give him any money. He fights with the Prosecutor over it. When Walsh has him pinned, Clarence cries out. Walsh is the only one who hears him.

A spotlight lights on Harry as he tells the story of General Custer and the Battle of Little Big Horn in great detail.

### **Act 1**

Act 1 opens with Harry starting to move farming supplies as he explains how he met Major Walsh. A newer member of the Mounties, Clarence, asks him for help with a large case of shovels, but eventually brings it onstage himself. Clarence trips over a ploughshare. The case spills open. As they lament the uselessness of the farming equipment, Clarence mentions a rumour that the Sioux are coming north.

Major Walsh is upset about the shipment the government is forcing him to try to give to uninterested Natives, but he welcomes Clarence into the team. Louis, the Metis guide, is also accepting of Clarence. Louis makes a joke about his father not being as white as Walsh because his father is French.

### **Cultural Note**

The Natives in this play communicate in English and Plains Cree. Mrs. Anderson, a settler, interrupts the officers by explaining that Natives had stolen her washtub. Crow Eagle, a member of the local tribe, stated they used it to make a drum since she had two washtubs. Walsh negotiates a payment for the washtub-turned-drum. Louis translates.

Crow Eagle asks for ammunition to hunt buffalo, but Walsh suggests they look at farming as a stable alternative to the buffalo. Crow Eagle refuses, stating that if the buffalo go extinct, they would rather die with dignity than work on the field, He leaves.

Clarence asks major Walsh about the Sioux. Walsh says they have nothing to worry about. The NWMP go scout the Sioux camp. Several leaders, including Gall, Sitting Bull, and White Dog, come to greet the scouts. Everything is formal, with tension on both sides, White Dog, who took some horses for the journey, is asked to return them and not take wild horses again.



White Dog insults Walsh, but takes it back, preventing a fight.

When it is sitting Bull's turn to speak, he interrupts Walsh, insisting that they need ammunition to hunt, The major agrees to let them have some.

Pretty Plume, Sitting Bull's wife, sets up her part of the camp. At the same time, Louis sings the voyager song *En Roulant Mad Boule*

## **GarryOwen**

### **Six Months Pass**

Louis, Clarence, and McCutcheon eat Native food together and smoke a pipe. Walsh explains to Sitting Bull that the government will only allow them to stay in Canada if they stay on the Canadian half of the border and are self-sufficient. He admits he does not agree with the plan, as White Forehead Chief, is following orders from the crown. He states the President will treat them fairly.

Sitting Bull noes that other chiefs who have been told that were slaughtered. Walsh insists he is trying to be helpful, but Sitting Bull does not trust him. There is too much political turmoil I the area. Tribes are refusing to go to reserves and are asking for Sitting Bull's help. The chief must refuse them and speak with the Americans.

### ***Red men choke and die on white men's words!***

#### **----Sitting Bull**

In a winter storm, the Native and the NWMP are looking for an incoming tribe. Battles and the cold have killed many of them. Most of the warriors were killed in battle, so the tribe is mostly women and children. The NWMP attempts to help the new arrivals.

### **A Blackout Moves Time Forward One Season**

Sitting Bull and his wife are teaching their son, Crowfoot, about the Medicine Wheel. Walsh called them to speak with American General Terry. The general refuses to accept Pretty Plume as the Sioux's speaker. He makes promises that the Sioux will be well cared for, but this time, it is Pretty Plume who does not accept Terry's terms.

Walsh tries to reason with Sitting Bull. When the chief asks him for his personal opinion, all Walsh can say is that the Sioux must consider their options. Sitting Bull says if Americans lie by saying they will be well cared for, may be the British lie when they say there are no supplies.



Louis reminds Walsh that the Sioux are trusting in the light-haired NWMP to make good choices. Walsh promises to present the Sioux case to the government. There is a blackout.

## **Act 2**

The NWMP are doing chores in Fort Macleod, noting this was not the adventure they imagined when they signed up. They exchange stories of their pasts. The story time is interrupted by the sight of smoke in the distance. American soldiers are burning the border so the buffalo can't leave. Clarence thinks the entire thing is ridiculous. Louis suggests the Natives will need to survive on grass.

Meanwhile, Walsh is reading a letter from his wife and writing her a reply. While his wife is hopeful, Walsh's outlook on life is grimmer.

Walsh is asked to meet with Colonel MacLeod chastises him for not following the rules about getting supplies, and Walsh says the Sioux need them. MacLeod encourages Walsh to send the Sioux back. Walsh is conflicted, but MacLeod insists Walsh must cut the Sioux off. He also tells Walsh to write an apology for his insubordination.

***They say one's strongest instinct is self-preservation .... And I've made the force of my life.***

**--- walsh**

Walsh starts to change his attitude. He tells Harry, who visited Sitting Bull, that the government wants the Sioux to leave and don't care what will happen to them in the United States.

Meanwhile, Clarence sneaks into the Sioux camp to give Crowfoot and Pretty Plume some food. Sitting Bull asks Clarence to smoke a pipe with them. He tries to get Clarence to agree with them. Clarence does.

Later, Walsh rips up a letter from his superiors. He rants to McCutcheon about the injustices suffered by the Natives, nothing that the government's response to his statement that the Sioux wanted to settle in Canada was to send a bigger army.

Walsh is also upset when Sitting Bull asks for provisions. Walsh can't give him anything. Sitting Bull and Walsh fight the same way the Prospector did. Clarence cried out. Walsh sends everyone away.



### **Some time passes**

Clarence and McCucheon haul Walsh's rope-bound trunk onstage. Walsh says they used too much rope. Walsh has chosen to take some time to be with his family. Clarence notes Sitting Bull will still think of Walsh as a friend, but Walsh can't afford to think like that anymore.

Walsh has 18 months off. During a snippet of that time, Harry sings drunkenly. Everyone is on edge. Sitting Bull and the Sioux are sent to America.

Walsh returns to the force with a map, soldier figurines, and a model train. He uses them to show his men a plan of battle. Clarence interrupts with the news that the Sioux were killed. Walsh remembers Sitting Bull and slams his hand on the desk.

### **MAHESH DATTANI'S TARA**

**0.1 Write a critical note on Mahesh Dattani's craft as a dramalist with special reference to Tara.**

**Or**

**Write a critical appreciation of Mahesh Dattani's play, Tara, bringing out Dattani's achievement as a playwright and the salient feature of the play.**

**Ans:** In 1998, Mahesh Dattani became the first Indian playwright in English to be awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection 'Final Solution and Other Plays'. Dattani's work expresses his beliefs without being didactic and offensive. His plays question all kinds of discrimination, including religious prejudice, gender discrimination and homosexuality. This commitment extends to his choice of language. English, When asked why he didn't write in his native tongue. Dattani's answer was "I do". His language is contemporary, comfortably "Indian" without any self-consciousness or pretensions. He situates his characters – showing that there can be no future until one has confronted the past. Without that, there can be no moving forward. As the protagonist of the radio play Clearing the Rubble says, If you can't clear the rubble you have to live with it, around it and over it, because what you lost is buried in there somewhere and until you find it, you have to keep on living with the rubble".



## **Dattani's Theatre**

Theatre, according to Mahesh Dattani, "is a reflection of what you observe. To do anything more would be to become didactic and then it ceases to be theatre." "What Dattani observes can be seen in almost all his plays when he has tried his best to assimilate both mature and manner. Although each play raises some prominent issues concerning the various maladies related to the healthy tissues of society, he is never seen didactic and straightforward in his attitude. He knows the art of expressing his views through some powerful images, symbols and stage direction and other means of art. Michael Walling thinks that the plays of Mahesh Dattani "fuse the physical and special awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual rigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. It is a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs, through its accuracy and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives. Postcolonial Indian and multi-cultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary, they require public spaces in which the mingling of the eastern and western influences can take place. Through his fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh creates such a space.'

"Thematically," Dattani says, "I talk about the areas where the individual feels exhausted. My plays are about such people who are striving to expand this' space. They live on the fringes of society and are not looking for acceptance, but are struggling to grab as much fringe space for themselves as they can "This is one of the most definitive descriptions of his themes and concerns. His work focuses on the marginalised entity and his or her struggle to redefine the centre. From the first play that catapulted him to success, *Dance Like a Man* to his latest, Dattani's protagonists question the dominant values that construct social and greater entities.

### **A Craftsman**

"I see myself as a craftsman and not as a writer," Dattani says in an interview to Alexander Viets. "To me being a playwright is about seeing myself as a part of the process of a production. I write plays for the sheer pleasure of communicating through this dynamic medium. "Calling himself "a reluctant playwright" because he wanted more plays written primarily in the English language for Indian audience. Dattani is a complete theatre person who is involved equally in the form as well as content of his plays. In this connection,



he says, “The actor, the playwright and the director are all complementary to each other in a production. It is like gardening, where a whole is made of many parts. So many conditions determine a garden’s lushness, its beauty. I write for the actor in the true sense of the word and not to pander to vanity actions. There is no theatre without an actor or an audience. Everything is geared towards ‘rasa’. Which is why I always direct the first production of any play I write. That enables me to put in more stage instructions, which goes on to become a blueprint for other directors. That way, there is no conflict.”

Dattani’s plays are written for the stage. It is the visual quality and dramatic effect which are of paramount importance. Though essentially rooted in the Indian settings, they can be staged anywhere in the world. He is able to merge the past and the present as well as geographical locations by using multi-level sets. The plays of Mahesh Dattani, says John McRae, are “the plays of today, sometimes as actual as to cause controversy, but at the same time they are plays which embody many of the classic concerns of world drama”. To quote Dattani, “When I’m directing a play, I feel like I’m a complete human being. That makes me happy.....I’m enjoying what I’m doing and I don’t want to do anything else.”

### **Tara: The Stage Setting**

Tara, Dattani’s third play, is about a boy and a girl, Siamese twins surgically separated at birth, and about their emotional separation. The play takes a serious look at the status of the girl child who is unwanted and discriminated against a male child, obsessed society like ours. The structure of the play is characteristic –moving fluidly between past and present, slowly unravelling a “secret” buried in the past, which must be faced before it destroys the future. In Tara, Dattani bares life to the bone, dealing with gender issues; he is a spokesman of all marginalized people. Every individual, he says, “wants to be part of society, of the mainstream but we must accept that it is a forced harmony”.

Mahesh Dattani’s plays are played out on multi-level sets where the exterior and the interior become one, and geographical families who inhabit them. Tara is also performed on a multi level set. The lower level occupies a major portion of the stage. It represents the house of the Patels. It is seen only in memory and may be kept as stark as possible. The next level represents the



bedsitter of the older Chandan (now called Dan) in a suburb of London. This is the only realistic level. Behind, on a higher level, is a chair in which the “amazing doctor” – Dr.Thakkar remains seated throughout the play.

### **Tara: The Content**

Tara is a riveting play that questions the role of a society that treats the children of the same womb in two different ways. It is a poignant account of a boy and a girl who are joined together at the hip and have to be separated surgically, an operation which will mean the death of one of the two. The fact that the injustice perpetrated by the victim’s own mother, whose preference is for the male child, suggests that it is women who continue the chain of injustice. Another such example of the injustice perpetrated by a mother on her daughter is Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), where Saru’s mother does not get reconciled to the birth of a daughter. Saru’s birth is accompanied by terrible rain; the mother perhaps sees the birth as a catastrophe. She shows her dislike of Saru openly as compared to her brother. Dhruva, Dhruva dies young and the mother constantly wishes Saru dead in his place. The mother and the daughter are estranged till the end.

### **Plight of the Girl Child**

Tara is viewed by many critics and feminists as not just the story of Tara, the protagonist, but the story of every girl child born in the Indian family whether urban or rural. The situation is aggregated if the girl is physically challenged, or suffers from any other physical or mental deformity – a glaring and bitter example of child abuse present in the Indian society. Every girl child born in an Indian family, it is said, does suffer from some kind of exploitation. And if there is a boy child in the family as well then the exploitation is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously provided to the son. To quote the eminent sociologist Sudhir Kakar. “In daughterhood, an Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage, she becomes less a wife than a daughter in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle.”

### **Tara and The Glass Menagerie**

Tara seems to be inspired by Tennessee William’s play. *The Glass Menagerie*, which is based on the dramatist’s real life story. Tennessee



William's father belonged to a middle-class family like the twin's father. Mr. Patel, in Patel, in Tara, and his mother belonged to an affluent family of bureaucrats like Bharati. Just like the Williams, the Patel's relations were strained over this issue. The similarity is striking when we notice that in both the situations the mother allows the doctor to perform the surgery which disturbs and disrupts the family life. Just like Tennessee Williams, Chandra Patel is attached to his sister, and he suffers the most in his family.

### **Tara : The Play**

The scene opens in a bedsitter in a suburb of London with Chandan, now an aspiring playwright, reminiscing about his childhood days with his twin sister Tara. Tara and Chandan are two sides of the same self rather than two separate entities and Dan, in trying to write the story of his own childhood, has to write Tara's story. Dan writes Tara's story to rediscover the neglected half of himself, as a means of becoming whole. He says

"I have my memories. But now I want to come back To  
masticate my memories and spit out the result to the world  
in anger."

### **Tara's Story**

Through a series of flashbacks we get an insight into the early family life of Chandan and Tara. The play revolves around the "conjoined twins." An operation separates the twins when they are just three months' old, leaving Tara crippled. Tara, the protagonist of the play, Dattani has said in one of his interviews "I see Tara as a play about the male self and the female self. The male self being preferred (if one is to subscribe to conventional categories of masculine traits and female traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of self and the resultant angst."

Chandan, the privileged brother, wants to turn his anguish into a play on his sister's childhood. Throughout the play we can sense that Tara bears some kind of grudge against society. She seems to have some aversion to the outside world; her world consists of only her parents and brother who is very close to Tara's attachment to Chandan and her anguish is expressed when she tells him that they are inseparable. "The way we started life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out....and separated."



## **The Indian Mindset**

The play explores the typical Indian mindset that has preferred a boy child over a girl child from time immemorial. It depicts the triumphs and failures of the parents and their twin children coping with the trauma. In Dattani's words "I focus on cultural emphasis on masculinity and how all the characters are in conflict with that. The parents the grandfather, the neighbour – they are all in that some in tension with their own sensibilities, as opposed to the cultural sensibilities that they may have knowingly or unknowingly subscribed to."

It is later revealed that a decision taken by the mother left Tara crippled for life, and it is this guilt that we notice in Bharati, their mother, being revealed throughout the play when she lavishes all her care and attention on Tara through her excessive concern for her. Her sense of regret and guilt is so deep that she is willing to donate her kidney to Tara so that she may survive for a few more years. She tells Chandan:

"I plan to give her happiness, I mean to give her all the love and affection which I can give. It's what she .....deserves  
Love can make up for a lot."

## **Roops**

As the play progresses, we are introduced to another interesting character Roopa, the inquisitive and garrulous neighbour of the Patels, who brings some humour to the play. To begin with, she comments on how different the twins look.

ROOPA: Funny, you don't resemble each other

CHANDAN: Not all twin are peas in pods. Two peas in a pod. That's something we aren't.

Roopa's reply makes the twins burst out laughing, much to her surprise. She tells them that the imagery of two "peas in a pot" is hilarious.

Bharati imposes her sense of guilt on Roopa too when she bribes her to be her daughter's "best friend" and companion. What follows is an interesting conversation between Bharati and Roopa. Bharati tells Roopa that she is ready to do anything for Tara's happiness. "You can watch whatever (movies on the video) you want! Just be my Tara's friend."



## **Bharati and Her Husband**

Bharati's inner turmoil is so strong that it often comes out in her relationship with her husband, where she is perpetually complaining about one thing or another. Bharat's father's affluence has always been a bone of contention between Mr. and Mrs. Patel. Bharati constantly complains to her children about their father, particularly Mr. Patel's attitude to her father. "Your father doesn't want to use them (her father's brass tumblers). He doesn't want to use any of you grandfather's things."

## **Lack of Ethics in the Medical Profession**

Mr. Patel's grudge against his wife is that she has used her father's wealth as strength against him, and it was this strength that Bharati used in taking the decision about separating the Siamese twins who were conjoined from the breastbone down through the pelvic region. The complicated surgery was carried out by Dr. Thakkar at Bombay's Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital. The parents were warned of the odds against survival in almost all such cases, one of the twins had always died by the age of four.

Dattani here exposes the twin maladies of Indian society, one being the preference for the male child and the other about lack of ethics in the medical profession which has been described in detail by Mr. Patel to Chandan and Tara, who were born with three legs.

"A scan showed that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg was provided by the girl.... The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive .... on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar I wasn't asked to come .... I couldn't believe what she told me – that they would risk giving both the legs to the boy .... The doctor had agreed.... It was later that I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing – the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land – in the heart of the city – from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used.... Chandan had two legs for two days. It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh which could have – might have .....been Tara".

This long and moving speech sums up the entire conscience of the play.



The physical separation of the conjoined twins was manipulated by their mother and grandfather to favour the boy (Chandan) over the girl (Tara). This results in an emotional separation between the two conjoined twins.

Tara, a feisty, lively and cheerful girl, isn't given enough opportunities given to her brother. Eventually she wastes away and dies, Chandan (now Dan) escapes to London and attempts to express his guilt over Tara's death. His sense of trauma and anguish is so intense that, at the end of the play, we see him apologizing to Tara in the most moving of all the lines:

“Forgive me, Tara Forgive me for making it my tragedy”

Mahesh Dattani has always been particular about his portrayal of women and he has no biases against them. He says about woman in general: “They are humans. They are humans. They want something. They face obstacles. They will do anything in their power to get it. All I focus on is the powerlessness of these people... And I am not going to change my sensibilities for political correctness either. My only defence is to say that I am not biased against women.”

**Q.2 Discuss Mahesh Dattani's characterisation of Tara and how he has presented the problem of the girl child in Indian society through her.**

Or

**Mahesh Dattani's play Tara is about the bias against the girl child in Indian society. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer.**

**Ans:** Tara, it is said, is not just the story of Tara, the protagonist of Mahesh Dattani's play, but it is the story of every girl child born in the Indian family, whether urban or rural. Dattani has presented the problem of the girl child in an urban family living in a metropolitan city like Bangalore, where the parents have their bias towards the son and the daughter is neglected even though she might be smarter than her brother.

The Flight of the Girl Child:

The situation is aggravated if the girl is physically challenged or there is any other physical and mental deformity in her – a glaring example of child abuse present in the Indian Society. Every girl child born in an Indian family, it is said, does suffer from some kind of exploitation which is very much visible as the privileges are consciously or unconsciously provided to the son. To quote the



eminent sociologist Sudhir Kakar,” In daughterhood, an Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage, she become less a wife than a daughter in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle.”

But Mahesh Dattani does not believe in this “conventional wisdom”. He says in an interview.

“I see Tara as a play about the male self and the female self  
The male self being preferred (if one is to subscribe to  
conventional categories of masculine traits and feminine  
traits) in all cultures. The play is about the separation of the  
self and the resultant angst.”

He is particular about his portrayal of women and he had no bias against them. To quote him,” They are humans. They want something. They face obstacles. They will do anything in the power to get it. All I am not going to change my sensibilities for political correctness either. My only defence is to say that I am not biased against women.”

### **The Son Syndrome:**

In Tara Dattani picks up the issue of the preference of a boy child over a girl child which forms the infrastructure of the play. The girl may be more enterprising than the boy but what is the great deal in it, she nevertheless falls to be favoured. Both the twins revel in their love for each other and adoration of the parents. Everything shatters into irretrievable pieces when they come to know about the manipulation of their separation by their mother and grandfather. Tara eventually dies and Chandra escapes to London to hide his guilt which he feels strangely over his sister’s death.

The play also enlightens us that so matter how much a girl outshines a boy, she will remain in the background and can never be given an advantageous position. In being a man’s work and the reins being in their hands. It is all the more deplorable when such characters as Tara’s mother Bharati worsen the condition for the own sex. If she has not shown indulgence for the male child over the female child, both Chandan and Tara might have flourished equally well. Tara thus points a picture of the helplessness and the mother not only sniffs out Tara’s life but also ruins the life of Chandan who leads a self-condemned life in London.



The fateful leg, which was the cause of Tara's continued ill health, could not be given to Chandan as it became useless after a couple of days. It would have been a complete success with Tara's body. It would have not only saved her life but also made her a complete person which she longed and desired to be, more than Chandan. Chandan is more complacent with his handicapped existence while Tara all the time craves for a complete and normal life. She is constantly aware of her handicap, and the humiliation meted out to her by Roopa and her friends when she is forced to show them her artificial limb is moving.

### **The Patels**

Mr. Patel and Bharati are educated parents. Theirs is a love marriage and they lead a happy married life till it is learned that Bharati is carrying twins and the birth might lead to some complication. Mr. Patel doesn't protest strongly when his wife and her influential father have a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar and manipulate things in favour of the boy child. This leads to strained relation between the couple and Bharati's sense of guilt over the injustice done to Tara turns her into a nervous wreck. They constantly bicker and have frequent showdowns and, to assuage her sense of guilt, Bharati lavishes all her care attention on her daughter and, when her condition gets worse, she decides to donate her kidney to Tara. But the damage to Tara's body and psyche has already been done and it is too late to do anything about it. Tara wastes away and dies. So does Bharati after her frequent bouts of nervous breakdowns. It is left to her husband to take care of her during the last years of her life, with Chandan being away in London.

Mr. Patel, however, keeps favouring Chandan throughout, preferring his son's education and career over his daughter's. At one point when Tara refuses to fill her college form and Chandan also follows her, Mr. Patel wants Tara to fill the form, not for her own sake, but for the sake of her brother. He seems to have got over the feeling of guilt over the injustice done to Tara and conveniently transferred to Bharati and her father simply because he was not invited to their "private meeting" with Dr. Thakkar when it was manipulated to favour Chandan over Tara. Bharati's rich and influential father not only helps the unethical Dr. Thakkar set up a private nursing home in Bangalore but also leaves his property to Chandan and only his house to Tara after his death. This



is, indeed, a male -dominated world, a patriarchal society in which the girl child does not count for much.

It is only Chandan who accepts the guilt and escapes to London to forget his trauma and anguish over the injustice done to his twin sister. But he can't get over it and apologises to Tara at the end of the play. And Tara apparently forgives him for the twins tightly hug each other as the parts of one self. In this sense, Tara is also a play about injustice to men such as Chandan. In the final analysis, Tara is neither Chandan's tragedy, nor is it Tara's. It shows the mindset of the Indian society which is heavily loaded against the girl child in which Dattani juggles with husband -wife relationship, son-in-law and father-in-law relationship, parents and children relationship with focus on father-daughter, mother-daughter and brother-sister relationships in the context of an educated urban family with the gender crisis giving rise to identity crisis in the case of Tara, the protagonist.

### **The Socio – Cultural System**

It is our socio-cultural system that is responsible for Tara's death, Discrimination against. Tara is accidental. Tara is not only disturbed about what others think of her infirmity, discrimination, against her by her own family gets her. Her parents – and earlier; her grandfather – are prisoners of the collective conscious that is a part of their psyche. There are two pointers for this injustice meted out to Tara. First is the conversation between Chandan and Roopa.

CHANDAN: What would you do if you had to choose between a boy and a girl? Who would you choose?

ROOPA: I think it's more civilized to draw her (the girl) in milk.

The twins' maternal grandfather was a wealthy and influential man. In politics, he came very close to becoming Chief Minister of the state. It was he who, along with his daughter Bharati perpetrated the injustice on Tara and who has left all his wealth to Chandan as we learn from the following conversation between Chandan and his father.

PATEL: He (the grandfather) left you a lot of money

CHANDAN: And Tara?

PATEL: Nothing

CHANDAN: Why?



PATEL: It was his money. He could do what he wanted with it.

Tara is thus a victim of the collective social system. Having been separated from her conjoined twin brother, her ordeal continues. When they grow up, Mr. Patel insists that Chandan is going abroad for higher studies while Tara is discouraged openly, notwithstanding her feelings in the matter, even though she is more intelligent, sharp and witty and would perform well, if given an opportunity. Bharati's support of Tara for higher education is, however, tainted with guilt. Tara is killed by the social system which controls the minds and action of people. She is simply not wanted. That explains why Chandan turns her tragedy into his own, and he apologises to her, "Forgive me, Tara Forgive it for making it my tragedy." The play thus holds a mirror to society and tries to shock it out of its grooved thinking through racy dialogue and bare minimum stage-setting.

**Q.3. Chandan and Tara are two sides of the same self, says**

**Dattani. Do you agree? Substantiate your answer.**

Ans: Chandan and Tara are "conjoined twins" who were separated when they were three months' old. The twins had three legs and were joined from the breastbone to the pelvic region. The doctors performing the surgery were of the opinion that the third leg would be more suited to the girl child. But their mother Bharati and her father favoured the boychild. They had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar to give the third leg to Chandan, which he did in exchange of setting up his private nursing home in Bangalore. Chandan had two legs for just two days as he had no use for the dangling second leg which was eventually amputated leaving the twins with one leg each. They were then given an artificial leg, the famed Jaipur foot, with which they live for the rest of their lives. This shows how the male child is preferred to the girl child in our society.

### **The Inseparable Twins**

Chandan and Tara are very close during their growing-up years. They are both lively and cheerful. While Tara is more fiesty and aggressive than her brother while Chandan is laid back and easygoing. They share the same interests and pursuits and are always together. Though surgically separated, they remain "inseparable" till the end. It is to get over the guilt of the injustice



that Chandan escapes to London after her death and decides to remain there even after Bharati's death, leaving his father to lead a lonely life.

### **Dan's Reminiscences:**

It is in his bedsitter in London that Chandan (now Dan) revisits his childhood. "Thousand of miles from home hasn't put enough distance between us," he says, He now plans to "masticate my memories in my mind and spit out the result to the world in anger". He hasn't succeeded in getting over his past so far. Now will he be able to do so till the end when he realises that his progress is "zero" . He twin sister Tara, although she has been dead for six years now, has been "lying deep inside, out of reach"

Likewise with Tara who chips in: "And me. Maybe we still are. Like we've always been. Inseparable. The way we started in life. Two lives and one body, in one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out."

### **Chandan and Tara**

Since she was the prime mover is separating the twin and favouring Chandran over Tara, their mother is obsessed with her guilt. She lavishes all her care and attention on Tara to the exclusion of the easygoing Chandan. This has resulted in strained relationship between Bharati and her husband who was not actively involved in the surgery in separating the twins. He lays the blame squarely on his wife and her wealthy and influential father-in-law for manipulating the operation with the connivance of Dr.Thakkar. As a result, Bharati is a nervous wreck and there are frequent arguments between the two.

Chandan and Tara are close. Chandan resents his father's attention as Mr.Patel wants him to join college and then go abroad for higher education to have a career in life. Mr.Patel has no such plan for Tara. But Chandan refuses to join college without Tara. He also frequently misses his physiotherapy lessons to the charging of his father who wants him to join his office.

The feisty Tara is wittier, sharper and more intelligent than Chandan. She often pulls him up for his "sidey jokes". Regarding her father's insistence on joining his office in order to prepare for life, she tells Roopa: "The men in the house were deciding whether they were to go hunting while the women looked after the cave." And when Chandan says that he would prefer staying at home to work out "the jigsaw puzzle" of his life, she quips: "Or carve another story on the walls."



Chandan however, joins Tara in making fun of Roopa when she remarks that the twins do not resemble each other, "Not all twins are peas in pods ...Two peas in a pod. That's something we aren't". When Roopa picks up the remark as "two peas in a pot". the twins are highly amused to Roopa's embarrassment and discomfiture. She is an "ogler" to Chandan as she is inquisitive and garrulous, and is a frequent visitor to their house which we learn later is because Bharati wants her to keep. Tara company and he her friend in exchange of movies, magazines, perfumes and lipsticks.

### **Tara and Roops:**

On her part, "Tara takes her continued illness lightly and is used to her frequent visits to the hospital, including the one for the kidney transplant. As her mother says, "Tara" more than makes up in some ways for what she....doesn't have." But when Roopa calls her a "freak" and would have nothing to do with her. Tara takes it out on her by pointing out that, like she had exploited her classmate's weakness for wetting her bed earlier in Bangalore, she intends to expose Roopa for having one of her breasts shorter than the other,"an ugly girl with uneven tits." This is done after Roopa has accused Chandan for molesting her and calling him a rapist. Tara takes up for her brother as he often takes up for her, bringing out how close and "inseparable" they are even though they were surgically separated when they were three months' old.

### **Tara's Bond with Bharati**

Tara wants to unravel the secret that Bharati has been threatening to tell her about, and Mr.Patel has been stopping her to do, by visiting Bharati alone in the hospital to get at the truth. She hates her father for ill-treating her mother. She holds him responsible for her mother's nervous breakdown and frequent hospitalisation without realising that it is her mother who is responsible for her present condition. She is attached to her mother and acknowledges the love and affection Bharati has for her.

"Mummy is so cute - sometimes,"she tells Roopa, adding.

"When we were young, I used to be quite a sick child .....And it was always I who got her attention and care.....He (Chandan)has never really asked for much. He is so happy with so little. I have always demanded more and more .....I really used to play hard to get. Sulking all the time ...And



when I smiled, it made everyone quite .....relieved! As if .....if I didn't smile I would just curl up and die! Mummy said my eyes really twinkled when I smiled."

Mr. Patel wants to handle both Chandan and Tara, but his wife won't allow him to decide anything for Tara. He tells Bharati. "You want her to believe that you are the only one who loves her!" This is a fact because Bharati, to assuage her sense of guilt, is keen on donating one of her kidneys to Tara. When Mr. Patel shows his concern for her as Bharati is in hospital, Tara tells him.

'You sound just like mummy! You men can imitate us so well if you want to. Pity we can't return the compliment".

### **Two Sides of the Same Self**

Chandan acknowledges that Tara has an edge over him as "a little girl with a wild imagination" as she tells him that she has fallen in love with the city of Bombay because the twins were separated here, and her Maharashtrian physiotherapist who is handsome in a "ghati" sort of way. She thanks him for the moral support he has given her all along. For his sake, she promise to be "cheerful all the time", laugh at his "gags", eat whatever is cooked and "not to mention mummy at all". On his part, Chandan concedes that he is a cowed when it comes to facing life alone without Tara, and not everyone has Tara's "strength". And when she decides to join college for his sake because "It's all the same. You, Me. There's no difference, "Chandan is happy.

"No difference between you and me? That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

Tara laughs and, sensing her triumph, calls him 'Bastard!' Chandan retaliates. "Vulgar girl! Calling yourself names!"

### **Chandan's Escape**

The bonhomie and camaraderie between the twins continues till Tara eventually fades away and dies. Chandra moves over to London to escape the trauma and anguish over what he is convinced is his role in the injustice done to Tara, whose only fault is that she was a girl child in an urban middle-class family. He refuses to return home to be with his father when his mother dies, asking Mr. Patel to come over to London where he would be looked after by his brothers and not by Chandan because he "never was a giver". He, however,



doesn't hold his father responsible for what happened. But he tells Mr.Patel categorically: "Either you come here or live in Bombay all by yourself". Obviously when Mr.Patel tells him that he is not coming over to London, Chandan hangs up on his father by saying, "Well, that's too bad! That's just too bad."

Chandan wears several masks in London to get over his feeling of guilt during his years in England – "the handicapped intellectual's mask", that of the "desperate immigrant", and the one with the "mysterious brown with the phoney accent". He peels off these masks one by one to confront the reality of his situation, which in his being inextricably linked with his twin sister. And all his reminiscences are interspersed with remarks by "the amazing doctor", Dr.Thakkar who had separated the twins at the behest of Chandan's mother and grandfather favouring Chandan over Tara, his sister:

"with whom I had shared a body. In one comfortable womb. Till we were forced out... and separated...But somewhere, sometime, I look up at a shooting star ... and wish. I wish that a long-forgotten person would forgive me. Whenever she is."

Tara appears as if to forgive him. And the twins, finally without the limp they had since their separation. "hug each other tightly". They still are inseparable even though Tara died six years old.

**Q.4 What accounts for the strained relations between Bharati and Mr.Patel to Mahesh Dattani's play, Tara? In what way are they responsible for the plight of their twins, particularly Tara?**

Ans: Bharati and Mr.Patel had a love marriage. Bharati was a Kannadiga and Mr.Patel a Gujarat from an orthodox family which he had to leave after he married Bharati, Bharati's father was "an industrialist and an MLA "who might have been Chief Minister of the state had he lived. As Mr.Patel tells us, "Ours was a happy marriage. We were all overjoyed when we came to know that Bharati would have twins."

**Separating the Twins:**

But there were complications at the twins were conjoined from the breastbone to the pelvic region, and they had only three legs. They "looked like two babies hugging each other"; they were not expected to survive till the Patel's heard of Dr.Thakkar who had done research abroad on such cases.



Bharati's father personally got involved in the case. The separation was done in Bombay. It was discovered that a major part of the blood supply to the third leg would survive better on the girl. But then Bharati and he father had a "personal meeting with Dr.Thakkar, Mr.Patel was excluded from the discussions at the end of which it was decided to give the third leg to the boy. Although it was unethical. Dr.Thakkar agreed to do it for getting prime land in the heart of Bangalore to set up his own nursing home in the city".

"As planned by them, Chandan had two legs – for two days It didn't take them very long to realize what a grave mistake they had made. The leg was amputated. A piece of dead flesh Which could have-might have –been Tara. Because of the unusual nature of the operation, it was easy to pass it off as a natural rejection."

### **The Guilt**

Mr.Patel feels guilty for the injustice done to Tara to the extent that he was simply told of the decision taken by Bharati and he father after they had settled everything with Dr.Thakkar to mutual satisfaction and "Maybe if I had protested too strongly!" which he didn't in keeping with the typical mindset of an Indian middle class family that prefers a male child to a female child. Bharati and he father were solely guided by this consideration. This is a sad commentary on the prevalent social million and this is what leads to the tragedy of the twins when they grow up. Tara eventually wastes away and dies while Chandan escapes to London to get over his part in the injustice done to the feisty, lively, sharper andmore intelligent Tara, who he thinks is "inseparable" from him.

### **Bharati and the Twins**

To get over her sense of guilt, Bharati lavishes all he care and attention on the weakling Tara, to the exclusion of the laidback an easygoing Chandan. Tara revels in the love and affection of her mother as she piles her with her favourite dishes and insists on Tara having her milk regularly. As Tara tells Roopa, whom Bharati forces on her as her "best friend" by bribing Roopa with gifts.

"Mummy is so cute – sometimes ... And it was always I who got her attention and care...He (Chandan) has never really asked for much. He is so happy with so little. I have always



demanded more and more ...I really used to play hard to get Sulking all the time. And when I smiled, it made everyone quite... relieved! As if ...if I didn't smile. I would just curl up and die! Mummy sold my eyes really twinkled when I smiled.”

Tara's condition ... she is in and out of hospital frequently and has to go regularly for hysiotherapy lessons – constantly worries Bharati. She is prepared to donate one of her own kidneys to Tara when Tara needs a kidney transplant. Despite Mr.Patel's efforts to stop her from taking such a drastic step, she insists on doing so. This plays have on her nerves. Her relation with her husband are strained and he accuses her of turning the children against him and against all the world. He also turns against her father who he thinks, is responsible for the mess in their lives.

Bharati literally inundates Tara with love “Tara! My beautiful baby! You are my most beautiful baby! I love you very much” And Tara replies: “Yes, mummy, I know that “Bharati promises to make up to her daughter “for all the things God hasn't given you”. When Mr.Patel expresses his concern for Chandan, Bharati is more worried about Tara – and justifiably so:

“It's all right while she is young. It's all very cute and comfortable when she makes witty remarks. But let he grow up. Yes, Chandan. The world will tolerate you. The world will accept you – but not her! Oh, the pain she is going to feel when she sees herself at eighteen or twenty. Thirty is unthinkable. And what about forty and fifty! Oh God!”

Bharati is certain that it is a man's world but strangely, it is she, herself a woman, who is responsible for perpetrating the injustice against one of her own species.

### **Mr. Patel and the Twins**

Although he claim to love both the twins equally, Mr.Patel is particularly concerned with Chandan, his going to college and then to London for higher studies for the sake of his career. Before he joins college. Mr.Patel wants Chandan to join his office. But Chandan is indifferent. He wants to do nothing that excludes Tara from his life. This saddens Mr.Patel who, in keeping with the typical male-dominated mindset of society, accuses his with the typical male-dominated mindset of society, accuses his wife of turning Chandan into a



“sissy” when he finds Chandan helping his mother with her knitting. He is disappointed in his son.

There are serious differences between Mr.Patel and Bharati over the upbringing of the twins. He even slaps her when she insists on donating one of her kidneys to Tara because, as he says, “I do not want you to have the satisfaction of doing it”. In her state of frayed nerves. Mr.Patel is certain that Bharati needs to see a psychiatrist. And when Bharati threatens to reveal the dark secret of their separation to the twins, Mr.Patel tells her.

“You cannot tell them, For their sake, don’t!... If at all they must know, it will be from me. Not from you.”

Bharati does not allow her husband to get close to the twins and handle them, for she knows that what she is doing is the best for both. Tara and Chandan. He asks her, “When have you ever allowed me to make plans for her? You want her to believe that you are the only one that love her...Don’t make her choose between us, for God’s sake! You’re ruining her life because you are sick. I want to help you, Bharati, please allow me to help you.” But Bharati tells him, “I don’t need your help.” This upsets Mr.Patel a great deal and he says:

“ Yes, call me a liar, a wife –beater, a child abuse. It’s what you want me to be! And you. You want them to believe you love them very much.”

But the damage has already been done. Both the twins hate him for his overbearing ways and his ill-treatment of their mother.

Mr.Patel does not allow Tara to visit her mother alone in the hospital for fear of Bharati revealing the dark family secret to her, and Chandan simply hates hospitals...his excuse for not going to his physiotherapy lessons as well as for not seeing his mother in hospital. Eventually Tara wastes away and dies, and Chandan escapes to London. He refuses to come back home to be with his father when his mother dies as he is busy exorcising his own guilt there. Mr.Patel is left alone at the end of the play. He appears to be more sinned against than sinning even though he subscribes to the same mindset of preference for the male child over the female child as his wife and his wealthy and influential father-in-law. In fact, his suffering is greater than that of Bharati who suffers from a nervous breakdown and is hospitalised towards the end of



the play. He has to look after not only Chandan and Tara, but also the nervy and unstable Bharati. He is indeed a pathetic figure in the play because no one empathises with him.

**Course Material Prepared by**  
**DR. Y. VIJILA JEBA RUBY**  
Associate Professor of English,  
Rani Anna Government College for Women, Tirunelveli – 627 008.