

## **Selected Poems- A. K Ramanujan**

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## **1.0 Introduction:**

Ramanujan's poetry is a depiction of human sentiments, feelings and emotions in a direct way without any gloss or sophistication. There are no traces of alien influences on his poetry, in spite of his long stay abroad. His poetry has technical excellence and bears the stamp of his individuality. In the poem 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears' he says, "I will grow/charitable one day/begin to classify/at dawn the week's bread crumbs / in a plastic bag for the red and black/street ant/the beggar doves in the park/the free sapphire blue jay/in the tree/will make a habit/of the shelled peanut/in my hand."

Ramanujan's poems have a technical perfection which is exemplary. His poetry is never pedantic or verbose and is written in a language which is crisp, intense and casual. In his poem 'The Striders' in order to draw the attention of the reader he has introduced even ambiguity "And search/for certain thin/stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs/Sea them perch/on dry capillary legs/weightless/on the ripple skin /of a stream/No, not only prophets /walk on water. This bug sits/ on a landslide of lights/and drowns eye/deep/into its tiny strip/of sky."2 The poems of Ramanujan are finely crafted pieces, and the words shine with depth of meaning 3. The words create a rhythm and form which enhance the value of his poetry. Ramanujan has laid equal stress on the meaning, as well as the design of each poem. The designer poems of Ramanujan are not only a treat to the eye, but also indicate a multi-layered meaning. To identify the central theme of Ramanujan's poems one has to proceed cautiously with patience and imagination.

Ramanujan's poetry has brought many laurels to him. The volumes of his poetry The Striders (1966), Relations (1971) and Selected Poems (1976) have been praised by the literary critics, for the succinct expression and originality. Ramanujan has done a yeoman service by translating the Tamil and Kannada classical poetry into English5. Those who read contemporary English poetry are familiar with the nuances and death of Ramanujan's poetry. His stress on the web of family life, and the integration of the individual with it remains the prominent characteristic of his poetry.

The collection of poems in *Relations* reflect his poetic insight tinged by eastern and western cultures. He says that with the passage of time, the individual is prone to see the law of Karma in all changes around him. Ramanujan's use of irony is most evident in the poem 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears'. Even at the advanced age of sixty instead of having total faith in God, one may "talk now and then of God", and one may find the effect of Karma "in the fall of a tubercular sparrow, and in the news paper deaths in Burma". He says in the same poem that double vision is confusing with no clarity of things in the external world, but "with one small adjustment/of glasses/all the misunderstanding vanishes".<sup>6</sup> The mystification of events due to lack of scientific approach and empirical analysis, produce a host of problems which are hurdles in the path of progress maintains Ramanujan.

The poetry of Ramanujan is like a mirror in which one can see the face of Indian tradition, along with a host of other things. His poetry recognize the vitality inherent in Indian culture and tradition, and also the changes which have taken place in the structure of Indian society. Ramanujan's subtle irony colours his glimpses into the traditional ideas and rituals, which are followed by people belonging to different strata of Indian society. His poetry has presented the diverse aspects of tradition in a new garb, which is also indicative of the need to distinguish between the relevant and irrelevant aspects of it in the context of changes in the contemporary world.

Ramanujan's poem 'Self-Portrait' shows his excellent grasp over the use of images, to depict the experiences and emotions in his poetry. He has brought out his innermost feelings and the assessment of his own personality and its different facts in it. He says "I resemble everyone/but myself, and sometimes see/in shop- windows/despite the well-known laws/of optics, /the portrait of a stranger,/date unknown/often signed in a corner/by my father".<sup>8</sup>

Ramanujan's two collections of poetry *The Striders* and *Relations* have a unique place in the corpus of Indian poetry in English. The interest and deep attachment of Ramanujan to the past events as well as history is depicted in *The Striders* and *Relations*. The poems in these two works provide an outline of his approach toward people, and the predicament faced by them in the past, and also in the world of today. He recaptures the past events very lucidly. He describes the events of his early years spent with his father, mother and grandparents.<sup>9</sup> In several poems he has mentioned his role in the family and analysed his inner feelings and sentiments. For Ramanujan the past is not an amorphous entity, but is substantial to correlate with the tempo of life in the current world. He says that without knowing the linkages with the past, one cannot grasp the reality of the living present. While asserting the importance of following the norms of the contemporary world, Ramanujan likes to derive solace from the traditions and beliefs of the ancient world. He says, "I should smile, dry- eyed/and nurse martinis like the Marginal Man./ But, sorry. I can not unlearn/Conventions of despair./ They have their pride./ I must seek and will find/my particular hell only in my hindu mind:/must translate and turn/till I blister and roast."<sup>10</sup>

Ramanujan's poetry reflects his deep insight into the cultural patterns, of both east and west. The ancient wisdom of Indian gains a new relevance in the poetry of Ramanujan, amidst the conflicts in the present world. He has analysed the human situation, through the combined vision of the east and west. The Indian perspective and experience towards the human problems, finds a prominent place in the poetry of Ramanujan. It is through appropriate images, that he has depicted the human situation, contradictions and complexities experienced by the people. His poetry is a synthesis of the best literary traditions of the Indian and the Western world. The combination of the Indian and western elements has added a new sheen to his poetry. His focus is on the several unexplored areas of human life, which are generally neglected today. His poetry concentrates on the innermost sentiments of the people, both in the Indian and western societies. Ramanujan has pointed out that some poets have no sympathy towards the suffering of fellow beings. In the poem 'A River' he

has indicated how during the flood period the river becomes an instrument of destruction. The huts are washed away and people living on river banks have to face acute suffering.<sup>11</sup> He has no respect for persons who are not inclined to share the suffering of others in their hour of crisis. He says that “The new poets still quoted/the old poets, but no one spoke/in verse/of the pregnant women/drowned, with perhaps twins in her, / kicking at blank walls/even before birth.”<sup>12</sup>

Ramanujan is a keen observer of socio-political events, and has exposed the rapacious dealings of politicians. In his poem ‘An Image for Politics’ he says “Once, I’d only heard/of a Chinese fancy-dish/of fish/that rots/till it comes alive/and a maggot-spaghetti squirms/where once a mackerel gasped for worms:/cannibal/devouring smaller cannibal/till only two equal/giants are left to struggle,/entwined,/like wrestlers on a cliff:/and at last / only one/omnipotent/maggot-cesar who rent/his rivals/and lived/of all the mob and the triumvirate/his fat and lonely body stiff/and blind with meat.”<sup>13</sup> The images of cannibals and squirming worms, bring out the strategy of some politicians who have no qualms in removing the rivals from their path, and playing their nefarious games without any sympathy for the welfare of the masses. Ramanujan has protested against the monopolists and dictators, who have no respect for human values. He prefers to follow the values embedded in the Hindu world-view. He is against accepting the socio-political systems, which negate the human values enshrined in the civilizations of the world.

That humanity is one family remains an important tenet of Hinduism. Ramanujan is fascinated by the ideals of Hinduism and has presented the manifold facets of it. He has acknowledged that, some traditions in it have outlived their utility, and now they have only a sentimental value. He has mixed humour and irony while presenting the tragic death of the family member in a far corner of the world. In the poem ‘Small scale Reflections on a Great House’ he says, “Once in nineteen forty three/from as far away as the Sahara,/half-gnawed by desert foxes/and lately from some where/in the north, a nephew with stripes/on his shoulder was called/an incident on the border/ and was brought back in plane/and train and military truck/even before the telegrams reached,/on a perfectly good/chatty afternoon.”<sup>17</sup>

Ramanujan’s two volumes of poetry *The Striders* as well as *Relations* deals with the events which happened in his family. He describes how different members of the family had to face situations which effected them deeply.<sup>18</sup> Ramanujan has given basic significance to things, events and memories connected with the family. The family grows, new entrants swell the reservoir of memorabilia with the passage of time. He finds in the family history the cultural patterns and traditions. He depicts the characteristics of the Hindu family and society, which have survived many a cataclysm by sheer unity and grit. Ramanujan says, “Sometimes I think that nothing/that ever comes into this house/goes out. Things come in everyday/to lose themselves among other things/lost long ago among/other things lost long ago;”

## **2.0 About the Author:**

The poet was born and brought up in a Hindu family and later he went abroad. So his self was formed with the host of incidents from the past or the memories of a life to which he belonged at his past. In fact while the Indian or Hindu milieu constitutes the ‘inner’ substance of Ramanujan’s poetry, the western milieu shapes the ‘outer’ substance and these two co-exist in his poems. All European artists used to draw their self portraits. Once the poet’s portrait was drawn by his father. The poet on his way watches his self-portrait through a shop-window. But his portrait seems stranger to himself. He cannot recognise his own

portrait. Here the poet is suffering from identity crisis of his own-self. In fact it 'illustrates modern man's concern with the self and provides the matrix within which self becomes relevant'. In the modern world it is easy to resemble everyone but oneself. The portrait reminds him the memory of his past, his family genealogy which he gave away when came to abroad. This is the other part of his existence; the past or his root. The poet here reminds that the stranger over there is essentially someone who belongs to a particular family. Here his self is somewhere fragmented. A sense of exile comes to his mind. He becomes alienated from his own self. This is a kind of modern alienation where a man is constantly falling into oblivion; he cannot resemble his own self from where he came. Surprisingly the portrait is though still signed but not dated. Here the time is diluted; there is no boundary of time in his own self. The present and the past coming together in his mind and try to make sense of it. Two points of view are offered in this poem about the identity crisis depicted in the poem about the identity crisis depicted in the poem. Bruce King states that in a series of paradoxes, resemblance is found to be influenced by situation and the kind of mirror or perspective in which a person is seen. Here the modern alienation effect is reflected vividly when the identity he sees mirrored is that of stranger. But if we look at another point, he is determined by his father or his sub-conscious mind is somewhere rooted in his own genealogy. His identity is reflected through his portrait by the rules of optics, suggesting his muddled identity, although 'often signed in a corner' by his father. 'Instead of the traditional artist painting his own portrait in a mirror, we have a cubist view of the self as fractured and belonging to different eras'(Bruce King). Ramanujan's self seems temporary to himself as temporary is his portrait as he 'sometimes see' himself in the shop windows. The whole poem is about the existential crisis which is a kind of predicament. Gajendra Kumar feels that the core of the essential self of the poet persona in the poetry of Ramanujan 'remains as an intuitive world, but this is amended by changed circumstances and decisions. The essential self develops, changes, it grows from the seeds in the past towards a future which while unknowable is already being formed''. So the poet in the poem is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both and his poem reflect the personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, contradictions but also aware of the past, the memories which formed his inner self, memories of an unconscious namelessness which are still alive. In this poem past and present are mingled together through the poet's journey of life not surpassing each other which is a cultural adjustment between 'West' and 'East' which is a major kind of adjustment. He was a unique writer who wrote poetry in three languages: English, Tamil and Kannada. Translation was his forte. He was attention to Indian literature through his numerous translations and creative writing in English all over the world.

The double impulse of being an expatriate writer, who had to satisfy the natives of both the countries of birth and domicile, seemed to have worked upon him. He states: "English and my disciplines (linguistics and anthropology) give me my 'Outer forms' linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field-trips, my personal and professional pre occupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my "Inner" forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where".

Ramanujan published four volumes of poetry. The striders (1966), Relations (1971), Selected Poems (1976) and second Sight (1986). In his poetry there is an encounter of past and present, of the East and the West. Poem after poem, he goes back to his childhood memories and experiences of life in India. In his poetry one may discern a Western trained intellectual man who looks at oriental things with a detached interest.

Most of the poems of Ramanujan have their origin in recollected personal emotion, and hence, family becomes the main focus of his poetry. They deal with the family life in an ironic tone. His poetry reveals how an Indian poet in English derives his health from going back to his roots-childhood memories. One has to agree with Parthasarathy who rightly observes: "The family for Ramanujan, is in fact, one of the central metaphors with which he thinks." is fastidiousness as an artist accounts for the thinness of his poetic output. He is also modern in the use of colloquial and conversational style. In most of his poems, he tries to assimilate the native tradition into English language for the benefit of the foreigners. For instance in the poem "A River " he uses the word 'diapers' which means napkins in America for the sake of his American readers. He has won the admiration of all his contemporaries and peers like Nissim Ezekiel, Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla and Jayanta Mahapatra. Hovering between the land of his birth and the country of his work and domicile, Ramanujan accepts both and does not abandon one for the other. His poetry is Indian in sensibility and content but English in language. It is strongly rooted in and stems from the Indian environment.

### **3 Prayers To Lord Murugan**

*Lord of new arrivals  
lovers and rivals:  
arrive  
at once with cockfight and banner—  
dance till on this and the next three  
hills*

*women's hands and the garlands  
on the chests of men will turn like  
chariotwheels*

*O where are the cockscombs and where  
the beaks glinting with new knives  
at crossroads*

*when will orange banners burn  
among blue trumpet flowers and the shade  
of trees*

*waiting for lightnings?*

2

*Twelve etched arrowheads  
for eyes and six unforeseen  
faces, and you were not  
embarrassed.*

*Unlike other gods  
you find work  
for every face,  
and made  
eyes at only one  
woman. And your arms  
are like faces with proper  
names.*

3

*Lord of green  
growing things, give us  
a hand*

*in our fight  
with the fruit fly.  
Tell us,*

*will the red flower ever  
come to the branches  
of the blueprint*

*city?*

4

*Lord of great changes and small  
cells: exchange our painted grey  
pottery*

*for iron copper the leap of stone horses  
our yellow grass and lily seed  
for rams!*

*flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals  
on rivers O dawn of nightmare virgins  
bring us*

*your white-haired witches who wear  
three colours even in sleep.*

5

*Lord of the spoor of the tigress,  
outside our town hyenas  
and civet cats live  
on the kills of leopards  
and tigers*

*too weak to finish what's begun.  
Rajahs stand in photographs  
over ninefoot silken tigresses  
that sycophants have shot.  
Sleeping under country fans*

*hearts are worm cans  
turning over continually  
for the great shadows  
of fish in the open  
waters.*

*We eat legends and leavings,  
remember the ivory, the apes,  
the peacocks we sent in the Bible  
to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox,  
the similes*

*for muslin: wavering snakeskins,  
a cloud of steam  
Ever-rehearsing astronauts,  
we purify and return  
our urine  
to the circling body  
and burn our faeces  
for fuel to reach the moon  
through the sky behind  
the navel.*

6

*Master of red bloodstains,  
our blood is brown;  
our collars white.*

*Other lives and sixty-  
four rumoured arts*



*tingle,*

*pins and needles  
at amputees' fingertips  
in phantom muscle*

7

*Lord of the twelve right hands  
why are we your mirror men  
with the two left hands*

*capable only of casting  
reflections? Lord  
of faces,*

*find us the face  
we lost early  
this morning.*

8

*Lord of headlines,  
help us read  
the small print.*

*Lord of the sixth sense,  
give us back  
our five senses.*

*Lord of solutions,  
teach us to dissolve  
and not to drown.*

9

*Deliver us O presence  
from proxies  
and absences*

*from sanskrit and the mythologies  
of night and the several  
roundtable mornings*

*of London and return  
the future to what  
it was.*

10

*Lord, return us.  
Brings us back  
to a litter*

*of six new pigs in a slum  
and a sudden quarter  
of harvest*

*Lord of the last-born  
give us  
birth.*

11

*Lord of lost travellers,  
find us. Hunt us  
down.*

*Lord of answers,  
cure us at once  
of prayers.*

### **3.1 Analysis of the poem:**

The poet quotes God Shiva, Lord Murugan and other Gods of the Hindu mythology in his poems. In the poem Prayer to Lord Murugan, the poet expresses unmistakable perception of a tradition as well as in ironic posture. No focus is given on contents and context, the subject matter is clarifying. In the present poem Vasavanna's dialogue is representative of Indian concepts of the ignorance causing births to occur through wombs and unlikely worlds. At a number of occasions, there is interrogation in ironic mode. Ramanujan clearly marks a visible paradox in this lines; a typical and radical mode of expression. But as a great child of Indian tradition, Ramanujan making utterances grounded in counter-culture sensibilities and further makes radical subversion of the dominal cultural representations. As a resident in western modern culture, Ramanujan was aware of western culture. For him modernity appeared to be afflicted with Oedipal repressions and violent dismissals of the immediate tradition of operations. Ramanujan's 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' are good example of his quest for human touch in life. He prays:

Lord of the twelve right hands  
Why are we your mirror men

With the two left hands  
Capable only of casting  
Reflections? Lord  
I choke, for ancient hands are at my throat.

The poet is conscious about people of modern generation who 'Having no clear conscience, he looks for one in the morning news. Assam then, Punjab now, finds him guilty of an early breakfast of two whole poached eggs. '  
( 'Looking and Finding' . The poet firmly believes that days can be golden, apples beautiful, if eyes can see only days and apples.

Help us read  
The small print.  
Lord of the sixth sense  
Give us back  
Our five senses  
The height o  
f his secular human search comes in the last stanza of the  
poem where the persona seeks:  
Lord of answers,  
Cure us at once  
Of prayers.

In the poetry of Ramanujan human relationships are described through its all complexities to bring out the suffering of the self. The persona of many poems is wedded to doubt/ and only married to woman 'The persona is 'Looking for a system, Although Ramanujan appears and wears a mask of secularism, his poems grouped as 'Prayers to Lord Murugan shed subjective identity here. The Hindu poems attest, through a developing process of implication that the persona or the mask cannot provide a consistent amour to the self because it can never fully cope with the variety and depth of inner life brought into interplay in one's encounter with reality. Thus Ramanujan through his prayer motif is successful in inscribing the self. It assumes the qualities of a persona. It also becomes an object. These prayers reach a climatic point with the last three lines:

Lord of answers,  
Cure us at once  
Of prayers.

Ramanujan harps on the essence of the religious faith which is universal:

Adjust my single eye, rainbow bubble,  
So I too may see all things double.

### **3.2 Some solved questions and answers:**

1 Whom does the writer quote in this poem?

A The writer has quoted Gods of the Shiva's family in this poem.

2 What is the basic theme of this poem?

A In the present poem Vasavanna's dialogue is representative of Indian concepts of the ignorance causing births to occur through wombs and unlikely worlds. At a number of occasions, there is interrogation in ironic mode. Ramanujan clearly marks a visible paradox which marks a typical and radical mode of expression.

How has human relationships brought out in the poem?

A In the poetry of Ramanujan human relationships are described through its all complexities to bring out the suffering of the self. The persona of many poems is 'wedded to doubt/ and only married to woman' The persona is 'Looking for a system, Although Ramanujan appears and wears a mask of secularism, his poems grouped as 'Prayers to Lord Murugan shed subjective identity here.

What is the poet's perception in this poem?

In the poem Prayer to Lord Murugan, the poet expresses unmistakable in perception of a tradition as well as in ironic posture.

What message does the poet tries to give us through this poem?

Ramanujan tries to bring out the essence of the religious faith which is universal and has emphasised on secularism which implies on tolerance toward all religions.

4 A River

*In Madurai,  
city of temples and poets,  
who sang of cities and temples,  
every summer  
a river dries to a trickle  
in the sand,  
baring the sand ribs,  
straw and women's hair  
clogging the watergates  
at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them  
the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun  
The poets only sang of the floods.*

*He was there for a day  
when they had the floods.  
People everywhere talked  
of the inches rising,*

*of the precise number of cobbled steps  
run over by the water, rising  
on the bathing places,  
and the way it carried off three village houses,  
one pregnant woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.*

*The new poets still quoted  
the old poets, but no one spoke  
in verse  
of the pregnant woman  
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,  
kicking at blank walls  
even before birth.*

*He said:  
the river has water enough  
to be poetic  
about only once a year  
and then  
it carries away  
in the first half-hour  
three village houses,  
a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda  
and one pregnant woman  
expecting identical twins  
with no moles on their bodies,  
with different coloured diapers  
to tell them apart.*

#### **4.1 Analysis of the poem:**

It turns to a dry trickle, uncovering 'sand ribs'. He details the underbelly of the river that stays hidden. Visible now, are the bits of straw and women's hair that chokes the rusty gates of the dam and the bridges that are plastered over with 'patches of repair'.

The narrator remarks wryly that the poets who sang and they, who now imitate them, see only the symbolism of vitality when the river is in flood. With a few stark images, the poet completes the picture of the river and its complexities which have been glossed over and ignored. Yet not to stress the merely the grim, unlovely angle, the poet brings alive the beauty too, which lies open in the summer. This has been lost on the sensibilities of the past poets:

*the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun.... (13-15)*

Using vivid similes, he refers to a lack of imagination of the old poets who ‘only sang of the floods’.

In stanza two, the poet speaks of the river in flood in the rains. He was there once and saw what happened. The river in spate destroys everything in its wake from live-stock to houses to human life. This happens once a year and has been continuing for years in the same pattern.

He notes the casual approach of the towns people. Anxiously they talk of the rising level of water and enumerate mechanically the ‘precise’ number of steps as the water brims over the bathing places.

The river carries off:  
‘three village houses,  
one pregnant woman  
and a couple of cows  
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.’

These are itemized, mentioned cursorily as in a list—three, one, two. The early poets and their successors tick off the losses as mere statistics, unheeding of the destruction, suffering and human pain left in the wake of the flood. Their aim, according to the speaker, is simply to record a sensational event to arrest the momentary attention of the people. He finds this attitude shocking and callous.

Between the village houses and Gopi and Brinda, the two cows is remarked one pregnant woman. No one knows what her name is and she is glossed over peremptorily. Yet the poet imagines that she may have drowned with not one life in her but two—‘twins in her’ which kicked at blank walls even before birth.

Continuing with the **analysis of a river by Ramanujan**, the poets deemed it enough to versify and exalt the river only when it flooded once a year. While they sang of the river as a creative force giving birth to new life, the paradox of the pregnant woman who drowned with twins in her eludes them. Embracing only the glory of the floods, they fail to realize its more complex repercussions on human life. The narrator gives us a more complete impression of the river as destroyer as well as preserver. He is sarcastic about the poets of yore who seize only the floods to write about and that too merely once a year.

*‘the river has water enough  
to be poetic  
about only once a year’*

### **Theme of the poem A River by Ramanujan**

The above lines satirize and debunk the traditional romantic view of the river Vaikai in Madurai, by the ancient poets. He is derisive too, of the new poets who have no wit but to blindly copy their predecessors.

Humor is presented in the names of the cows and the colored diapers of the twins to help tell them apart. Yet this too, is an attack on the orthodoxy of Hinduism. While cows are given names, no one knows who the pregnant woman is nor are they concerned. Human sacrifices were performed to appease the gods because of droughts in Tamil Nadu, and the drowned twin babies may be a reference to such cruel and orthodox rituals.

This is an unusual poem with many layers of meaning and is a commentary on the indifference of the old and modern poets to the ravages caused by the river in flood and the pain and suffering caused to humans.

With a few stark images, the poet completes the picture of the river and its complexities which have been glossed over and ignored. Yet not to stress the merely the grim, unlovely angle, the poet brings alive the beauty too, which lies open in the summer. The opening line immediately presents the main physical setting of the poem by mentioning the city of “Madurai.” By the end of the work, however, the relevance of the poem will transcend its relevance to this particular place. The speaker uses Madurai as his setting so that he can present detailed, concrete specifics rather than broad abstractions or generalizations. By the time the poem concludes, however, it will be obvious that the significance of his words transcends their significance for any specific city. This is ultimately a poem about the differences between writing that is realistic, conventional, and/or highly imaginative.

In line 2, Madurai is described as a “city of temples and poets,” making it sound like a place of great spiritual significance and associating it also with creativity and beauty. Its poets, indeed, have often sung of “cities and temples” (3), thereby celebrating places of great importance. Yet no sooner does the speaker make Madurai sound like a mythic, magnificent location than he immediately complicates (or even undercuts) this impression. He reports that each summer the city’s river—a river that might itself symbolize power, vitality, and energy—“dries to a trickle” (5), so that many of its normally hidden imperfections and unappealing aspects are suddenly visible, such as:

straw and women’s hair  
clogging the water gates  
at the rusty bars  
under the bridges with patches  
of repair all over them....(8-12)

Part of the function of the present poem, then, is to reveal what is normally unseen and thereby deal with the full complexities of the river. The poet doesn’t hesitate to describe aspects of Madurai that conflict with the simplistic, romantic imagery with which the poem opened. This speaker and this poem present some of the full facts about Madurai, whereas other poets have tended merely to celebrate merely the beautiful, mystical aspects of the place.

To say this, however, is not to say that the speaker of this poem dwells only on the uglier aspects of the city or its river. Indeed, his descriptions of details that are not usually mentioned in other poems about Madurai are themselves sometimes beautiful. Thus he mentions the

the wet stones glistening like sleepy  
crocodiles, the dry ones  
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun....(13-15)

Here his imagery is vivid and his similes (comparisons using “like” or “as”) are inventive

#### **4.2 Solved Questions and Answers:**

What does the opening line of the poem present?

The opening line immediately presents the main physical setting of the poem by mentioning the city of “Madurai

How is humour presented in this poem?

Humor is presented in the names of the cows and the coloured diapers of the twins to help tell them apart which is an attack on the orthodoxy of Hinduism

How is imagery presented in the poem?

The poet doesn’t hesitate to describe aspects of Madurai which contradicts with the imagery of other poets that are romantic and beautiful. The imagery is vivid and his similes and comparisons are inventive. With a few stark images, the poet completes the picture of the river and its complexities which have been glossed over and ignored. Yet not to stress the merely the grim, unlovely angle, the poet brings alive the beauty too, which lies open in the summer.

Why is this poem called unusual?

This is an unusual poem with many layers of meaning and is a commentary on the indifference of the old and modern poets to the ravages caused by the river in flood and the pain and suffering caused to humans.

How is Madurai described in line 2 of this poem?

In line 2, Madurai is described as a “city of temples and poets,” making it sound like a place of great spiritual significance and associating it also with creativity and beauty.

### **5 Elements of Composition**

*Composed as I am, like others,  
of elements on certain well-known lists,  
father's seed and mother's egg*

*gathering earth, air, fire, mostly  
water, into a mulberry mass,  
moulding calcium,*



*carbon, even gold, magnesium and such,  
into a chattering self tangled  
in love and work,*

*scary dreams, capable of eyes that can see,  
only by moving constantly,  
the constancy of things*

*like Stonehenge or cherry trees;*

*add uncle's eleven fingers  
making shadow-plays of rajas  
and cats, hissing,*

*becoming fingers again, the look  
of panic on sister's face  
an hour before*

*her wedding, a dated newspaper map,  
of a place one has never seen, maybe  
no longer there*

*after the riots, downtown Nairobi,  
that a friend carried in his passport  
as others would*

*a woman's picture in their wallets;*

*add the lepers of Madurai,  
male, female, married,  
with children,*

*lion faces, crabs for claws,  
clotted on their shadows  
under the stone-eyed*

*goddesses of dance, mere pillars,  
moving as nothing on earth  
can move &mdash*

*I pass through them  
as they pass through me  
taking and leaving*

*affections, seeds, skeletons,*

*millennia of fossil records  
of insects that do not last  
a day,*

*body-prints of mayflies,  
a legend half-heard  
in a train*

*of the half-man searching  
for an ever-fleeing  
other half*

*through Muharram tigers,  
hyacinths in crocodile waters,  
and the sweet*

*twisted lives of epileptic saints,*

*and even as I add  
I lose, decompose,  
into my elements*

*into other names and forms,  
past, and passing, tenses  
without time,*

*caterpillar on a leaf, eating,  
being eaten.*

### **5.1 Analysis of the Poem:**

The poem is about the elements of composition and talks about the Hindu ideas of the five elements (*pancha bhuta*), the earth, the fire, the wind, the water and the sky, which is one such list, the other list being the 100-odd elements that the chemistry books talk about. The poem begins with talking about composition and ends with decomposition (the caterpillars, eating and being eaten). All the elements like gold, magnesium, calcium etc. are gathered into a chattering self, tangled in love and work.

*“Capable of eyes that can see,  
only by moving constantly,  
the constancy of things”*

A beautiful thought. The eyes can see, only by moving them constantly, the constancy of things, like the Stonehenge or the cherry tree. The physical eyes can see the beauty of nature or a great work of art only by moving them constantly. One should watch things which are in a continuous state of flux over a period of time to grasp the inherent beauty of nature and a great work of art.

*”add uncle’s eleven fingers  
making shadow-plays of rajas  
and cats, hissing,*

*becoming fingers again”*

A lovely reminiscence of the poet about his uncle's dexterity in shadow-play using his eleven fingers to create fascinating images of kings ,cats etc and sounds like hissing and the transformation of the shadows to fingers again !

His sister's fear of an impending tragedy just before her wedding :

*“ the look  
of panic on sister's face  
an hour before*

*her wedding, a dated newspaper map,  
of a place one has never seen, maybe  
no longer there”*

The horrific existence of the mutilated lepers of Madurai against the exquisitely ornate stone sculptures of goddesses of dance in the majestic Meenakshi temple:

*“add the lepers of Madurai,  
male, female, married,  
with children,*

*lion faces, crabs for claws,  
clotted on their shadows  
under the stone-eyed*

*goddesses of dance, mere pillars,  
moving as nothing on earth  
can move —“*

All these are the very elements of which he and they are composed . They pass through him as he passes through them :

*“I pass through them  
as they pass through me  
taking and leaving*

*affections, seeds, skeletons,*

*millennia of fossil records  
of insects that do not last  
a day,*

*body-prints of mayflies,  
a legend half-heard  
in a train”*

The whole poem is about what we are composed of , the different forms in which the elements combine , the impact of time on the composition ,the process of the decomposition (the Madurai lepers) and finally death and destruction (eating and being eaten).

## 5.2 Solved Questions and Answers:

What is the poem all about?

The poem is about the elements of composition and talks about the Hindu ideas of the five elements (*pancha bhuta*), the earth, the fire, the wind, the water and the sky, which is one such list, the other list being the 100-odd elements that the chemistry books talk about.

What is the horrific existence that is mentioned?

The horrific existence that is mentioned is of the mutilated lepers of Madurai against the exquisitely ornate stone sculptures of goddesses of dance in the majestic Meenakshi temple.

What does the physical eyes can see in this poem?

The physical eyes can see the beauty of nature or a great work of art only by moving them constantly. One should watch things which are in a continuous state of flux over a period of time to grasp the inherent beauty of nature and a great work of art.

What is a lovely reminiscence according to the poet?

According to the poet, A lovely reminiscence is of the poet about his uncle's dexterity in shadow-play using his eleven fingers to create fascinating images of kings, cats etc and sounds like hissing and the transformation of the shadows to fingers again

What are the different forms that the poem conveys?

The whole poem is about what we are composed of, the different forms in which the elements combine, the impact of time on the composition, the process of the decomposition (the Madurai lepers) and finally death and destruction which is described as eating and being eaten

## 6 Snakes

*walking in museums of quartz  
or the aisles of bookstacks  
looking at their geometry  
without curves  
and the layers of transparency  
that makes them opaque,  
dwelling on the yellower vein  
in the yellow amber  
or touching a book that has gold  
on its spine,  
I think of snakes.*

*A basketful or ritual cobras  
comes into the tame little house,  
their brown-wheat glisten ringed with ripples.*

*They lick the room with their bodies, curves  
uncurling, writing a sibilant alphabet of panic  
on my floor. Mother gives them milk  
in saucers. She watches them suck  
and bare the black-line design  
etched on the brass of the saucer.*

*The snakeman wreathes their writhing  
around his neck  
for father's smiling  
money. But I scream.*

*'One two three four five  
five fingers to a hand'  
said the blind boy counting  
but he found a sixth one  
waiting like a cousin for a coin;  
a budlike node complete with nail,  
phalanx and mole  
under the usual casual opposable thumb.*

*Said my granny, rolling her elephant's leg  
like a log in a ruined mill:  
'One two three four five  
five princes in a forest  
each one different like the fingers on a hand  
and we always looked to find on her paw  
just one finger left of five: a real thumb,  
no longer usual, casual, or opposable after her husband's knifing temper  
One sunday morning half a century ago.*

### **6.1 Analysis of the poem:**

Ramanujan's "Snakes" points out the touching truth, the truth of insensibility and indifference of the modern society. The poor do not hesitate to face danger. No doubt, snake-charmers take any risk only to extinguish the starvation of the family by providing entertainment or pastime to the rich.

Here it appears that their lives are for the sake of snakes :

"The snakeman wreathes their writhing  
round his neck  
for father's smiling money."

Another reference is made to snakes, flies and frogs. The poet brings out the puzzled association of snakes with the family. The snakes are "like some terrible aunt." Whenever his sister entwines her hair he conceives it as opiate. The poet as a child does not get rest from

the fear of snakes till they  
are killed.

“Now  
frogs can hop upon this sausage rope  
flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,  
and I can walk through the woods.”

The poet is placid and lepid that small creature like frog can now hop on the serpent which is just like a “sausage rope” and flies will mob the look in his eyes. Another reaction of his parents and the poet to the snake can be seen here. His mother gives it milk; the father cheerily pays the snakecharmer, but the poet screams at its sight. The poet adroitly depicts the

“The twirls of their hisses  
rise like the tiny dust-cones on slow noon roads  
Winding through the farmers feet.  
Black lorgnettes are etched on their hoods,  
ridiculous, alien, like some terrible aunt,  
a crest among tiles and scales  
that moult with the darkening half  
of every moon.”

The poem presents an image, a complex of feelings, distilled memories and events which are not elaborated or commented upon. But as it begins in the present ‘now’ of museums of book stacks which contrast with rural India and family life, the poem celebrates the liberation from the fears of the past, ‘ghosts’ from which Ramanujan now feels safe.”

"Snakes" is among the best poems of Ramanujam. The poem begins on a note of suspense with an emphatic, "No, it does not happen when I walk through the wood". This happens when he is walking through museums or libraries. The description is of a snake that induces fear in the minds of all. The snakes take shelter in the museums, book shelves, glass-shelves, etc., The Poet says that the book of yellow vein, yellow amber would remind him of snakes, the shelf which is arranged in geometric lines would remind him of snakes. Ramanujam can be distracted by his own skill for description is seen in the apparently irrelevant but rivet detail of "the yellow vein in the yellow amber" or "the book with gold on its spine". The amber yellow and gold and the curves with the imagination think of snakes.

The Poet compares the intermittent hissing of the snakes to the little clouds of dust that arise one walks along a dusty road. They have the nature of winding through one's feet exactly the way the snakes do. The hoods, the snakes have display a kind of design resembling the etched black lorgnettes. It looks ridiculous all the same. It is likened to the terrible aunt who is proud of her titles. The snake's scales mount with the warning of the moon. Then, he explains a real incident. One day a snake man has brought a basket full of cobras to the poet's home. The snakes are let out and the person watches them more on the floor. Their bodies are wheat -

brown in colour with rings all over. The way they move on the floor looks like a strange alphabet written here and there. The poet's mother feeds the snakes with saucers of milk. As they suck the milk, the etched design on the brass reappears. The snake man then wears them on his neck in order to impress the poet's father. The latter gives him money.

The Poet has a sister who has long hair touching the ground. He notices her tying her hair in braids. She takes great care in tending them and decorates them with tassels. These braids look very much like the snakes and the waves themselves resemble the scales on the body. Both have the nature of shining brightly. In other works the poet is often reminded of snakes when he looks at the braids of his sister. He is so afraid that he waits impatiently to see hair trimmed and tied up neatly.

Then, the poet narrates the happening while he walks along the forest path suddenly he feels as if he is walking on a slippery surface. It is a snake and it writhes in pain. Its body is green - white the bluish nodes resemble a lotus stalk that has been plucked lately. He steps on it until it is dead; He is now confident and is not afraid. He expects the frogs to hop over the sausage rope without fear of being eaten up. The flies can come round the eye part of the snake and he himself has grown at all.

Portrayal of the Market scene in Ramanujan's Snakes.

A.K. Ramanujam brings out the market scene in this poem. He feels provoked on seeing the oranges in the city market. They are carried in wicker baskets. The oranges fill the gaps inside these baskets woven in intricate designs. The fruits are of various colours. Some are still green, others are over ripe with a pot of fungi-ash in a hollow; some others are of saffron colour; others are pupy and velvet - sinned. Some of the fruits resemble the inner first of fingers held rather loosely. It is compared to the loosening skin andweakening nerves in the part of a grand old man who is termed by the poet as 'Grandpa's grip'.

Noticing the orange tree the poet looks at the small branch which once served as an extension is found to be intact. The same is described as the human umbilical cord. The tree once nourished the young bud, the power coming from the root part of the tree. The fruit has come out at this mature stage and the tree holds it even now. There is now no connection between the fruit and the tree. The fruit itself finds its way into the basket. The fruits in the tree every seed of the tree can produce thousands of oranges in turn. The cycle goes on like this and it is a never ending process. As is characteristic of Ramanujam, there is no real conclusion.

## **6.2 Solved Questions and Answers:**

What does the poet portray in snakes?

“Snakes” points out the touching truth, the truth of insensibility and indifference of the modern society. The poor do not hesitate to face danger. No doubt, snake-charmers take any risk only to extinguish the starvation of the family by providing entertainment or pastime to the rich.

How has the hissing of the snakes been compared?

The Poet compares the intermittent hissing of the snakes to the little clouds of dust that arise one walks along a dusty road. They have the nature of winding through one's feet exactly the way the snakes do.

What does the orange tree denote?

The orange tree is described as the human umbilical cord. The tree once nourished the young bud, the power coming from the root part of the tree. The fruit has come out at this mature stage and the tree holds it even now.

What kind of image does the poet present?

The poem presents an image, a complex of feelings, distilled memories and events which are not elaborated or commented upon. But as it begins in the present 'now' of museums of book stacks which contrast with rural India and family life,

Why there is no conclusion in the poem?

The tree once nourished the young bud, the power coming from the root part of the tree. The fruit has come out at this mature stage and the tree holds it even now. There is now no connection between the fruit and the tree. The fruit itself finds its way into the basket. The fruits in the tree every seed of the tree can produce thousands of oranges in turn. The cycle goes on like this and it is a never ending process. Therefore there is no real conclusion.

## **7 Obituary**

*8 Father, when he passed on,  
left dust  
on a table of papers,  
left debts and daughters,  
a bedwetting grandson  
named by the toss  
of a coin after him,*

*a house that leaned  
slowly through our growing  
years on a bent coconut  
tree in the yard.  
Being the burning type,  
he burned properly  
at the cremation*

*as before, easily  
and at both ends,  
left his eye coins*



*in the ashes that didn't  
look one bit different,  
several spinal discs, rough,  
some burned to coal, for sons*

*to pick gingerly  
and throw as the priest  
said, facing east  
where three rivers met  
near the railway station;  
no longstanding headstone  
with his full name and two dates*

*to holdin their parentheses  
everything he didn't quite  
manage to do himself,  
like his caesarian birth  
in a brahmin ghetto  
and his death by heart-  
failure in the fruit market.*

*But someone told me  
he got two lines  
in an inside column  
of a Madras newspaper  
sold by the kilo  
exactly four weeks later  
to streethawkers*

*who sell it in turn  
to the small groceries  
where I buy salt,  
coriander,  
and jaggery  
in newspaper cones  
that I usually read*

*for fun, and lately  
in the hope of finding  
these obituary lines.  
And he left us  
a changed mother  
and more than  
one annual ritual.*

## 7.1 Analysis of the poem:

The poem “Obituary” was written by A.K. Ramanujan. An obituary is usually a tribute to the person who has passed away, featuring the high points of his life. Such is not the case in this poem. Written in first person, the son is the narrator of the poem.

Seeming quite disgruntled with his father, the son points out all of the things his father left undone. His bills were unpaid, and he left unmarried daughters. His grandson, a bed wetter, was named after the grandfather, but improperly. The house in which the narrator grew up leaned against a tree. Apparently, the father had a hot temper which may be part of the son's unhappiness:

Being the **burning type**,  
he burned properly  
at the cremation...

When the father was cremated, coins were placed on the body's eyes. In keeping with the Hindu custom of swift cremation, bodies are cremated within 24. After the cremation, the sons dug through the ashes to find hot coals to throw in an eastward fashion into the river.

The father would have no headstone with the dates of his birth and death. To the son, the dates are parentheses encapsulating the time of the father's life. From his birth to his death, the son feels that his father did many things incorrectly or incompletely:

like his caesarean birth  
in a Brahmin ghetto  
and his death by heart-  
failure in the fruit market...

He hears that his father's obituary took two lines in a local newspaper four weeks after his cremation. The son often bought sugar cane placed in one of these newspapers shaped like a cone. In the beginning, the son says that he looks for the paper for fun, and then he says he would like to have the obituary.

in newspaper cones  
that I usually read

for fun, and lately  
in the hope of finding  
these obituary lines.

Since the narrator is the oldest son, he will be responsible for any ancient rituals that the culture requires. There is little mourning when a Hindu dies because they believe that once a person is born he or she never dies. Often there is little crying. The son does not show any strong feelings for the father's death which may be due to the Hindu custom or his irritation with his father.

Now, everything is different. Understandably, the mother is changed; her husband has died. Despite the displeasure with his father voiced by the narrator, he still respectfully wants to have the paper with the father's obituary.

The poem "Obituary" by A.K. Ramanujan is a literary work that has the author, in the poem, waxing nostalgic about a father's life and death. It is a vivid, emotional, and intense poem that looks back on the life and times of a dear loved family member. The author relates that the father left behind a legacy that will live on for him:

*left debts and daughters,  
a bedwetting grandson  
named by the toss  
of a coin after him,*

The author reflects that this man was cremated and disappeared all too easily from this physical existence. He alludes to the transience of life and the pain those left behind experience in a patriarch's absence. The author muses about the physical remnants left behind from the father's cremation: *eye coins in the ashes* and *several spinal discs*. This is the only tangible evidence of the man left behind and this is painful to the family.

Essentially the poem deals with our brief time on this planet and what we accomplish and ultimately leave to posterity. The poem also reflects on the dignified way the family is encouraged to honor the deceased family member as they are to throw his remains to the east where there are three rivers that congregate by a railroad station.

The poem is vivid as it reflects on the father's past life in a Brahmin ghetto and his death due to heart failure. The reader learns that the man died suddenly while at a fruit market. The author reflects on how the father's life has been reduced to a two line snippet in an obituary and how the death of the man changed the mother significantly and how each year they have the ritual of honoring and remembering this beloved man.

The poem 'Obituary', in this regard is a significant example of Ramanujan's poetry. This poem is a comic-serious evaluation of a dead father. The central irony in the poem stems not only from its overall ironic tone but also from the fact that there are two obituaries in the poem: The one published in the newspaper as a routine matter of personal history and the other, the aesthetic recreation. The poet estimates in this poem what his father meant when he was alive and what he adds up to now that he is dead. The poem is, of an intensely personal emotion that the death of the father is neutralized by the continuing link with the father - the changed mother:

And he left us  
a changed mother  
and move than  
One annual ritual (53-56)

## **7.2 Solved questions and answers:**

Point out the irony in this poem?

An obituary is usually a tribute to the person who has passed away, featuring the high points of his life. Such is not the case in this poem. Written in first person, the son is the narrator of the poem. However the poet appears to be disgruntled with his father, the son points out all of the things his father left undone. His bills were unpaid, and he left unmarried daughters. His

grandson, a bed wetter, was named after the grandfather, but improperly. The house in which the narrator grew up leaned against a tree. Apparently, the father had a hot temper which may be part of the son's unhappiness

How does the poet neutralises the emotions that is caused by his father's death?

The poem is, of an intensely personal emotion that the death of the father is neutralized by the continuing link with the father - the changed mother.

Bring out the nature of the poet's father in this poem.

The poem is vivid as it reflects on the father's past life in a Brahmin ghetto and his death due to heart failure. The reader learns that the man died suddenly while at a fruit market. The author reflects on how the father's life has been reduced to a two line snippet in an obituary and how the death of the man changed the mother significantly and how each year they have the ritual of honoring and remembering this beloved man.

What does the poet tells about the eternal truth of life?

The author reflects that his father was cremated and disappeared all too easily from this physical existence. He alludes to the transience of life and the pain those left behind experience in a patriarch's absence. The author muses about the physical remnants left behind from the father's cremation: *eye coins in the ashes* and *several spinal discs*. This is the only tangible evidence of the man left behind and this is painful to the family.

Why does not the poet show any emotions for his father who died?

The poet does not show any strong feelings for the father's death which may be due to the Hindu custom or his irritation with his father.

## **8 The Highway stripper**

*Once as I was traveling  
on a highway  
to Mexico  
behind a battered once-blue  
Mustang  
with a dusty rear window,  
the wind really sang  
for me  
when suddenly out of the side  
of the speeding car  
in front of me  
a woman's hand  
with a wrist watch on it  
threw away  
a series of whirling objects  
on to the hurtling road:*

*a straw  
hat,  
a white shoe fit  
to be a fetish,  
then another,  
a heavy pleated skirt  
and a fluttery  
slip, faded pink,  
frayed lace- edge  
and all  
(I even heard it swish),  
a leg-of-mutton blouse  
Just as fluttery.*

*And as I stepped  
on the gas  
and my car lunged  
into the fifty feet  
between me  
and them,  
a rather ordinary,  
used, and off-white bra  
for smallish  
breasts whirled off  
the window  
and struck  
a farmer's barbed wire  
with yellow-green wheat grass  
beyond  
and spread-eagled on it,  
pinned  
by the blowing wind.*

*Then before I knew,  
bright red panties  
laced with white  
hit  
my windshield  
and I flinched,  
I swerved,  
but then  
it was gone,  
swept aside  
before I straightened up-  
fortunately, no one else  
on the road:  
excited, curious  
to see the stripper  
on the highway,  
maybe with an urgent*

*lover's one free hand  
(or were there more?)  
on her breast  
or thigh,  
I stepped again  
on the gas, frustrated by their  
dusty rear window  
at fifty feet  
I passed them  
at seventy.*

*In that absolute  
second,  
that glimpse and after-  
image in this hell  
of voyeurs, I saw  
only one at the wheel:  
a man,  
about forty.*

*A spectacled profile  
looking only  
at the road  
beyond the nose of his Mustang,  
with a football  
radio on.*

*again and again  
I looked in my rearview  
mirror  
as I steadied my pace*

*against the circling trees,  
but there was only  
a man:*

*had he stripped  
not only hat  
and blouse, shoes  
and panties  
and bra,  
had he shed maybe  
even the woman  
he was wearing,*

*or was it me  
moulting, shedding  
vestiges,  
old investments,  
rushing forever*

*towards a perfect  
coupling  
with naked nothing  
in a world  
without places.*

### 8.1 Analysis of the poem:

This poem is probably one of the few poems where the use of imagery, especially erotic, tends to stray away the mind of the reader from the actual message that the poem conveys. One doesn't tend to easily understand the spiritual meaning implied here, one related to Bhakti. Ramanujan moved to the US when he was 30, and lived there till his death. Lots of his works feature the lack of transcultural attitude in a supposedly globalized world, based on his own experiences in the US. Another point here is that Ramanujan was an avid believer in Bhakti and its concepts, and also translated many verses, which pertained to the movement. These two concepts play a significant role in this poem as well.

All the verses of the poem, except the last two ones, are easy to comprehend, where Ramanujan speaks about how he was once traveling on the highway behind a Mustang, when suddenly he saw lots of pieces of female clothing being thrown out of the window one by one. There is profound stress on the female sexual factor in terms of imagery, with use of words like slip, bra and panties. He uses terms like *a white shoe fit to be a fetish, a fluttery slip, faded pink, ordinary used and off whitish bra, bright red panties* and so. The use of these suggest that the person wearing these clothes is obviously not very financially well off and so is wearing old clothes, and that the person has a gaudy dress sense. These two factors associated with a female make a direct implication as a metaphor for a prostitute or a stripper.

In striking contrast here are terms like *dusty, blue, Mustang, speeding* that are implicit symbols of masculinity. These two elements of a woman's sexuality and a man's vigor are juxtaposed to create two very different erotic scenes, which blend in together and are yet in complete contrast to one another.

In the next stanza, the poet creates a heightened sexual tension and urge as he himself is overpowered to go and see the stripper on the highway. He lets his curiosity wander to the limit where he suggests through imagery that the lover has his hand over the stripper's thigh and there maybe more than one man with her. The use of hyperbole in his thoughts suggests the amount of sexual feeling he wants to build in the reader's mind before reaching an anti climax.

When he overtakes the car in which the stripper sits, he is shocked to see only a man behind the wheel, a spectacled man, aged around forty, listening to a football radio channel. Presenting the actual image of the stripper with use of *spectacled profile, about forty, football radio* brings in the element of irony in the poem as the stripper is not only a man but is as far from being a woman as possible. He checks again in his rearview mirror but finds only the man in the car.

The next two verses are the most critical to understand the entire theme of the poem. To understand this, let us first get an insight to a very interesting concept of Bhakti, called nirguna. Nirguna is essentially a state of such devotion to God where the worshiper becomes a part of his God and unites with him. One has to understand that to attain nirguna, a person

ceases to have any material form. There is no physical being, just unity with God. A very closely related concept is that of ardhnarishwar, a fusion of Shiva and Parvati. Ardhnarishwar is symbolic of totality and completeness that comes about only after the male and the female merge. It is a concept that says that every person has spiritual elements of both the genders, which are beyond the gender of the person's physical body. Once a person strikes a balance between the male and the female sides of his/her mind, then he/she reaches the state of totality, which is beyond his/her physical body. This state of mind, which transcends above the physical gender of a person, is required to attain nirguna.

The stripper on the highway is suddenly portrayed by Ramanujan as spiritual rather than sexual. In just two lines, the entire focus shifts to the spiritual being, where the stripper is shown as a fusion of the male and the female, a symbol of attaining union with God. Ramanujan further clarifies this in the last verse, where he asks if it was him who was shedding his old beliefs, and was striving for a perfect coupling of the male and the female inside himself, with naked nothing, with his God, in a world without places, in a place where only spiritual being dominates and not physical.

The last verse however, can also suggest that the highway stripper is a hermaphrodite, or a transgender and that coming from a conservative country, Ramanujan is finally shedding his old conservative beliefs. By doing this, he is now striving towards a perfect world, which is transcultural, a world that is not affected by people on the basis of their origin. However, he calls this world a naked nothing because such a world, free of any cultural differences, can only be hypothetical and not real.

## **8.2 Solved questions and Answers:**

What does the poet intend when he talks about the clothing that were thrown from the window while he was travelling the highway?

The use of these clothing suggest that the person wearing these clothes is obviously not very financially well off and so is wearing old clothes, and that the person has a gaudy dress sense. These two factors associated with a female make a direct implication as a metaphor for a prostitute or a stripper.

How does the use of imagery in this poem suggest?

This poem is probably one of the few poems where the use of imagery, especially erotic, tends to stray away the mind of the reader from the actual message that the poem conveys.

How does the poet create sexual tension?

The poet creates a heightened sexual tension and urge as he himself is over powered to go and see the stripper on the highway. He lets his curiosity wander to the limit where he suggests through imagery that the lover has his hand over the stripper's thigh and there maybe more than one man with her. The use of hyperbole in his thoughts suggests the amount of sexual feeling he wants to build in the reader's mind before reaching an anti climax.

How does the poet bring about the spirituality in the last stanza?



The stripper on the highway is suddenly portrayed by Ramanujan as spiritual rather than sexual. In just two lines, the entire focus shifts to the spiritual being, where the stripper is shown as a fusion of the male and the female, a symbol of attaining union with God. Ramanujan further clarifies this in the last verse, where he asks if it was him who was shedding his old beliefs, and was striving for a perfect coupling of the male and the female inside himself, with naked nothing, with his God, in a world without places, in a place where only spiritual being dominates and not physical.

What according to the poet is Nirguna?

Nirguna is essentially a state of such devotion to God where the worshiper becomes a part of his God and unites with him. One has to understand that to attain nirguna, a person ceases to have any material form. There is no physical being, just unity with God. A very closely related concept is that of ardhnarishwar, a fusion of Shiva and Parvati. Ardhnarishwar is symbolic of totality and completeness that comes about only after the male and the female merge. It is a concept that says that every person has spiritual elements of both the genders, which are beyond the gender of the person's physical body. Once a person strikes a balance between the male and the female sides of his/her mind, then he/she reaches the state of totality, which is beyond his/her physical body. This state of mind, which transcends above the physical gender of a person, is required to attain nirguna

## 9 LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE – 2

*After a night of rage that lasted days  
quarrels in a forest, waterfalls, exchanges, marriage,  
exploration of bays and places we had never known  
We would never know  
my wife's always changing syriac face, chosen of all faces  
a pouting difficult child's changing in the chameleon  
emerald wilderness of Kerala small cousin to tall*

*mythic men, rubber plant and peppervine  
frocks with print patterns copied locally  
from the dotted butterfly,  
grandmother wearing white day and night in a village*

*full of the colour schemes of kraits and gartersnakes  
adolescent in Aden among stabbing Arabs, betrayed and whipped  
yet happy among ships in harbour  
and the evacuees the borrowed earth*

*under the borrowed trees, taught dry and wet  
hot and cold by the monsoon then,  
by the siroccos now  
on copper dustcones, the crater townships in the volcanoes of Aden*

*I dreamed one day that face my own yet hers  
with my own nowhere to be found  
lost, cut, loose like my dragnet past  
I woke up and groped  
turned on the realism of the ceiling light*

*found half a mirror in the mountain cabin  
fallen behind a dresser to look at my face now  
and the face of her sleep, still asleep  
and very syriac on the bed*

*behind: happy for once at such loss of face,  
whole in the ambivalence of being  
half-woman half-man contained in a common body,  
androgynous as a god balancing stillness in he middle  
of a duel to make it dance  
soon to be myself, a man unhappy in the morning  
to be himself again, the past still there  
a drying net on the mountain*

*in the morning, in the waking  
my wife's face still fast asleep  
blessed as by butterfly, snake, shiprope  
and grandmother's other children  
by my love's only insatiable envy*

### **9.1 Analysis of the poem:**

Love poem for a wife-2, on the other hand, shows the mature aspect of love with a compromising approach. The family relationship is explored upto the root level tracing back his wife's Keralite origin to dense green forest habitation filled with rubber plants, pepper vines, and her granny wearing white in a rural dwelling – “full of the colour schemes of Keralites and garter snakes.” The scene shifts to crater-township Aden, where her ancestors and spent precarious days among stabbing Arabs “betrayed and whipped yet happy”.

The poet employs dream technique in which he identifies himself with his wife physically

“I dreamed one day  
that face my own, yet hers  
with my own nowhere  
to be found; lost; cut

loose like my dragnet

past.”

He thinks of his situation like that of androgynous God Nataraja (“half woman half man contained in a common body”) balancing stillness in the middle of dynamic dance (a duel as the poet calls). The poet finds himself in a similar state balancing himself between diverse backgrounds of his own and his wife, the present and the past (“still there a drying net on the mountain.”).

Coming back to reality and world of wakefulness he finds his wife sleeping calmly undisturbed by her past.

“My wife’s face still fast

asleep, blessed as by

butterfly, snake, shiprope

and grandmother’s other

children,

by my only love’s only

insatiable envy.”

A blessing indeed indicating a similar approach for the poet also to follow. Real love transcends differences and affords calm composure.

A.K. Ramanujan’s poem is a love poem that isn’t from the traditional school for he does not plainly declare his love for his wife. Instead his means are all the more subtle as he through his love for her picks up quaint little images and weaves it within his search for what she was before she married him. He deals with her past life in Kerala and maternal home and ends the poem with a union of the two sexes where they are both part of one being.

The poem begins in an informal style where the reader comes to learn of a quarrel that has lasted for days but the treatment is so light that one is reassured that it is merely a lover’s tiff and nothing more serious. His wife has Syrian blood in her veins and so we are aware subtly of the fact that their marriage is the intermingling of two religions and cultures. The lady is pouting like a difficult child while the poet moves on further to describe the scenery of Kerala and her home there that made her the woman that she is.

The imagery is rural with rubber plants, print dresses and a white clad grandmother filling memory lane. Her home is a colourful place that has replaced the native home she has lost in Aden when her ancestors were forced out by the Arabs and had to take refuge in Kerala. Thus, the land they live in is borrowed land but to him it is all the more dear for she has lived there.

He then shifts to a more intimate level where he speaks of a dream he once had where they both were one-faced there was no union of two as they both formed one being. His own past life, his own individuality, his own face and hers did not exist as his face was hers and hers was his.

As he watches her in her sleep he sees happiness lying there on her serene brow. She is content to be a part of him and loose her identity in his thus, making him think of the nature of the gods that are made up of both the male and the female. He can no longer be happy as just a man or a half being. To be together is to be complete and whole.

In the morning's realism he is aware that though they may share a wholeness yet he is also himself but as he watches her sleep he feels that she has been blessed by her past even as she has been blessed by his love as tender as that of a grandmother for her children. He also feels a slight possessiveness for her and is conscious that he is jealous of anyone loving her though his love may be unselfish in all other ways.

## **9.2 Solved questions and answers:**

What is the theme of the poem?

Love poem for a wife-2, shows the mature aspect of love with a compromising approach. The family relationship is explored up to the root level tracing back his wife's Keralite origin to dense green forest habitation filled with rubber plants, pepper vines, and her granny wearing white in a rural dwelling.

Comment on the use of imagery in the poem.

The imagery is rural with rubber plants, print dresses and a white clad grandmother filling memory lane. Her home is a colourful place that has replaced the native home she has lost in Aden when her ancestors were forced out by the Arabs and had to take refuge in Kerala. Thus, the land they live in is borrowed land but to him it is all the more dear for she has lived there.

What thought comes to poet's mind when he sees her sleeping?

As he watches her in her sleep he sees happiness lying there on her serene brow. She is content to be a part of him and loose her identity in his thus, making him think of the nature of the gods that are made up of both the male and the female. He can no longer be happy as just a man or a half being. To be together is to be complete and whole.

Can the poem be considered to be a love poem? Explain

A.K. Ramanujan's poem is a love poem that isn't from the traditional school for he does not plainly declare his love for his wife. Instead his means are all the more subtle as he through his love for her picks up quaint little images and weaves it within his search for what she was before she married him. He deals with her past life in Kerala and maternal home and ends the poem with a union of the two sexes where they are both part of one being.

Why does the poet say his condition resembles that of Lord Nataraj?

He thinks of his situation like that of androgynous God Nataraja ("half woman half man contained in a common body") balancing stillness in the middle of dynamic dance (a duel as the poet calls). The poet finds himself in a similar state balancing himself between diverse backgrounds of his own and his wife, the present and the past ("still there a drying net on the mountain.").

## 10 The Striders

*The Striders  
And search  
For certain thin \_\_\_\_  
Stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs.  
See them perch  
On dry capillary legs  
Weightless  
On the ripple skin  
Of a stream  
Not only prophets  
Walk in water. The bug sits  
On a landslide of lights  
And drowns eye-  
Deep  
Into its tiny strip  
Of sky.*

### 10.1 Analysis of the poem:

"The Striders" is included in the very first collection of poems by A.K. Ramanujan, the poem "The Striders" is one of the finest poems by the poet which opens a scope for a deconstructive analysis in relation to the poets of Indian sensibilities. The striders may be a small insect. But the poet delineates it from different angles. It causes explosion of thoughts for the poet. The thoughts are having no forms. Those do not remain in the framework of binary. In the poem we find, the first stanza is all about its physical description. The poet makes it a source of ideas. It is no doubt a strange insect. But the poet makes it a point of exploration. The poem begins with the line 'And search', the conjunction 'And' refers to the multiplying ideas, some of which may be known and the rest may be unknown. 'Search' itself stands for an exploration, not in any particular direction, nor in any presumable form. The poet describes the water bug as 'bubble-eyed', thereby he makes it dynamic, not static. Hence, ideas are also like the bubbles, very much short-lived. Those come and go. The poet refers to human ideas perching on 'Capillary legs'. The poet may be referring to the force of globalization, through the 'ripple skin of a stream'. Again, at first reading the poem seems to be written on the line of Imagist ideals. After the excellent narration of the waterbug in scanty language, the poem seems to gain momentum of meaning. For some critics, "Stream" is the symbol of Universal change and of time, what is a very common idea in Indian philosophy. Waterbug is a symbol of permanence. Both the symbols refer to the myth of Vishnu, what is again an Indian God. The Vishnu is a constant in a world of flux.

The second stanza also refers to Indian tradition. The poet links the ancient time to the present time. The depth and the potentiality of the insect is heightened by the poet through the reference to the ancient prophets, who with their energy, accumulated through yoga, used to walk even on water without being sunk. It creates an impression of the fact that the poet might be speaking about power of human being, 'who sits on a landslide of light', means he is even capable of going deep into the mystery of light or universe. It has a touch of irony at the same time. With the growth and development of science and technology, moral strength of human being has not increased. It has rather gone down. Hence 'the strider' is not just a strange insect. Through it, the poet refers to the human-being, who is very powerful in every respect. Human-being has not only conquered light, but also the sky. For the poet the high sense of adventure of human being is very significant. The poet never forgets the unbelievable power of the yoga and the yogis, which is part of Indian life and tradition from the Vedic days. But in present context the same yogic power has decline.

'Strider' is the New England name for the water insect as mentioned by the poet himself in a foot note of the poem. There is another symbolic implication in it. America which in its early stage of formation as a nation was called New England stands for adventure, exploration, sense of freedom implying much more than England or any other European country. Does the poet refer to the Americas leadership, its imperialism, its exploration in each and every field of life and its unique assimilation of people from all over world? Now that America is let down by global recession along with other European countries, the poem seems to have an ironic undertone. The poet has a high sense of wonder towards the west and the poem too has an impact on the readers because he approaches the issues as an Indian. The poet underlines the fact that what is past for India is a present for the west. As Indians we usually play our 'past' card in global forum with no critique of our present endeavour. We have our past glory, heritage, golden history and cultural achievement which have not been continuing upto contemporary time. We hardly realize our present barrenness. 'Of prophets walking on water' in ancient past is a yogic or scientific excellence, we have not carried forth the tradition to present time. We bask in our past achievements and do nothing. We have become stagnant. But the west and the United States are not so. Their progress continues and as high as the sky. It is an on going process. It simply can not be measured. Their success goes 'deep into its tiny strip of sky'. Hence the poem is not just an account of the achievement of the west but also the contemporary feature of India in each and every field against the backdrop of a large and glorious past.

It is frustration of contemporary time which lead to 'anxiety'. 'Anxiety' kills human vitality. A.K. Ramanujan has been appeared as a diasporic poet right from the beginning of his poetic career with *The Striders* in 1966 and has remained the same until his death in 1993. As the only Indian English poet occupying a place in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* Ramanujan's reputation is well established as a world's foremost folklorist, linguist, translator and a sagacious intellectual. And as a poet, he is not only a representative figure of the post-independent Indian English poetry, but also a seminal representative spokesman of the third world Diasporas. In his poetry, Ramanujan is always unique in rendering his sensibilities as a diaspora having "a double self" composed with the components of Eastern and Western epistemologies (Singer xiii). With this double self "as actor and as object" (ibid)- one who acts and the other acts upon- the poet always considers him as vulnerable with his 'elements of composition' indicating the anti-essentialist view of self-identity capable of constant transformations and negotiations. Though Whitmanian in view, here Ramanujan, behind incorporating various theoretical perspectives like Foucault's "technologies of the self"

(Foucault, “The Technologies of the Self” 18), Bhabha’s notion of the ambivalent “third space” (Rutherford 211) and so on, too manifests him as a fragile and open being having a hybrid identity.

With that hybrid identity, the poet, throughout his early poetry indicates how he maintains a floating existence in the diasporic space as a displaced individual. The title of the first volume *The Striders* itself is the metaphorical expression of that floating existence that the poet has to maintain in that displaced location. Most of the critics of our present time have been considered Ramanujan as one of the most obscure poets among all the post-colonial Indian diasporas dealing with “the nature of the human body and its relation to the natural world” as his main themes of poetry through which the poet asserts his inner turmoil and anxieties as a diaspora and negotiates his problems of identity and belonging. Although in such disguised self-revelations, the personal in Ramanujan’s poetry is often deferred by his ironic posture, which, in turn, forms a stipulated discourse of diasporic existence in the introspective level of his poetry. That discourse comprising the trajectory between subjective to objective is the main idea linking the notion of identity in his poetry. For Bruce King, such “paradoxical concerns” in Ramanujan’s poetry often have incorporated variety of themes and moods ranging from the notion of root to routes, past to present, truth and absurdities of religious faith to views of modern science or from urge for belongingness to the notion of uncertainty of identity (71). However, an experimental move from the reflective level to the introspective level of his poetry reveals that behind those ‘paradoxical concerns’ and varied moods, Ramanujan has always foregrounded his diaspora sensibilities as a catalytic force of his poetry. Starting with the hermeneutics of nostalgia, a split-consciousness, “multiple identities and solidarities or a re-assertion of ‘native’ cultural identity” and so on, his poetic narrative incorporates all the tactics of diaspora narrative (Nayar 197). The title of his first volume itself stands for the ‘water bugs’- “a new England name for the water insect” having the power to move on the surface of rivers symbolizing the floating existence of a diasporic poet in the river like dynamic context of living. The insect, which neither sinks nor stops, floats and roams everywhere to belong somewhere in a continually changing river is a metaphorical assertion of his own liminality as a diaspora who being alienated from the past and the root as well, roams and floats to regain his lost sense of identity and belonging. If the struggle of the striders to “perch...on the ripple skin/of a stream” renders the poet’s struggle to capture a sense of belonging in the diasporic location, the ability of the same to exist both on water and on land manifest the prophetic dimension of their existence. What is vindicated through such an amphibious existence is not the desire for essential inner identity, but the myriad of potential identities irrespective to any definite belonging and primordial identity. In the domain of diaspora, both the processes of thwarting native identity and of creating new identities operate as two overwhelming forces of motivating identity politics in Ramanujan’s poetry. A diaspora discovers both the arts of negotiation and appropriation out of that reciprocal tension between the two forces and thereby makes the threshold a highly productive and ambivalent space for creation.

## **10.2 Solved Questions and Answers:**

What is the basic theme of this poem?

*The Striders*” is one of the finest poems by the poet which opens a scope for a deconstructive analysis in relation to the poets of Indian sensibilities.

How is the feeling of diaspora brought about in the poem?

The poem itself is written with diasporic feeling in the mind of the writer. the processes of thwarting native identity and of creating new identities operate as two overwhelming forces of motivating identity politics in Ramanujan's poetry. A diaspora discovers both the arts of negotiation and appropriation out of that reciprocal tension between the two forces and thereby makes the threshold a highly productive and ambivalent space for creation.

What is missing in the poem?

Ramanujan's poetry is often deferred by his ironic posture, which, in turn, forms a stipulated discourse of diasporic existence in the introspective level of his poetry.

How have the themes incorporated in this poem?

Ramanujan's poetry often have incorporated variety of themes and moods ranging from the notion of root to routes, past to present, truth and absurdities of religious faith to views of modern science or from urge for belongingness to the notion of uncertainty of identity.

How does Striders portray Indian tradition?

The poem refers to Indian tradition when the poet links the ancient time to the present time. The depth and the potentiality of the insect is heightened by the poet through the reference to the ancient prophets, who with their energy, accumulated through yoga, used to walk even on water without being sunk. It creates an impression of the fact that the poet might be speaking about power of human being, 'who sits on a landslide of light', means he is even capable of going deep into the mystery of light or universe.

## 11 Anxiety

*Not branchless as the fear tree,  
It has naked roots and secret twigs  
Not geometric as the parabolas  
Of hope, it has loose ends  
With a knot at the top  
That's me.  
Not wakeful in its white snake  
Glassy ways like the eloping gaiety of waters,  
it drowns, viscous and fibered as pitch.  
Flames have only lungs. Water is all eyes.  
The earth has bone for muscle.  
And the air is a flock of invisible pigeons.  
But anxiety  
Can find no metaphor to end it.*

### 11.1 Analysis of the poem:

Ramanujan puts anxiety in a process of continuity. He explains it indirectly, not directly. 'fear' is the kindred of anxiety. So he begins with it. The source of all tension is the individual : "..... it has loose ends/with a knot at the top/that's me'. He explains the issues relating to anxiety through 'water' 'flames' and 'pigeons' and ultimately he confesses: 'but anxiety / can find no metaphor to end it.' He cannot explain the things in a metaphoric way, rather in a metonymic process.

The poem refers to the complex Indian problems like growth of population, poverty,



illiteracy, lack of hygienic sense and the problem of unemployment. 'Fear' is the source of all tension in the poem. Fear may be because of communal conflict, Maoism and terrorism, apparently the problems are having 'loose ends'. The problems are not related to each other. Those may be because of the wrong policies of the government and wrong administrations also. But the buck cannot be passed to the government alone. The problems are because of the lack of individual consciousness also. That's why the poet says that the anxieties are 'with a knot at the top/that's me'. To express what, in fact, anxiety ridden world is the poet speaks about an anxiety less earth which is as fresh and beautiful as 'gaiety of waters.' Then again the pigeons are the symbols of peace. Just as the air brings freshness the pigeons also stand for happiness.

## 11.2 Solved Questions and Answers:

What is anxiety according to Ramanujan?

Ramanujan puts anxiety in a process of continuity. He explains it indirectly, not directly. 'fear' is the kindred of anxiety.

What is the source of all tension?

The source of all tension is the individual as it has loose ends with a knot at the top that's himself.

How does he explain issues related to anxiety?

He explains the issues relating to anxiety through 'water' 'flames' and 'pigeons' and ultimately he confesses: 'but anxiety / can find no metaphor to end it.'

What does the poem refers to?

The poem refers to the complex Indian problems like growth of population, poverty, illiteracy, lack of hygienic sense and the problem of unemployment. 'Fear' is the source of all tension in the poem.

Why is fear considered to be the source of all tension?

'Fear' is the source of all tension in the poem because fear may be because of communal conflict, Maoism and terrorism, apparently the problems are having 'loose ends' which may not be directly related to each other.

## 12 On the Death of a Poem

*Images consult  
one  
another*

*a conscience "C  
stricken  
jury*

*and come  
slowly  
to a sentence.<sup>14</sup>*

*Each and every hungry and homeless soul  
within a mile of the little island  
is soon gravitating towards it*

*to receive the sacrament of idli,  
to anoint palates  
with sambar,*

*to celebrate anew, every morning,  
the seduction and death  
of the demon of hunger*

*(threatening the entire world)  
at the hands of Gauri  
in the form of a humble idli.*

*They come from all over;  
walking, running, dancing, limping, stumbling, rolling  
“C each at his own speed.”<sup>20</sup>*

*For, yes, it's breakfast time at Kala Ghoda  
as elsewhere  
in and around Bombay*

## **15.**

*The little vamp, the grandma, the blind man,  
the ogress,  
the rat-poison man,*

*the pinwheel boy,  
the hipster queen of the crossroads,  
the Demosthenes of Kala Ghoda,*

*the pregnant queen of tarts,  
the laughing Buddha,  
the knucklebones champ “C*

*the island slowly begins to fill up.  
Not just with the children  
and the grandchildren of the banyan*

*and their cats and dogs,  
but with all their friends and cousins as well,  
from near and far.*

### **12.1 Analysis of the poem:**

The whole process of poetic creation is presented in such lean and striking linguistic space. At the source and core of the poetic process, the poet enshrines the intimate conclave of consulting images. This personal and core experience for the poet is one of severe ideological, aesthetic and moral conflicts as the second stanza implies. But, as each of the "images" in the poetic "jury" arrives at the value judgment and linguistic consensus, they narrow down on their choices. That forces the "jury" into the verdict of a linguistic necessity and finality of grammatical sentence in the final line.

This can also be a kind of final judgment in the sense of sentencing. This resolution and closure of the poetic process for practical as well as linguistic purposes becomes a judgment close to a capital punishment for Ramanujan's persona. And that is what the readers are told boldly in the title, although the thrust of the poem seems to argue a different perspective on the birth and status of a poem. A poem in a tidy grammatical sentence as an art object is a dead poem, if it does not open up without closure for others to share in, contribute and deviate from. In a way, Ramanujan's text may be trying to contest the exclusive authority and privilege either of the critical discerner in the poet or of the advocate for the institution of critical hegemony. This way Ramanujan may be exploring the possibility of a much more process-oriented non-canonical and thereby secular as well as democratic practice and theory of poetry. Because, as Bruce King observes, "such completeness kills the experience of the images operating on each other"<sup>15</sup>. It is as if Ramanujan wants to hold and propose the view that "The poem is a process of images operating upon each other before being given a fixed order and interpretation."

Here the persona of Ramanujan plays the devil's advocate. 'On the Death of a Poem' can be a poetic warning to the politics of linguistic hegemony taming and taking over a possible secular poetic process. Instead of sanitizing, the poet problematizes the complicity and the politics of linguistic choices in the context of the poetic form. So a secular aesthetics would seem to need a continual commitment to a language that does not leave the street of constant contact with the subaltern and the changing times.

However, Ramanujan did not ridicule poor Indian cousins the way Nissim Ezekiel did in his *Very Indian Poems in Indian English*. It is also true that in *Second Sight* he has not taken the focused political stand of an Arun Kolatkar in favour of the dispossessed and the exploited as the true "masters" of "the city". In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar's poetic persona, the Pi-dog's ironic and Tiresian vision admirably and justifiably locates the heart and soul of the city of Mumbai in the subaltern and secular communion of the underdogs representing every possible colour, gender, caste, and race living off the street and on the street.

Nevertheless, in 'On the Death of a Poem' Ramanujan did "things with the syntax" and imagery that brought his poetic language "alive in rich and strange ways". In that sense at least, the language used in his poetry has contributed in some measure to a different level of "biriyanization", to go back to Ali's metaphor.

The critical exegesis of these two poems substantiates the secular possibilities of Ramanujan's use of poetic language. As Ramanujan himself has sarcastically put it, the *Kamasutra*, "literally a grammar of love", declines and conjugates "men and women as one would nouns and verbs in different genders, voices, moods and aspects." In a similar way, the grammar of a secular aesthetics can inflect and inform the sources of Ramanujan's poetic themes and concerns, the dynamics of his poetic language and imagery, the dialectics of his voices and visions. So the quality of his poetic language adds also to the overall strength of the secular aesthetics imagination Ramanujan's poetry aims at in terms of its worldview, political charge and authorial process. Theoretically speaking, in the context of Indian Poetry in English, Ramanujan's Secular aesthetic has subverted and exposed the orientalist and the upper-class predilections of a Sanskrit aesthetic tradition predicated on the primacy of the classical Indian ethos or the 'Great Tradition'; it can also challenge and withstand the formalist and urban-centric linguistic standard and the consequent exclusions of a "Sacramental" aesthetic trend of a supposedly globalised literary taste and global English. Moreover, the Secular Aesthetic model emerging from Ramanujan's poetry can make poetry appreciation and criticism much more relevant to the Indian context and can provide one of the meaningful pedagogic alternatives for literature studies. It is relevant to our cultural and political context today, where native / regional literatures, subaltern literatures, Dalit and Women's writings have claimed their mainstream presence.

## **12.2 Solved questions and answers:**

How is the poem presented?

The poem is presented as a process of poetic creation is presented in such lean and striking linguistic space. At the source and core of the poetic process, the poet enshrines the intimate conclave of consulting images.

How does the poem brings out the secularism in this poem?

'On the Death of a Poem' can be a poetic warning to the politics of linguistic hegemony taming and taking over a possible secular poetic process. Instead of sanitizing, the poet problematizes the complicity and the politics of linguistic choices in the context of the poetic form. So a secular aesthetics would seem to need a continual commitment to a language that does not leave the street of constant contact with the subaltern and the changing times.

Does the personal experience of the poet brings conflict in the poem?

The personal and core experience of the poet is one of severe ideological, aesthetic and moral conflicts as the second stanza implies but, as each of the "images" in the poetic "jury" arrives at the value judgment and linguistic consensus, they narrow down on their choices.

Who is Ramanujan's persona in the poem?

The persona of Ramanujan plays the devil's advocate which can also be a kind of final judgment in the sense of sentencing. This resolution and closure of the poetic process for practical as well as linguistic purposes becomes a judgment close to a capital punishment for Ramanujan's persona.

How is comparison made in the poem?

Ramanujan has used comparison in this poem like sacrament is compared to idli thereby giving a desi twist.

# **The Harvest**

## **1 Introduction**

## **2 About the author**

## **3 Summary of the novel**

## **4 Analysis of the characters of the novel**

## **5 Chapter wise Analysis of the novel**

## **6 Theme**

## **7 Conclusion**

## **8 Questions for practice**

### **1 Introduction:**

Since the origin of Indian English Drama, dramatists have taken up contemporary social and political situations for analysis. Shanta Gokhale points out that whereas early writers like Krishna Mohan Banerjee talked of the “conflict between orthodox Hindu customs and the new ideas introduced by a western education”, today, writers like Mahesh Dattani discuss issues like communalism and the role of money in family relationships.

However, literature thrives on innovation and experimentalism. Dattani’s ingenious theatrical techniques like split sets and hidden rooms that create unexpected stage spaces, and Karnad’s use of the conventions of Indian Classical Drama and folk theatre are a significant step ahead in this direction. Another mode of experimentalism can be the choice of an unexhausted theme. This is what Indian English Women’s Drama has been doing for quite some time now. One focus of this drama has been the exploration of a means of expression through the woman’s body or sexuality. They use this theme both as a methodology for expression as well as a theme for struggle. The purpose of this paper shall not be to study this aspect of women’s drama as something done in opposition to male playwrights but rather as an agenda that women’s drama has charted out for itself. It is not to be reductively compared to what it can accomplish vis-à-vis men’s drama, but rather is to be analysed for what it has been able to achieve by itself, in terms of representation

*Harvest* is a play by Manjula Padmanabhan that highlights on organ-selling in India set in the near future. It is a critique of the commoditization of the third world body. The play confronts us with a futuristic Bombay of the year 2010. Om Prakash, a jobless Indian agrees to sell unspecified organs through Inter Planta Services, INC to a rich person in first-world for a small fortune. InterPlanta and the recipient's are obsessed with maintaining Om's health and invasively control the lives of Om, his mother Ma, and wife Jaya in their one-room apartment. The recipient, Ginni, periodically looks in on them via a videophone and treats them condescendingly. Om's diseased brother Jeetu is taken to give organs instead of Om. *Harvest* won the 1997 Onassis Prize as the best new international play.

In the screen play *Harvest*, by Manjula Padmanabhan many global borders arise in which organ-selling occurs in India in the near future, 2010. This screen play deals with the first and third world countries. In India, there are more developed places than others. With people still suffering and finding a way to support their families with food and shelter they will do almost anything to make a living. A main character, Om Prakash loses his job while living in a one bedroom apartment with his family and decides to sell unspecified organs through a company called, InterPlanta Services Inc. "I went because I lost my job in the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now...there's nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? There's us and the street gangs and the rich." (pg 62) Why do you think Jaya is fighting with her husband Om? Do you think that she thinks he is doing wrong by selling unspecified organs just so he can support his family?

In scene 4 (pg 61) The Guards take Jeetu instead of Om to do the eye surgery. Once the procedure is over his eyes will be donated and he will be left wearing a pair of goggles that look like pair of imitation eyes. Om expresses to Jaya that since they don't care about Om and his family, the less fortunate that they are going to operate on Jeetu even though they made a mistake and took the wrong person. In this scene, Om acts very cold hearted and seems to only care about the money he is going to be receiving. On the other hand, Jaya is very anxious and upset about what is taking place. When the Guards bring Jeetu back, he comes in white silk pajamas and his head all wrapped up in bandages. "I wont listen! Because listening brings acceptance. And I will never accept, I will never live with this..."(64) Now that Jeetu is not able to see, he feels trapped and is built up with a lot of anger. "Why? Because I'm in a place beyond

death. I'm in a place worse than death. ( 66). If Jeetu feels this way rightfully so, then why does Om say that he is selfish? Is Om only worried about the money he is going to be receiving from this procedure?

Even though the family received money and were able to live a much better life through organ donation, many problems were created between each other. This is a perfect example of how money doesn't buy happiness.

*Harvest* is a play written by Manjula Padmanabhan focusing geographically on Mumbai, India. We see the character Om, signing up as a organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there is no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for doning an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guranteed and certained, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

This play reminds the reader about a *Brothel* mainly because it is takes place in India, although this time it is Mumbai and not Calcutta. This play also has a prostitute and revolves around poor finanical situations resorting to doing very unfortunate jobs to keep their funds up. We see the family go through wonderful meals which can seem as space age because the family is taking off at the beginning of the play with good promise. But as the play furthers itself, we see the promise becoming dark and uneasy.

By seeing the financial situations of Om and his wife Jaya, we can appreciate money as a neccessity to life. In this play, we see Om pretty much selling his life in order to obtain the top dollar for this family, well at least in India it was considered top dollar. Jaya was evidently distressed about Om's decision on signing himself to Ginni, because the family is already on an off and on troubled relationship because Jaya is having a secret realtionship with Om's younger brother Jeetu. Jeetu works as the prositute mentioned earlier, Ma is Om's mother who also lives in the house who favors Om more so then the others.

Work itself is not even hard either. For the family, Ginni operates their services by dictating to Interplanta, which is the company that supplies them with food and services such as a toilet and



shower that Om and his family received as newly rich people. This obviously made a foreshadow of his death. Personally, I wanted to just skip right to the point where Om was going to die because it was so clear that if he wasn't going to die...then this play would be more interesting. I believe that this simplicity had been effective because it relates to this week's theme of 'problem with food.'

Om Prakash is an embittered, petty, unemployed youth who keeps the pretension of caring for his whole family. His new life with his family often surrounded around the luxury of food and the shelter with services they are not used to. The problem with this, is that we as people simply take food and shelter for granted. I do not remember how many numerous times I have complained about how hungry I am or if my sister had used all the hot water in the shower, but as another dystopian play, *Harvest* showcases the morality and ethical views of our society in my opinion. As a result, Om's carelessness left his family in turmoil. But...but but but...the tables had turned when Jeetu has gotten sick. This is the point where I was like..wait wait..hold on...oh shit, so that means Om is probably going to donate his organs to Jeetu but he can't because he had signed to Ginni. We see Jeetu been taking away from the picture as well as the Donor and Jaya is left alone to fend for herself.

In the end, it is evident that the body serves as the major theme. Manjula did a great job on portraying the body's importance to our society as well as in this play. What I believe was effective is how easy Om was able to sign to Ginni because it shows how uncaring and what his body means to him, in order to get the riches. Kinda makes sense now why the title is *Harvest*, because our body is like food, we can harvest it whenever in cases we need it as Ginni had portrayed it in this play.

Manjula Padmanabhan, a 21st century woman, being a technocrat herself, uses the techniques and tools of the modern world in her most celebrated play, *Harvest* (1996). Though *Harvest* is not, as obvious, the first play Padmanabhan wrote, her fame as a playwright rests on it. Padmanabhan drew the attention of the world when *Harvest* won the Onassis cash rich award for the theatre at Athens (Greece) out of more than hundred entries. The underlined statement, though, made a decade later, seems to be predicted in the play. The economics of life rules the life. The events that take places in the play are the results of the

economics/financial pressure as the only bead where now unemployed Om. Though the play, *Harvest* as Shital Pravinchandra comes as a critique of the commoditization of the healthy third world body, much thanks to the significant adventures in transplant medicine, has now been a bank of spare parts for ailing bodies in the first world (1). Apart from its futuristic approach (as the play is set in 2010 Mumbai) the play also shows how the financially strong groups/agents use the modern electronic technology to control and govern the financially weak sections of society in the world at the risk of hell like life as is found in Padmanabhan's another play, *The Mating Game* (2003). Though the gist of the play, *Harvest* can be given in three lines, its presentation, characters, their behaviour, action and the space occupied the screen contact module speak of the value and possession electronic devices are going to have to the life

The story of the play centers on Om, who signs who signs up to be an organ donor for an American organ receiver named Ginny. Ginny provides all the facilities to make and keep Om's body parts hygienic. Gradually the electronic contact module takes possession of all the characters in the play. Om, Ma and Jeetu except Jaya, Om's wife who, as Durgesh Ravande says, represent the conflict between technological adventures and human relationship in life. (163) Jaya appears as the last hope of emotional value in the fire when a legal moral and bio-ethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome, when the trade in human organ is fully institutionalized and smoothly operated by the rapacious forces of global capitalism (Shital Pravinchalra, 8). Helen Gilbert in her introduction to the Anthology of the Post-colonial Plays rightly comments on the nature of the play. She observes: *Harvest* can be read not only as a cautionary tale about the possible (mis) use of modern medical and reproductive science but also a reflection on economic and social legacies of Western imperialism, particularly as they coverage with new technologies (216)

The play is set in 2010 Mumbai. The financial crisis and computerization at the global level have turned the unskilled employees jobless. Ransacking job has become the routine of such middle-class and middle-aged people who can do nothing else. The play *Harvest*, with very apt title, describes how one such family fall victim to the flesh-market controlled by the Western world. The action of the play moves around four full-fledged characters, Om the jobless husband, his 19 year old wife Jaya, his 17 year old brother Jeetu and his 60 year old widow mother, Indumati

Prakash. There are four other minor nameless mechanical guards, two screen characters, Ginni and Virgil and a neighbor Vidyutbai. An attempt made herein is to describe how the machine world governs the human world and how the playwright has cleverly used the electronic devices turning them into characters.

When the play opens, Ma Jaya are seen waiting for Om who is about to come after job-hunting. Apart from the usual retorting and differences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, one notes their concern for Om's getting job. Though the ever-growing use of electronic devices like computer has turned Om jobless, his sixty-year-old mother seems to be addicted to another electronic domestic device-television. She appears to be less concerned about her son and daughter-in-law. One feels that she believes more in the celluloid world than the real world where one finds difficult to feed only four members in the family. Ma retorts her daughter-in-law Jaya when the latter asks to leave her alone.

MA. Alone, alone! Have you seen your neighbours? Ten in that room; And harmonious as a TV show! But you? An empty room would be too crowded for you. (Padmanabhan's *Harvest*, 218)

One begins to feel influence of technology more when Om comes back and begins to describe how he has been selected for a different kind of job. He narrates the non-human instructions at the time of his selection procedure. There begins the commanding influence of the machines in human life. Om narrates:

OM. We were standing all together in that line. And the line went on and on -not just on one floor, but slanting up, forever. All in iron bars and grills. It was like being in a cage shaped like a tunnel. All around, up, turn, sideways, there were men slowly moving. All the time, I couldn't understand it. Somewhere there must be a place to stop, to write a form? Another questions? But no. Just forward, forward. One person fainted but the others pushed him along. And at the corners, a sort of pipe was kept.

## **2 About The Writer:**

**Manjula Padmanabhan** (born 1953) is a playwright, journalist, comic strip artist, and children's book author responsible for the play *Harvest*. She has also written such plays as *Lights Out!* (1984), *Hidden Fires*, *The Artist's Model* (1995) and *Sextet* (1996). She was born in Delhi to a diplomat family in 1953, she went to boarding school in her teenage years. After college her determination to make her own way in life led to various kind of works in publishing and media related fields

She has authored a collection of short stories, called *Kleptomania*. Her most recent book, published in 2008, is titled "Escape". Apart from writing newspaper columns she also created comic strips. She created Suki, an Indian female comic character, which was serialized as a strip in *Sunday Observer*. Before 1997 (the year in which her play *Harvest* was staged) she was better known as cartoonist and had a daily cartoon strip in *The Pioneer* newspaper. This Delhi-based writer and artist. Her comic strips appeared weekly in the **Sunday Observer** (Bombay, 1982-86) and daily in the **Pioneer** (New Delhi, 1991-97). Her books include **Hot Death, Cold Soup** (Kali for Women, 1996), **Getting There** (Picador UK, 1999) **This is Suki!** (Duckfoot Press, 2000), and **Kleptomania** (Penguin Books India, 2004). **Harvest** (Kali for Women, 1998 and subsequently in three separate international anthologies), her fifth play, won the 1997 Onassis Award for Theatre. Manjula has illustrated twenty-four books for children including her own novels for children, **Mouse Attack** and **Mouse Invaders** (Macmillan Children's Books, UK, 2003, 2004).

Manjula Padmanabhan is an artist, illustrator, cartoonist, playwright and novelist. She has illustrated 21 children's books, and has had a longrunning cartoon strip, Suki, in the *Sunday Observer* and later the *Pioneers*. Her play, *Harvest*, was selected from 1470 entries in 76 countries for the Onassis Prize in 1997.

In the play the themes of economic exploitation, reification (=commodification) and acculturation are presented through the mercantile as well as surgical metaphor of body-parts transplantation. The Donors and the Receivers in the play represent the natives of the Third World and the First World respectively. Om, his wife Jaya, and Om's brother Jeetu are devalued as depositories where parts of the human body are sold at cheap rates. The most shocking irony is that the sellers are enthralled by the prospect of selling themselves and being devoured by the

Western/capitalistic cannibals. Om has orgasmic pleasure in imagining parts of his body inside Ginny. “After all, who wouldn’t want to be inside such a divine being?” (50T), asks Ma, who has been always disgusted with her other son’s being a male prostitute. The inequality of the two groups (Donors and Receivers) is shown as rigidly stabilized as there is no possibility of the reversal of their functions. In other words, the Donors always give and the Receivers take; hence, there is no exchange by any chance. The Guards and Agents are the robot-like commandos of the Receivers. Acting as middlemen, they channelize resources from the donors to the Receivers. Their mechanical existence as revealed through their ruthless precision and efficiency is a mark of total dehumanization. Notice that Guard 3 is a male clone of Guard 2.

Delhi born Manjula Padmanabhan could be taken as a suitable match to the 20th century Rabindranath Tagore. Like Tagore, Padmanabhan has successfully tried her hand at all types of literature. It includes plays, comic strips, travelogues, short stories, and children’s book and additionally she is as an illustrator. Before entering in the area of literature, she joined the staff of Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest: a Battle Between Machine and Man*. *Harvest* (1997) *Lights Out* (1984) and *Hidden Fire*(1991), the Artists’ Model Sex tet and the Gujrathi Monologue, a collection of short stories (1996) Suki, a travel memoir like *Getting there* , a collection of short stories like *Death and Old Soup* and *Kleptomania*, *Escape* a book for children

*Muse Attack* (2008). Even after writing plays, Padmanabhan continued to contribute as an illustrator both independently and in collaboration. In dependently she produce „ I am different! Can you find me ? (2011), U n princess (2005), A Visit to City Market (1986) and with Tara Ali Baij , ndrani and the Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest: a Battle Between Machine and (wo)Man* *Harvest* (1997) *Lights Out*(1984) and *Hidden Fire*(1991), the Artists’ Model Sextet and the Gujrathi Monologue, a collection of short stories (1996) Suki, a travel memoir like *Getting there* , a collection of short stories like *Death and Old Soup* and *Kleptomania*, *Escape* a book for children *Muse Attack*(2008). Even after writing plays,Padmanabhan continued to contribute as an illustrator both independently and in collaboration. Independently she produce I am different! Can you find me? (2011), Unprincess(2005), A Visit to City Market (1986) and with Tara Ali Baij, Indrani and the *Enchanted Jungle* (1979) and with Maithily Jagannath, *Dropsy Dragonin* 1984. She also penned a comic strip as „Double Talk’(2007). Her comic female character Suki

was serialized in Sunday Observer. She also earned her name as a cartoonist and had a daily cartoon strip in The Pioneer..

Alienation and marginalization play a large role in her books. *Harvest* is a futuristic play about the sale of body parts and exploitative relations between developed and developing countries. It is being filmed by Govind Nihalani. Her short stories are marked by a wry sense of humour.

Padmanabhan's latest book, *Getting There* is a semi-autobiographical novel about a young woman illustrator in Bombay. She describes it as being "based loosely on events in the author's life between 1977 and '78. Almost none of it is entirely factual, but as a whole it is more true than false" Her cartoon strip, Suki, is also being published as a book in 2001, and her etchings are featured in their own exhibition in Delhi.

Manjula Padmanabhan was born in Delhi, grew up in Sweden, Pakistan and Thailand, and now lives in Delhi.

### **3 Characters of the Play:**

#### **Om Prakash:**

He is the main protagonist of the play. We see the character Om, signing up as an organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there are no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for donating an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as an organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guaranteed and certain, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

By seeing the financial situations of Om and his wife Jaya, we can appreciate money as a necessity to life. In this play, we see Om pretty much selling his life in order to obtain the top dollar for this family, well at least in India it was considered top dollar. Jaya was evidently distressed about Om's decision on signing himself to Ginni, because the family is already on an

off and on troubled relationship because Jaya is having a secret relationship with Om's younger brother Jeetu. Jeetu works as the prostitute mentioned earlier, Ma is Om's mother who also lives in the house who favors Om more so than the others.

It can be said that it was so easy for Om to be able to sign to Ginni because it shows how uncaring and what his body means to him, in order to get the riches. Kinda makes sense now why the title is *Harvest*, because our body is like food, we can harvest it whenever in cases we need it as Ginni had portrayed it in this play.

Om's insistence that his role in the selection procedure was entirely passive allows Padmanabhan to critique the liberal discourse of free will and choice that advocates organ markets on the basis of individual autonomy. She suggests that it is precisely this discourse which creates the economic structure of millennial capitalism in which the selling of organs becomes an

'option' for the disenfranchised third-world individual. As Om's final reaction makes clear, his judgement has been severely impaired by the lure of unlimited wealth. When the reality of what he has done hits him, he is terrified: 'How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?' (1997, p.234)

### **Jaya:**

Jaya appears as the last hope of emotional value in the film when a legal moral and bio-ethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome, when the trade in human organ is fully institutionalized and smoothly operated by the rapacious forces of global capitalism. She is 19 years old. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *The Narrative Reader* by Martin McQuillan, (2000). Therefore, by offering us the opinions of women about the ongoing rape, Padmanabhan re-directs the 'gaze' as emanating from men, towards a situation where it is elicited from women, the sympathetic observers. Secondly, by not directly showing the assault, Padmanabhan carefully avoids any titillation that such scenes may provide the audience or readers. The assault is occurring in the background (both backstage and at the back of our minds) and is able to keep the sense of unease alive and imminent. As such, rather than 'witness' the rape and experience a sense of 'escape' in the

immediacy of it, one is made to 'think' about it and its repercussions. There is no 'catharsis' offered here, but sheer irresolution, resting the burden of action on the spectator/audience's shoulders.

She is a very assertive female character, although women's resistance is not the central concern of this play. It is a dystopian play about the trade in human organs and the commodification of the third world body that such a trade is predicated upon. Here, it is through the character of Jaya that Padmanabhan voices a possible resistance. There are suggestions of a discord in her relationship with her husband. However, Jaya does not seem resigned to submit to her fate. She openly expresses herself in front her husband's brother Jeetu (with whom, it is suggested, she has been having a liaison): "What do you know of my needs, my desires? ..... A woman wants more than just satisfaction." (96). Although her illicit relationship with Jeetu is not condoned by the playwright, we are nevertheless given an insight into what miseries a woman's life can be reduced to, if she does not find a legitimate outlet for her sexual desires. It is not just direct interference with the woman's body, but also cultural dictates that can stifle her physical existence.

However, it is towards the end that we get a firm assertion by Jaya to be master of herself and her own body. When Virgil, an American man, tries to gain control over her body, so that he can make her bear his child, she refuses to negotiate with him. She is determined to lay down her own conditions. If Virgil wants her body, he must come to her in person. She insists, "I know Jaya resists Virgil's advances and retains her own dignity in one swift stroke. While Virgil weighs his options, Jaya threatens to reclaim her own body through suicide. One is reminded of the French feminist Helene Cixous' words about how a female physiology as a source of expression, can be empowering and enabling: "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse..." (Marks and Courtivron, 256). Jaya certainly uses her own body to write her own fate, if nothing else, and thus, to voice resistance. Donna Haraway, in 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' talks about how, in today's world of technological advancement, women can voice resistance through an analysis of their situation in inter-national migrations and the increasing rate of male unemployment. Padmanabhan takes the argument a step further by suggesting that a reaction to commodification of women's body might not necessarily lead to compromised situations like exploitative women-headed households but also to a more assertive control by the women over their body. For, even in the face of her husband's unemployment, and the consequent poverty in the family, Jaya refuses to 'migrate' to a foreign land and asserts her power through her control over her body.

**Ginni:**



She is the American woman who had paid Om to receive his organ through transplantation. Throughout the play the characters on stage are seen talking to the image of a beautiful woman called Ginni, the alleged buyer of Om's organs. The other main character is the module in the room which seems to have materialised from some futuristic thriller; Ginni (genie), the American lady, appears on it now and then like some Big Sister to see whether the Prakash family is following the rules. They lead antiseptic lives, eating multicoloured pills instead of food, not mixing with others, and God forbid, getting a cold.

Ginny is careful, however, to provide the donors with plenty of comforts to compensate them for their efforts. Ginny reminds the family that by pampering them so, she is only fulfilling her own contractual obligations. Ginny's casual sentence serves as a jolting and disturbing reminder that receivers and donors hardly trade in equivalents: Ginny provides 'things' for which the donors pay her back in their own lives. In fact, Ginny's continual gifts amount to little more than mere investment.

Her presence on the screen is invisible. She communicates with the donor family only through the contact module. She is thus never physically present on the stage, a fact that is highly significant because Padmanabhan's chosen genre – theatre – is explicitly concerned with a tangible, embodied and physical presence on stage. Yet throughout the play, Ginny is only ever visible in two-dimensions, on the screen of the contact module. The only embodied performers on the stage are the racially and visually distinct bodies of the third-world donors.

#### **4 Summary of Harvest:**

The play Harvest, with very apt title, describes how one such family fall victim to the flesh-market controlled by the Western world. An attempt made herein is to describe how the machine world governs the human world and how the playwright has cleverly used the electronic devices turning them into characters. There begins the play of machines and machine-like men (representatives of the machine world) instructing, commanding, interfering and grabbing the human lives. The entry of the Guards from the Interplaza services is the beginning of the machine era and end of the human era.

Manjula Padmanabhan in *Harvest* presents battle a war between machine and man for possession human beings have to wage in future if not learn to control machines. Where machine will succeed at the initial ground, but final victory will lie with a (wo) man. The play also shows the futuristic picture of the modern times where the machines will be replacing and distancing human beings gradually. The play warns through the character of Jaya how one has to govern the machines instead of being governed.

## **5 Analysis of the Play:**

*Harvest* is a play written by Manjula Padmanabhan focussing geographically on Mumbai, India. We see the character Om, signing up as a organ donor for Ginni who is an American woman simply because there is no more jobs in India. Ginni pays him to lead and live a healthy life, so when it is time for doning an organ, there is no difficulty or problem in doing so. This play feels nice in the beginning because it seems as after signing up as organ donor, leading a happy and healthy life is guranteed and certained, but what lies underneath is when Om and his small family starts to enjoy their new lifestyles, they also start to deny the consequences.

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The play is an ironic, sci-fi examination of the relations between developing and developed countries. Set in the imminent future "Harvest" imagines a grisly pact between the first and third worlds, in which desperate people can sell their body parts to wealthy clients in return for food, water, shelter and riches for themselves and their families. As such, it is a play about how the "first" world cannibalizes the "third" world to fulfill its own desires.

The story, centers on Om, who signs up to be an organ donor for an American woman named Ginni because there are no other jobs available for him in Mumbai. Ginni pays him to lead a "clean" and "healthy" life so she can harvest healthy organs whenever she needs them. Ginni begins to control every aspect of Om's life, from when and what he eats to whom he sees and how he uses the bathroom. In fact, Ginni comes to control the entire family until the end of the play, when Om's diseased brother, Jeetu, is taken to give organs instead of Om, and the recipient, Ginni, turns out to not be what she initially seemed. In a final act of defiance, the seeds of rebellion flower in a "checkmate" ploy by Om's wife, Jaya.

The author's vision of a post-apocalypse future is dark, but told with rich irony and humor. Themes of globalization abound. Director Benjamin Mosse says, "We are struck more and more by the loss of individualism because branding is becoming so universal. The first and third worlds are no longer geopolitical places, but economic zones. Om sells his body to the face of a corporation, which is indifferent to the fact that he is American or Indian."

"Harvest" won the Onassis Award for best new international play in 1997. It was selected out of 1,460 entries from 76 countries. It has been produced in Athens, Delhi, Swarthmore College and UC Berkeley. This is its New York professional premiere.

Playwright Manjula Padmanabhan is a Delhi-based writer and artist. Being both a cartoonist and socially-conscious playwright, she invites comparison with America's Jules Feiffer. Her books include "Hot Death, Cold Soup," a collection of short stories; "Getting There," a travel-memoir; "This is Suki!", a collection of her New Delhi strip SUKI; "Hidden Fires," a collection of five dramatic monologues; and "Kleptomania," a second collection of short stories. Her comic strips appeared weekly in the Sunday Observer (Bombay, 1982-86) and daily in the Pioneer (New Delhi, 1991-97). Padmanabhan has illustrated twenty-four books for children including her own two novels for children, "Mouse Attack" and "Mouse Invaders. Her most recent book is "Double Talk", a collection of the Bombay strip by the same name.

Manjula Padmanabhan's dystopian play *Harvest* (1997) examines the trade in human organs and the commoditization of the third world body that such a trade is predicated upon. Padmanabhan's

play, in which an unemployed Indian man sells the rights to his body parts to a buyer in the United States, pointedly critiques the commoditization of the healthy third-world body, which, thanks to significant advances in transplant medicine, has now become a bank of spare parts for ailing bodies in the first world.

Describing this phenomenon as a case of 'neo-cannibalism', anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1998, p.14) notes that wealthy but ailing patients in the first-world are increasingly turning to healthy if poverty-stricken populations of the third-world in order to procure 'spare' body parts. It is tempting, at first glance, to read this illicit global economy as yet another example of the exploitation of third-world bodies that global capitalism gives rise to. Scheper-Hughes herself suggests that the trade in human organs is best understood in the context of global capitalism when she points out that the global circuit of organs mirrors the circuit of capital flows in the era of globalisation: 'from South to North, from Third to First world, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white' (2002, p.197).

And yet, as I argue in my essay, the human organ cannot be equated with other objects produced in the third-world for first-world consumption because the organ is not a product of the *labouring* third-world body. Unlike the commodity exported from an exploitative third-world sweatshop, the organ is not *produced* by the third-world body but *extracted* from it. The organ's particular characteristic as a product that requires no labour in order to fetch a price provides the key to understanding why third-world populations are increasingly willing to be preyed upon by first-world organ buyers.

Many theorists writing about global capitalism today have pointed out that first-world economies are increasingly reliant not on production but consumption. The workforce of the first-world is ever more disengaged from industrial labour and manufacture either because, in the wake of technological advances, such labour is carried out by non-human means, or alternatively, because human labour is obtained elsewhere. In their drive to multiply profits, first-world economies rely on production sites where labour is 'cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminised and less protected by states and unions'.

Typically located in the third-world, such production sites displace human labour to remote geographical locations, allowing for industrial production to become increasingly less visible in the first-world. The first-world, on the other hand, sees a proliferation of service-economies, economies which rely on consumers to purchase increasingly non-material commodities.

Yet organ trade does not strictly correspond to this global economic pattern. The organ is indeed a material good originating in the third-world, but it is *not* the product of labour. It is, rather, a product that can be sold without the expenditure of labour, while promising to generate 'wealth without production, value without effort' (Comaroff and Comaroff, (p.313). Undreamt-of amounts of money with little to no labour: this is the

particular promise that organ sale extends to the impoverished and disenfranchised populations of the third-world. In order to understand the often irresistible lure of this promise, we must explore not the transformation in the conditions of capitalist production, but rather the transformation in the social imaginaries of the labouring poor.

Jean and John Comaroff theorise just this transformation. According to the Comaroffs, capitalism today presents itself to the labouring poor in a millennial, messianic form, advertising itself as 'a gospel of salvation; as a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalised and the disempowered' (p.292). Thus, the key to understanding millennial capitalism lies in the

particular brand of seduction upon which it operates. This seductiveness, they argue, is most visibly manifested in the unprecedented proliferation of 'occult economies' in the third-world (2000, p.312). The Comaroffs cite not just organ trade as an example of these occult economies, but also the sale of services such as fortune-telling, or the development of tourist industries based on the sighting of monsters (2000, p.310). Occult economies are characterised by the fact that they respond to the allure of 'accruing wealth

from nothing' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000, p.313). In other words, occult economies are animated by the same tendency that motivates wealth accruing actions like gambling

or speculation on the stock market. It is within this millennial context that we need to understand the decision of the organ-seller to embark on the sale of her organ and seek out the occult economy of the organs market. The organ-seller's voluntary decision is brought on by that set of contradictory emotions, hope and despair, that millennial capitalism and its occult economies unleash upon their targets. Despair, because the owner of a healthy organ is immiserated, poor and hopelessly excluded from capitalism's promise of global prosperity. Hope, because millennial capitalism's occult economies hold out the promise of a quick fix to this condition by presenting a new, quasimagical means of making enough money to overcome poverty.

*Making money.* This is the promise that the occult economy of organ trade extends to its objects: sell your organ and you will *make* more money than you will ever *earn* through years of toil and labour. The promise of millennial capitalism works because it allows the third-world individual to see her body as that which contains a natural 'spare' part, a naturally occurring surplus that is not the product of labour yet is still in high demand.

The third-world individual is thus seduced into selling the organs that her

body has a 'spare' of – a kidney, a cornea – in order to solve all her monetary problems. The organ hence emerges as a very peculiar kind of commodity: one that is not produced by a labouring human body, but rather extracted from it. What kind of commodity, then, is the organ? Indeed, is it a commodity at all? It is instructive to turn here to Karl Marx's discussion of a particular kind of commodity: one that has a use-value, and thus fulfils a need, yet no value, insofar as it is not the product of labour.<sup>1</sup> Marx's primary example of such a commodity, which he discusses in the third volume of *Capital*, is land. Marx recognises that there are various modes of production arising from land, but he chooses to focus on the particular case of agricultural production, where the farmer-capitalist leases a certain amount of land, and pays the owner of this land a fixed sum of money every month in the form of rent. Parenthetically, he adds that 'instead of agriculture, we might equally have taken mining, since the laws are the same' (1991, p.752). The phrase is suggestive, because both cases, agriculture and mining, involve the

extraction of something from the land. We might easily include the human body in the same category. In the scenario I explore here, the body, like land, is in the same category. In the scenario I explore here, the body, like land, is *mined* for its organs, and, as the title of the play I discuss below suggests, organs are removed, *harvested*, from the body

Marx's discussion of land as a commodity offers yet further insights into the trade in human body parts. In *Capital III*, he explicitly states that to speak of land as having value is '*prima facie* irrational, since the earth is not a product of labour, and thus does not have a value' ( p.760). And yet, as Marx recognises, the fact remains that land has a price, a money sum for which it can be exchanged. We might add here that the organ, too, fetches a price without being a product of labour. From whence then, does this price originate? To this question Marx provides a very definitive answer:

The prices of things that have no value in and of themselves – either not being products of labour, like land, or which cannot be reproduced by labour [...] – may be determined by quite fortuitous combinations of circumstances. *For a thing to be sold, it simply has to be capable of being monopolised and alienated* (1991, p.772,

Capitalist production, argues Marx, develops precisely by virtue of its ability to monopolise and alienate the special, natural properties of use-values without value, such as land. Thus, the sale of land might appear, superficially, to be similar to the sale of a



produced commodity. However, they have different theoretical statuses (p.28). As Duncan Foley explains:

If we want to understand value relations in commodity production, we should centre our attention first of all on conditions of production, on factors such as labour productivity. *If we want to understand value relations involving nonproduced things, we should look, not to production, but to the rights involved in ownership of these things and to the bargaining positions these rights give to their possessors* (28-9,)

It is thanks to the social phenomenon of *landed property* that land is able to command a fixed, agreed-upon money-sum, in the form of rent if the land is leased, and in the form of a price if it is sold. The legal notion of landed property effectively alienates certain portions of land and decrees them as the exclusive possession of a given individual. As Marx puts it:

[T]he legal conception [of private property] itself means nothing more than that the landowner can behave in relation to the land just as any commodity owner can with his commodities (1991, p.753).

Landed property thus renders land into an alienable, monopolisable good in the possession of a given individual who can now sell it.

As the work of Lawrence Cohen (2002) shows us, the organ, too, has been rendered alienable. Cohen argues that biomedical advances in transplant medicine have led to the possibility not just of extracting and

transferring an organ from one person to another: more importantly, these advances have created a much larger pool of both potentially useful organs and compatible recipients alike. This ‘fortuitous combination of circumstances’, to quote Marx (1991, p.772), results from the development of highly effective immunosuppressant drugs such as cyclosporine. The development of cyclosporine, Cohen states, effectively means that patients awaiting kidney transplants are no longer dependent on kidneys that match their own tissue types (2002). Theoretically, then, it is highly probable that anyone wishing to sell their ‘spare’ organ will easily find a buyer for it, for immunosuppressant drugs greatly reduce the chances that the organ will be rejected by its new owner. The arrival of cyclosporine, as Cohen puts it, ‘[has] allow[ed] specific subpopulations to become “same enough” for their members to be surgically disaggregated and their parts reincorporated’ (12).

If, as Marx says, a thing needs merely to be monopolisable and alienable in order to be sold, then the global black market in organs shows that this process is well underway in the case of body parts.<sup>2</sup> Much more fraught, however, is the question of what it means to own one’s body and the organs that comprise it. Land ceases to be a free resource for all once a given state espouses the notion of private property upon which capitalism is founded. An organ, however, is always the possession of a given individual, who, theoretically speaking, is therefore entitled to sell it, should she so choose. And yet the legislation adopted by most nations of the world, explicitly prohibiting the trade in human body parts, proves otherwise.

Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell argue that if, along with the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, no country in Western Europe has as yet legalised the sale and purchase of human body tissues, this is due to the fact that most politicians and bioethicists in these countries uphold the human body as ‘the locus of absolute dignity [...] [This] [d]ignity is destroyed if any part of the body is assigned a market value and rendered alienable’ (2006, p.19). Citing Paul Rabinow, Waldby and Mitchell explain that such an understanding of dignity as an inalienable human right is derived from Kant’s distinction between dignity and price:

In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity.(19) The most trenchant critiques of the commoditization, be it illicit or legalised, of human body parts, spring from a similar conception of the dignity of the human body. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) describes organ market proposals as being founded upon utilitarian and neo-liberal principals that consistently undermine the fundamental dignity of the human body.

Furthermore, these libertarian arguments emphasize the right of every individual to choose whether or not to sell what she owns. However, as Scheper-Hughes points out, the very idea of choice becomes problematic in most third-world contexts:

Bio-ethical arguments about the right to sell are based on Euro- American notions of contract and individual ‘choice’. But social and economic contexts make the ‘choice’ to sell a kidney in an urban slum of Calcutta or in a Brazilian favela anything but a ‘free’ and ‘autonomous’ one.

The remainder of this essay discusses *Harvest*, a play which, can be argued, launches a scathing critique of the organs market and of the global, predatory capitalism that results in the commoditization of the third-world body. Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan’s 1997 play confronts us with a futuristic Bombay of the year 2010, a time when legal, moral and bioethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome. The trade in human organs is now fully institutionalised and smoothly operated by the entity embodying all the rapacious forces of global capitalism: a transnational corporation

named Interplanta Services. The cast, Padmanabhan's stage directions tell us, is divided into two main groups consisting of Third World donors and First World receivers.

Although Padmanabhan chooses, 'for the sake of coherence', to make the donors Indian and the receivers North American, her stage directions emphasize that :

the donors and receivers should take on the racial identities,

names, costumes and accents most suited to the location of

production. It matters only that there be a highly recognisable

distinction between the two groups, reflected in speech,

clothing and appearance (1997, p. 217).

The play's futuristic setting allows Padmanabhan to deploy a series of sci-fi gadgets on stage. Their purpose, I argue, is to alert us to the crucial role that technology plays in both seducing and policing the third-world donors into submission. It is thanks to one such sci-fi gadget that we see the first-world receiver and organ purchaser Ginny, whose body is never present on stage, but visible only on a screen suspended from the ceiling. The four Indian donors belong to the same household: Om; his wife Jaya; Om's mother, referred to simply as Ma; and Om's younger brother, Jeetu. While Padmanabhan uses her donor characters to interrogate the particular circumstances that make the option of selling one's body parts so seductive, ultimately, I contend, she upholds the Kantian idea of human dignity which views the selling of one's body parts as a violation of human integrity. When the play opens, Jaya and her mother-in-law are impatiently waiting for Om's return from his job interview. Both are fretful: Ma fervently hopes that Om will get the job; Jaya, knowing what the job entails, hopes that he will not. But Om returns to announce that he has indeed been selected for the 'job' at Interplanta Services. Having passed the medical tests at Interplanta, he has been decreed an eligible, healthy candidate for selling the rights to his entire body to an anonymous buyer in the United States. His confused feelings about signing such a contract allow Padmanabhan to portray the complex mixture of

hope and despair that has motivated his actions. At first, he verges on the ecstatic: ‘We’ll have more money than you and I have names for!’ he says to Ma, proudly. ‘Who’d believe there’s so much money in the world?’ (1997, p.219). When his wife expresses her reservations for what he has done, he becomes defensive:

You think I did it lightly. But [...] we’ll be *rich*! Very rich!

Insanely rich! But you’d rather live in this one small room, I suppose! Think it’s such a fine thing – living day in, day out, like monkeys in a hot-case – lulled to sleep by our neighbours’ rhythmic farting! [...] And starving (1997, p.223).

When Jaya accuses him of making the wrong choice, he is adamant that his decision was not made of his own free will:

Om: I went because I lost my job at the company. And why did

I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks

anymore! There are no new jobs now – there’s nothing *left* for people like us! Don’t you know that?

Jaya: You’re wrong, there are choices – there must be choices –

Om: Huh! I didn’t choose. I stood in queue and was chosen!

And if not this queue, there would have been other queues – (238)

Om’s insistence that his role in the selection procedure was entirely passive allows Padmanabhan to critique the liberal discourse of free will and choice that advocates organ markets on the basis of individual autonomy. She suggests that it is precisely this discourse which creates the economic structure of millennial capitalism in which the selling of organs becomes an ‘option’

for the disenfranchised third-world individual. As Om's final reaction makes clear, his judgement has been severely impaired by the lure of unlimited wealth. When the reality of what he has done hits him, he is terrified: 'How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I?' (1997, p.234)

Om's mother, however, expresses no such regret. Upon first hearing her son's promises of unimaginable riches, Ma is mystified: 'What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?' (1997, p.220). As she begins to understand what Om's 'job' entails, she resumes her queries as though she cannot believe their good fortune: 'Tell me again: all you have to do is sit at home and stay healthy? [...] And they'll pay you? [...] Even if you do nothing but pick your nose all day?' (1997, p.222). By showing Ma's continued amazement at the fact that her son will be paid to do absolutely nothing, Padmanabhan is able to depict the extent to which the forces of millennial capitalism appear to provide a quasi-magical means of making money.

By Act II of the play, Ma has become completely addicted to their new life of luxury.

The family household is littered with an array of gadgets that Ginny has provided in order to entertain the donors and keep them comfortable, and Ma spends most of her time compulsively watching television on the interactive set that Ginny has sent them. She becomes the perfect recipient of Ginny's gifts as she dismisses Om's compunction and increasingly seeks to escape the reality of her life in Bombay through technological devices. By the end of the play, she has locked herself away into what Padmanabhan terms a VideoCouch, a capsule into which Ma can plug herself, watch one of 150 television channels, and not worry about food or digestion because the unit is entirely self-sufficient. The comforts with which Ginny so willingly provides her seduce Ma into an amazed contentment at their sudden reversal of fortunes. Surrendering to the joys of technologically-induced bliss, Ma is thrilled that, for literally performing no labour at all, 'they will be rich for ever and ever' (1997, p.235).

Not all the high-tech devices that Ginny delivers to the donors are designed to pamper the body, however. In the very first scene of the play, shortly after Om's return with a new 'job', representatives of Interplanta Services, his new employers, barge into the donors' home to install a series of gadgets. As Om, Jaya and Ma watch, they dismantle the family's rudimentary kitchen and replace it with their own cooking device and jars

containing multi-coloured food pellets. They then install a Contact Module, a device that hangs from the ceiling and which looks, Padmanabhan tells us, like a 'white, faceted globe' (1997, p.221). Each time the device springs to life, Ginny, the American who has purchased Om's body, is able to make contact with the donor family. I wish to dwell at length on the sci-fi gadget that is the contact module. What interactions between the donors and the receiver does the contact module permit? And what does this device allow Padmanabhan to achieve on stage?

Let us begin with this latter question. Ginny communicates with the donor family only through the contact module. She is thus never physically present on the stage, a fact that is highly significant because Padmanabhan's chosen genre – theatre – is explicitly concerned with a tangible, embodied and physical presence on stage. Yet throughout the play, Ginny is only ever visible in two-dimensions, on the screen of the contact module. The only embodied performers on the stage are the racially and visually distinct bodies of the third-world donors. Thus, the audience has no choice but to gaze on a body whose sheer presence on stage challenges the supposed remoteness of the labouring and now cannibalised body, the very body that capitalist production in the era of globalisation has displaced into the remote third-world. Furthermore, the contact-module allows Padmanabhan to establish a structure of gazing and surveillance that mirrors the role of the audience. For, like the receiver, the audience too, gazes at the only physical bodies on stage: the donors. The audience is thus impelled into an uncomfortable identification with the receiver, the very entity who is responsible for the objectification of third-world bodies that the play so overtly criticises.<sup>3</sup> Keeping the first-world receiver's body remote serves a second purpose. It allows Padmanabhan to signal to the profound tensions underlying the predatory relationship between donors and receivers. The donor's hitherto healthy body harbours, on the one hand, the possibility of prolonging the ailing receiver's life. Yet, on the other hand, the third-world body produces in its new owner, the first-world receiver, a profound anxiety.

For like the receiver's own body, the donor's body too is vulnerable to the Encroachment of disease and degeneration that must be kept at bay at all costs. Firstly, then, the contact module enables Ginny to intervene in the donor world without having to set foot in the geographical location that the donors inhabit. Nor would she want it any other way. She has purchased the

rights to Om's organs in order to fend off disease and death and has no intention of risking a visit to their unhygienic dwellings. Secondly, the contact module allows Ginny to police the daily habits of the donors in order to ensure that the organs that will one day be hers remain healthy too.

Thus, realising, after the first visit, that Om's family shares a toilet with forty other families, Ginny reacts with horror. 'It's wrong', she exclaims. 'It's disgusting! And I – well, I'm going to change that. I can't accept that. I mean, it's unsanitary!' (1997, p.225). Accordingly, Interplanta is commissioned to install a toilet in their home that very same day.

The regular monitoring that the contact module permits is rendered even more effective given that only the receiver is able to operate it at will. Om's family never knows when Ginny will 'visit' them next. By the opening of Act II of the play, we see how well her strategy is working. Two months have elapsed, and Om is panicking because they are late for lunch.

(Lunch, of course, consists of the multi-coloured nutritional pellets provided for them by Interplanta Services.) 'You know how [Ginny] hates it when we're late to eat', Om says, worriedly (1997, p.228). The contact module thus allows the receiver to establish a permanent structure of surveillance in Om's home. Fearing Ginny's rebuke, or worse, a revoking of his contract,

Om urges his entire family to police their own behaviour. The contact module inculcates self-discipline, rendering the donors' bodies into perfect sites of 'docility-utility', optimal sites, in other words, from which to extract the healthiest possible organ (135-169).

Ginny is careful, however, to provide the donors with plenty of comforts to compensate them for their efforts. When the curtain lifts for Act II of the play, the stage reveals that, a mere two months later, the donors' household is fully equipped with an air-conditioning



unit, a mini-gym and a gleaming, fully-equipped kitchen (1997, p.227). Ginny reminds the family that by pampering them so, she is only fulfilling her own contractual obligations: 'I get to give you things you'd never get in your lifetime, and you get to give me, well... maybe my life' (1997, p.230). Ginny's casual sentence serves as a jolting and disturbing reminder that receivers and donors hardly trade in equivalents: Ginny provides 'things' for which the donors pay her back in their own lives. In fact, Ginny's continual gifts amount to little more than mere investment. As she says to the family, warping the pronunciation of Om's name: The Most Important Thing is to keep Auwm smiling. Coz if Auwm's smiling, it means his body is smiling and if his body is smiling it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best, smiling organs... (1997, p.229)

Reading the receiver's actions as an investment permits us to return, once again, to the parallels between the human body and land that the play's title, *Harvest*, alludes to. The term effectively assimilates the whole human body, from which the part is extracted, to a crop-producing plot of land, and thus, by extension, to the possibility that land harbours of generating life. The extractable human body part is accordingly assimilated to the yield or crop; this is the commodity with genuine use-value, the part that it is profitable to detach from the whole. In order to obtain the best possible harvest, as Ginny is well-aware, one must not only select the best possible site in which to invest: one must maintain a continued investment in this site. Quality input will produce quality output: namely, a healthy harvest.

While Virgil weighs his options, Jaya threatens (promises?) to reclaim her own body through suicide. Padmanabhan thus leaves us to ponder a sobering question: is a victory that requires the death of the exploited target of millennial capitalism really worthy of being termed an act of resistance?

*Harvest* poses a potent critique of the first-world's exploitation of third-world bodies for the commodities of labour-power and, as the recently emerged trade in organs shows, health. Should third-world individuals resist such commoditization? Indeed, can they? While opponents of organ markets embrace human dignity as an inalienable right that no individual should have to

relinquish, the black market in human organs continues to be the only solution for those who have no other assets to sell. In this context, Padmanabhan's notion of 'winning by losing' seems a disturbingly apt way to define the third-world individual's predicament: lose your own body-part to win the cash.

avoid"(Wandor,1993,55).

### **Chapterwise description of Harvest:**

Manjula Pabmanabhan's *Harvest* is important in the canon of Feminist Theatre as they encapsulate what Helen Keyssar describes as,

Productions of scripts characterized by the consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performance ( written and acted) that deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power, scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition; and the creation of women in the subject position (Keyssar,1996,1).

The main theme of *Harvest* is about organ transplant and it's abuse, the subtext focuses on how women are treated as possessions of men who harvest future generations from their bodies but refuse the same women even a modicum of autonomy in life.

The play shows how feminist playwrights like Padmanabhan have not only used innovative techniques but have also adapted some conventions of the proscenium to effectively establish their agenda. This paper also makes an effort to illustrate how certain aspects of language have been adapted to enhance characterizations and how techniques as diverse as realism, social gest and alienation effect have been yoked together for this purpose.

Like other feminist plays *Harvest* start *media res*, at a point where a crucial decision has to be taken. *Light's Out* is set in the affluent upper floor apartment of Leela and Bhaskar. The first scene establishes the fact that Leela is traumatized by the disturbing activities and cries for help emanating from the neighboring building. Her disheveled appearance and tense words are proof of her fear which she describes as a shawl wrapped around her shoulders. As soon as she sees her husband Bhaskar her first words are to find out whether he has informed the police about the disturbance which has been going on for sometime. In total contrast , Bhaskar is relaxed and

interested only on unwinding. He asks their servant, Frieda, for his evening tea as he starts reading the newspaper and casually informs Leela that he had forgotten to call the police. Leela gets very agitated at his words and attitude as she had been able to convince him only after a lot of arguments. But her agitation and anger have no effect on her husband who tells her to relax with some Yoga. The first scene of *Harvest* shows Jaya waiting anxiously for her husband Om. She keeps looking out of the window with worry written large on her face. Her anxiety is better understood when we realize that the job that they are hoping for is of selling his organs. Om decides to do this in spite of Jaya not agreeing to it. He even makes her promise not to tell his mother about it. The playwright shows the limbo that the two women are in. They have no autonomy or deciding power in their own homes and are prime examples of, in psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller's words, "the submissive group" (qtd. in Roy, 1999, 42). They are bogged down by female passivity, inability to act, to decide and to think. The women show a reluctance to voice their disagreement and frustration strongly. Their sentences are, at this point, hesitant, broken and incomplete, ex. Leela's "Did you.....do it?" Oh.....Bhaskar", and Jaya's "what they say in their room—none of your business"

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Padmanabhan's plays are realistic in style and content. They are realistic to the extent that they portray the lives of common people through incidents dramatized in a believable manner but realism in the conventional sense is circumvented by the fact that the issues discussed are totally women centric and told from their point of view. In *Light's Out* the reactions of women to rape i.e of repugnance and horror at the crime, are given cognizance and all other attempts to treat it differently are rejected. *Harvest* puts the spot light on the effect of organ sale on women and their struggle to mitigate the repercussions. Recognizable settings, characters and events re-accentuate the newness of the material on stage. It is typified by juxtaposing and maintain continuity of incidents from scene to scene and references to popular culture like newspaper reading, tea, gossip sessions, job hunting, cooking and childcare. This makes the audience forget the difference between the stage and themselves and end up caring about it as much as their own lives. This, according to Michelene Wandor,

“though disguises the construction of the world and makes it appear seamless and natural and hence appropriate, it puts ordinary and working class people at ease and makes them more receptive to political and social ideas and behaviours that they may otherwise avoid”(Wandor,1993,55).

none of your business”. As Cixous says,

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away- that's how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak even just open her mouth in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that speaks in the masculine ( Cixous,1997,351).

The dramatization of their helplessness serves the dual purpose of creating empathy of shared experience with the women in the audience as well as emphasize their future transformation more effectively.

Naming is a powerful ideological tool. It is also an accurate pointer to the ideology of the namer. Different names for an object represent different ways of perceiving it. An example from another area of violence illustrates this; how do you refer to a person who seeks political aims using aggression? Is s/he a terrorist, guerilla freedom fighter, rebel or resistance fighter?

Different connotations of legitimacy and approval are carried by these labels. The naming of the assault and its participants as those of religion also works in giving it a positive hue( Clark,1998,184).

Padmanabhan goes a step further to show how this process, appropriated for countless ages by men, becomes a double edged sword in their hands. When the women refuse to be distracted from their conviction of going to the police the men change tracks and say that even if they accept that the incidents may have sexual overtones it cannot be rape as the women being tortured seem to be cheap “whores”(40). In their opinion prostitutes who sell themselves have no right over their bodies and so cannot be raped and only decent women can be raped. Kate Clark, studying the reports by the newspaper *The Sun* on male physical violence against women, describes how the messages that a popular newspaper engenders in it’s reporting of such crimes are critical. *The Sun* refers to attackers of wives, brides, housewife etc. as fiends and monsters, but where the attacks were on blondes,unmarried women, Lolitas ( in *Sun* language, a sexually active underage girl)the attackers were named sympathetically or in terms of normality (184).

*Harvest* however presents an empowering scenario of the naming process. Throughout the duration of the play, Virgil, the foreigner buying Jaya’s husband’s organs , persists in pronouncing her name as “zhaya”. But at the end of the play when Jaya finally meets him and realizes that it is in her power to decide the further implementation of his plans she refuses to go any further until he pronounces her name properly. In the face of her adamancy he is forced to bow to her wishes and says it correctly. “zhaya”. But at the end of the play when Jaya finally meets him and realizes that it is in her power to decide the further implementation of his plans she refuses to go any further until he pronounces her name properly. In the face of her adamancy he is forced to bow to her wishes and says it correctly.

Silence is the other aspect of language that is prominent in these plays. It is a well documented fact that society’s linguistic registers like religion, political rhetoric, legal discourse, science and literature of mass reach like poetry and theatre lack contributions by women. While women’s silence in the public sphere can be explained to a certain extent by their subordinate position relative to men, silence in everyday life is a little more complicated. Gal, in her essay on problems in the connection between language and gender, notes that silence has more meanings than just powerlessness. She gives instances like confession to a priest, therapist or an officer of

law, where silence is a strategy of resistance to the oppressive power. Conversely it can be a weapon used by the powerful, seen in such phrases as “strong silent type”. The power comes from emotional distance or unavailability and this kind of behavior is usually seen only in men (426). It is interesting that all the above manifestations of silence, powerlessness (Frieda), power (male characters) and subversion (Naina, Jaya) can be observed in these plays. Padmanabhan uses it further as a route to escapism when the world becomes too hard to handle for the women living in it.

Padmanabhan does not shy away from using strong language. The female characters mouth bold words like arse, pimping rascal and wetting yourself without any inhibition. The dialogues, hard as shrapnel, do not allow any margin for the sensibilities of the audience. The playwright uses a language with no circumlocution and adopts a language of power/men.

In *Harvest* there is a scene where one of the neighbours, Bidyut Bai, after using the freshly installed toilet in Jaya’s house, tries to leave the place as inconspicuously as possible. When Om stops her and asks her as to who invited her in, she tries to feign ignorance about the entire thing. So also when there is a discussion about going abroad and Om tells his mother that no one travels abroad nowadays because of poverty, Jaya says “not whole people anyway”. Ma understands this as “knot-hole people”, or dwarfs, in her language. This kind of levity provides a break in the otherwise serious atmosphere and by bringing down their defenses it aids in making the people in the audience more receptive to the ideas of the playwright.

Research has shown that Brechtian techniques apply well to Feminist Theatre as they provide ample scope to isolate and address issues and bring out the ideology behind the theatrical endeavour clearly. Janelle Reinelt has found that “Brechtian Techniques, in particular, social gest and alienation effect, provided the means to reveal natural relations as the basis of social reality, to foreground and examine ideologically determined beliefs and unconscious habitual beliefs and perceptions and to make visible those signs inscribed on the body which distinguish social behaviours in relation to class, gender, and history....(they) offer a way to examine the material conditions of gender behavior( how they are internalized, opposed and changed) and their interaction with other socio-political factors such as class”(154). This study shows that these techniques have been used ably by Padmanabhan in her plays which problematize both gender and class. Social gest and alienation effect work well for Feminist Theatre as they stimulate the

audience to participate in the action on stage by thinking about the problems. Social gest is the gest that is relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn about social circumstances. This makes it the right platform to expose the various kinds of challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society and which demand validation. Four such gests that have been studied in this paper.

## I

When Naina, brushing aside the objections of the men, looks out of the window to ascertain for herself what actually is happening, she is horrified to see three men holding down a woman while the fourth violates her mercilessly. The sight of this extreme torture shocks her into inarticulateness. Saying “some one’s being……They’re- they’re” she starts retching. This gest is very important because while it underlines the horror and revulsion that Naina feels for the crime it also gives a hint to the reaction that the playwright hopes to provoke in the spectator. The gest works to shock the spectator into stepping back and analyzing about all the horrific stories s/he reads and hears about instead of passively slotting it away as another statistic in the everyday hurly burly of life.

## II

The vignette where Leela is seen collecting arms for a retaliatory attack. In a matter of minutes she arranges for acid and knives. There is an expression of glee on her face as she does this. Leela is a woman who is caught between her abject fear and the denial of autonomy to find a solution to the circumstances responsible for those fears. Given the total invalidation of her wishes by her husband, Surinder’s idea of a violent response gives her a sense of validation. The scene dramatizes and warns society about the reactions one can expect from women who are continually denied a voice.

## III

The gest which underlines the effects of the vice like grip of poverty and patriarchy is where Jaya angrily wipes off the kum-kum mark on her forehead saying “ my forehead burns, when I say the word sister”, when she comes to know that Om, without her knowledge, has declared her as his sister to the company employing him to donate his organs. Om does this to circumvent the

precondition of the company that the donor has to be unmarried. This gesture, usually associated with widowhood, is useful in making the audience critique the mental anguish of Jaya who does this when her husband is still alive. For Jaya the word 'sister' being used in connection to herself and Om is like a death knell to her marital relationship. Her actions create an empathy in the audience as it is on the basis of this relationship, a large part of her identity, that Jaya is living in that home. The pain that this distortion of relationships causes is reinforced when Ma says " But these aren't words! They are people". The word 'sister' negates the very foundation of her life and so the gest forms a point of enquiry into the circumstances forcing Om to take such a decision. For a person like Om, unemployed and struggling to provide two square meals to his family, calling his wife 'sister' on paper is a small price to pay if it ensures financial solvency. The gest problematizes the desperate situation in modern day society which forces a man to choose between being cut up/ dying one day at a time and abject poverty.

#### IV

The gest which encapsulates the joy of having the autonomy to decide the course of one's own life comes at the end of *Harvest*. It is interesting to note that it comes at a point of direct confrontation and when Jaya's life seems to be at stake. Jaya comes to know that she has been the actual target of the organ buyer, Virgil, and that after using the bodies of both Om and Jeeten, he is now intent on impregnating her with his seed mechanically to propagate his race, irrespective of her wishes. Once she realizes his designs, she locks herself in a room and counters his threats with her own conditions. Knowing fully well that she is the most important factor for the implementation of his plans she tells him that she will agree to conceive his child only if he comes to her and goes through the natural process of conjugation and that she will commit suicide if any other means is forced upon her. Saying " This game is over! Either you have to erase me and start again or.....You must accept a new set of rules", she settles down in front of the T.V to wait for him. She tells him that she does not want to be disturbed anymore and that she is going to enjoy herself for the first time in her life, eating for three and taking three baths a day. As she does this, joyous music fills the stage to signify her moment of empowerment. Everybody in the audience would have gone through a situation of intense dilemma and the relief that comes with the decision to face the consequences, good or bad, of one's actions and beliefs. So the gest connects the audience to the character and her struggle for control over her body and



wishes. Jaya's empowerment comes from the fact that she is ready to win by losing. She is willing to go through the agreement but on her terms.

One's understanding of the alienation effect, an important Brechtian Technique, is that it prevents the audience from involving itself totally in the action on stage and remaining as passive observers. It is a device to create a critical audience separated mentally from the character on stage. Alienation effect or *Verfremdungseffekt* is a tool to enable the audience to analyze the problem being presented rather than become emotionally involved in the story of the characters. This could be in the form of props, songs, direct interaction by the actors with the audience etc.

In *Harvest*, a fictitious atmosphere is created by the presence of a white faceted globe which looks like a Japanese Lantern, which lights up, moves in slow circles and also vertically. Throughout the play the characters on stage are seen talking to the image of a beautiful woman called Ginni, the alleged buyer of Om's organs. The movement of the globe creates a disconnect in the realistic aspect of the play. It also draws the attention of the audience towards the illusory nature of economics which society sees as the basis of success. It lights up the irony that the people who have the money to buy organs are dependent on those very sellers for their existence. By breaking the wall of suspension of disbelief, intrinsic to realism, this dramatic technique makes it possible for the audience to question the effects of poverty on man. When Jaya realizes that Ginni is actually only an animated front of an old man called Virgil she strikes the globe to break it. This act shatters any acceptance of the globe as an intrinsic element of the play and pushes the person watching the play out of the comfort zone of his own life into thinking about people like Om, living desperate lives, where relationships, ethics and even basic humanity are forgotten in the struggle for survival. The shattering also brings into focus, quite strongly, the strength of Jaya who holds onto her dignity and humaneness in spite of all the trauma and disillusionment that she faces. The loud sound and jagged light forces the audience to ask, is Jaya (as her name suggests) victorious over the forces trying to exploit her? The lighted, flickering globe moving around on the stage creates an eerie but contrived atmosphere and this ambience negates any notions of the play being only a piece of evening entertainment and refuses to absolve the audience of active participation. The end of the play where images are created out of thin air, the shattering of the globe along with the guards shouting for Jaya to open

the door are enough to disturb the complacency of the spectator and provoke him/her into thinking of some kind of intervention to the chaos on stage. It forces the spectator to imagine her/himself in Jaya's shoes and taste for a brief moment her desperation.

## **6 Theme of the play:**

### **Harvest and the Evils of Globalization:**

Globalization is evil because it does not foster the humanity of things in the world. What it drives towards is for the greater benefit of the developed or the First World countries. Khor (2005:1) opines that: The reasons for the changing perception of and attitude towards globalization are many. Among the important factors is the lack of tangible benefits to most developing countries from opening their economies, despite the well-publicized claims of export and income gains.... The economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid financial and trade liberalization, the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social and cultural problems have been made worse by the workings of the global free-market economy and the soaring degree of attack by elements of terrorism are some of what have characterized globalization today. It means developing nations have faced more problems than ever as a result of the phenomenon of globalization.

### **Neocolonial intervention**

It is into this world of disorder that Inter Planta Services brings apparent order and respectability. Om is hired to donate the healthy organs of his body when required by the receiver. There occurs a radical change to their dingy room and it acquires an air of sophistication. The most important installation however, is the contact module placed at the centre of the room to facilitate communication between the receiver and the donor. The contact module and the apparent order brought in by Inter Planta seem to create turmoil in personal relationships. Since Inter Planta needs only the services of the bachelors, Om is forced to conceal the fact that he is married and hence Jaya masquerades as his sister. Om and

his family members appear to be unable to question the complete hijacking of their personal lives by Inter Planta. It is worth noting that while the receiver can see Om, his family members and all other aspects of his life, the donor Om, gets to see only the face of the receiver and her sugary voice (that too deceptive). The donor and his family is kept under the constant gaze of the receiver as the module can rotate round to face each corner and can flicker to life at any moment. Ginni (Virgil) informs Jaya that the contact module had spied on them, “Always I listened in to you, Zhaya. I heard every word in the room- even when the Module was off, it recorded.” (*Harvest* 94).

### **Constant gaze of colonizer**

The contact module thus seems to become a sort of demigod. It does not fail to remind Om that the slightest trace of dishonesty on his part can be detected. It induces a feeling of helplessness in the family. They are powerless to resist even as it begins to encroach upon their private lives. “Every sneeze, every belch” (*Harvest* 94) is noticed. The situation becomes unbearable when Ginni demands an accurate report of every sneeze and every smile. She compares Om’s flat to a “human goldfish bowl” (*Harvest* 43) which she can observe and amuse herself with.

### **Panopticon**

To this vision of powerlessness, we could associate Jeremy Bentham’s concept of ‘Panopticon’ as “a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind”. French philosopher Michael Foucault looks at this as the paradigm of a sophisticated mechanism of observation and surveillance, as the ultimate surveillance system. This architectural Panopticon is a circular edifice with a tower at the centre that ensures constant observation of the inmates in the isolated cells of the outer ring, by a supervisor in the tower at the centre. The supervisor remains invisible to the inmates. The concept of the design is to allow a watchman to observe (*-opticon*) all (*pan-*) inmates of an institution without their being able to tell whether they are being watched or not. Bentham himself described the Panopticon as “a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example.” Foucault terms this system of observation which renders the invisible power at the centre as ‘panoptic’. This could be read along with Antonio Gramsci’s concept of ‘Cultural Hegemony’ (control through consensus). Contemporary social critics often assert that technology has allowed for the operation of panoptic structures invisibly

throughout society. The Panopticon creates a consciousness of permanent visibility as a form of power, where no bars, chains, and heavy locks are necessary for domination any more. Manjula Padmanabhan's living room is reminiscent of the panoptic mechanism.

### **Panoptic power relation in family**

The victory of panoptic surveillance technique is evident when Om discourages Jaya's decision to nurse Jeetu back to health after Jeetu's return to home from a miserable existence on the pavements. Om sees this as a display of sentimentality, a weakness which he knows Ginni will disapprove of. It is apparent that Om is prepared to renounce familial ties even without Ginni asking him to do so. Michel Foucault described the implications of 'Panopticism' in his 1975 work *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* – “the major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power”. Om is, without his conscious knowledge, being made the tool for power. A miniature version of the panoptic system can be perceived in Om's mother's total absorption in the fantasy world. She willingly shuts herself off from all outward manifestations of life. She is unmoved even as she sees her son Jeetu being taken away by the guards for an organ transplant by mistake. The Super Deluxe Video Couch she orders for herself is representative of her self-imposed withdrawal. Om's mother's renunciation of the world is complete, unhesitating and unquestioning. She chooses for herself electronic annihilation. Jeetu in turn is also not able to resist the phony allurements offered by the screen image of Ginni, who is latter described as nothing but a “computer- animated wet dream” (Harvest 95). Actually the receiver was an old man, Virgil, who had deliberately misled Om Prakash and his family, by projecting animated image of the seductive and lovely Ginny. Jeetu donates his organs willingly and is destroyed.

Amongst all these characters, the only one who is able to resist the inhuman situation is Jaya. She realizes that she has lost every member of her family- Om Prakash, her husband; Ma, her mother-in-law; and Jeetu, her brother-in-law. Now it's her turn, but she decides enough is enough, and says that if she is pushed against her will, she will kill herself, as she has nothing to lose, but in the process she will defeat the designs of the rich receiver. It is evident that she cannot resist the first world power structure through nothing but death, when she says,

“I’ve discovered a new definition for winning, winning by losing. I win if you lose. (Harvest 100)... If you want to play games with people, you should be careful not to push them off the board. You pushed me too far. Now there’s nothing left for me to lose.(Harvest 101)... I am not willing to caretake my body for your sake! The only thing I have left which is still mine is death. My death and my pride.” (*Harvest* 101).

Silence:

Silence is the other aspect of language that is prominent in these plays. It is a well documented fact that society’s linguistic registers like religion, political rhetoric, legal discourse, science and literature of mass reach like poetry and theatre lack contributions by women. While women’s silence in the public sphere can be explained to a certain extent by their subordinate position relative to men, silence in everyday life is a little more complicated. Gal, in her essay on problems in the connection between language and gender, notes that silence has more meanings than just powerlessness. She gives instances like confession to a priest, therapist or an officer of law, where silence is a strategy of resistance to the oppressive power. Conversely it can be a weapon used by the powerful, seen in such phrases as “strong silent type”. The power comes from emotional distance or unavailability and this kind of behavior is usually seen only in men (426). It is interesting that all the above manifestations of silence, powerlessness (Frieda), power (male characters) and subversion (Naina, Jaya) can be observed in these plays. Padmanabhan uses it further as a route to escapism when the world becomes too hard to handle for the women living in it. Productions of scripts characterized by the consciousness of women as women; dramaturgy in which art is inseparable from the condition of women as women; performance (written and acted) that deconstructs sexual difference and thus undermines patriarchal power, scripting and production that present transformation as a structural and ideological replacement for recognition; and the creation of women in the subject position (Keyssar, 1996, 1).

The play shows how feminist playwrights like Padmanabhan have not only used innovative techniques but have also adapted some conventions of the proscenium to effectively establish their agenda. This paper also makes an effort to illustrate how certain aspects of language have been adapted to enhance characterizations and how techniques as diverse as realism, social gest and alienation effect have been yoked together for this purpose.

Padmanabhan’s plays are realistic in style and content. They are realistic to the extent that they portray the lives of common people through incidents dramatized in a believable manner but

realism in the conventional sense is circumvented by the fact that the issues discussed are totally women centric and told from their point of view. In *Light's Out* the reactions of women to rape i.e of repugnance and horror at the crime, are given cognizance and all other attempts to treat it differently are rejected. *Harvest* puts the spot light on the effect of organ sale on women and their struggle to mitigate the repercussions. Recognizable settings, characters and events re-accentuate the newness of the material on stage. It is typified by juxtaposing and maintain continuity of incidents from scene to scene and references to popular culture like newspaper reading, tea, gossip sessions, job hunting, cooking and childcare. This makes the audience forget the difference between the stage and themselves and end up caring about it as much as their own lives. This, according to Michelene Wandor,

“though disguises the construction of the world and makes it appear seamless and natural and hence appropriate, it puts ordinary and working class people at ease and makes them more receptive to political and social ideas and behaviours that they may otherwise

## **7 Conclusion**

The conclusion says that the inmates of the Third world are trapped under the unrelenting gaze of the First world. This total deprivation of privacy can be interpreted as the ultimate form of surveillance. The only way one can salvage one's sense of pride and self-esteem is through a willingness to die if the need arises- and through great courage and self control. It is this panoptic nightmare of total visibility which *Harvest* seems to highlight. The horror of a callous acquisitive culture is what makes this play a shocking revelatory experience. Padmanabhan has futuristically exposed the macabre that may likely befall the developing world if critical attention is not given to the phenomenon of globalization. This is what is expected of a visionary playwright of her own class and clout. Other writers have also exposed their fear and reservations for this generation that is highly disillusioned. Martin (2007:7), in this book, „the Meaning of the 21st Century “warns us that we are living in a “make-or-break century”. We are traveling at a “breakneck” speed into an age of extremes –extremes in wealth and poverty, extremes in technology and the experiments that scientists want to perform, extreme forces of globalism, weapons of mass destruction and terrorists acting in the name of religion. If we must survive, then we are expected to manage this situation. It is the frank position of the paper that the humanity in us should continue to be encouraged ahead of the globalization of the world. This

means that humanity should be put first before inventions, profits, politics, etc. People should uphold what fosters the humanity in the world and not how much we connect in the world. Humanity of things will mean shaping a new global system that will manage globalization and post-unipolar world. This will mean the need for a genuine reform of our political and economic institutions so as to make them fit for a new age. Also, it should also mean that concerted effort is channeled toward solving the political and environmental problems that will fit into the interconnected and highly complex global age. There should be the reconstitution of the membership of United Nations Security Council to include emerging powers like India, Japan, Brazil, Nigeria etc. because of their current level of development. This should be corroborated with deliberate effort to always seek the consent of both major and minor powers as decisions are taken on global issues. There should be more drama on globalization and its impact and effects on cultures and social life of nations. It is in the spirit of trying to change the fortunes of the developing countries that Padmanabhan wrote her play. This is because developing nations are the ones that are badly affected by the phenomenon.

### **8 Questions for Practice:**

#### **Long Questions and Answers:**

- 1) What is the main theme of this play?

In the screen play *Harvest*, by Manjula Padmanabhan many global borders arise in which organ-selling occurs in India in the near future, 2010. This screen play deals with the first and third world countries. In India, there are more developed places than others. With people still suffering and finding a way to support their families with food and shelter they will do almost anything to make a living. A main character, Om Prakash loses his job while living in a one bedroom apartment with his family and decides to sell unspecified organs through a company called, InterPlanta Services Inc.

*Harvest* however presents an empowering scenario of the naming process. Throughout the duration of the play, Virgil, the foreigner buying Jaya's husband's organs, persists in pronouncing her name as "zhaya". But at the end of the play when Jaya finally meets him and realizes that it is in her power to decide the further implementation of his plans she refuses to go any further until he pronounces her name properly. In the face of her adamancy he is forced to

bow to her wishes and says it correctly. “zhaya”. But at the end of the play when Jaya finally meets him and realizes that it is in her power to decide the further implementation of his plans she refuses to go any further until he pronounces her name properly. In the face of her adamancy he is forced to bow to her wishes and says it correctly.

Padmanabhan does not shy away from using strong language. The female characters mouth bold words like arise, pimping rascal and wetting yourself without any inhibition. The dialogues, hard as shrapnel, do not allow any margin for the sensibilities of the audience. The playwright uses a language with no circumlocution and adopts a language of power/men.

The main theme of *Harvest* is about organ transplant and it's abuse, the subtext focuses on how women are treated as possessions of men who harvest future generations from their bodies but refuse the same women even a modicum of autonomy in life.

## 2) How does the writer bring about the feminist context of the play?

The play shows how feminist playwrights like Padmanabhan have not only used innovative techniques but have also adapted some conventions of the proscenium to effectively establish their agenda. This paper also makes an effort to illustrate how certain aspects of language have been adapted to enhance characterizations and how techniques as diverse as realism, social gest and alienation effect have been yoked together for this purpose.

Like other feminist plays *Harvest* start *media res*, at a point where a crucial decision has to be taken. *Light's Out* is set in the affluent upper floor apartment of Leela and Bhaskar. The first scene establishes the fact that Leela is traumatized by the disturbing activities and cries for help emanating from the neighboring building. Her disheveled appearance and tense words are proof of her fear which she describes as a shawl wrapped around her shoulders. As soon as she sees her husband Bhaskar her first words are to find out whether he has informed the police about the disturbance which has been going on for sometime. In total contrast, Bhaskar is relaxed and interested only on unwinding. He asks their servant, Frieda, for his evening tea as he starts reading the newspaper and casually informs Leela that he had forgotten to call the police. Leela gets very agitated at his words and attitude as she had been able to convince him only after a lot of arguments. But her agitation and anger have no effect on her husband who tells her to relax with some Yoga. The first scene of *Harvest* shows Jaya waiting anxiously for her husband Om.



She keeps looking out of the window with worry written large on her face. Her anxiety is better understood when we realize that the job that they are hoping for is of selling his organs. Om decides to do this in spite of Jaya not agreeing to it. He even makes her promise not to tell his mother about it. The playwright shows the limbo that the two women are in. They have no autonomy or deciding power in their own homes and are prime examples of, in psychoanalyst Jean Baker Miller's words, "the submissive group"(qtd. in Roy,1999,42). They are bogged down by female passivity, inability to act, to decide and to think. The women show a reluctance to voice their disagreement and frustration strongly. Their sentences are, at this point, hesitant, broken and incomplete, ex. Leela's "Did you.....do it?" Oh.....Bhaskar", and Jaya's "what they say in their room—none of your business"

How is a fictitious context brought out of the play *Harvest*?

In *Harvest*, a fictitious atmosphere is created by the presence of a white faceted globe which looks like a Japanese Lantern, which lights up, moves in slow circles and also vertically. Throughout the play the characters on stage are seen talking to the image of a beautiful woman called Ginni, the alleged buyer of Om's organs. The movement of the globe creates a disconnect in the realistic aspect of the play. It also draws the attention of the audience towards the illusory nature of economics which society sees as the basis of success. It lights up the irony that the people who have the money to buy organs are dependent on those very sellers for their existence. By breaking the wall of suspension of disbelief, intrinsic to realism, this dramatic technique makes it possible for the audience to question the effects of poverty on man. When Jaya realizes that Ginni is actually only an animated front of an old man called Virgil she strikes the globe to break it. This act shatters any acceptance of the globe as an intrinsic element of the play and pushes the person watching the play out of the comfort zone of his own life into thinking about people like Om, living desperate lives, where relationships, ethics and even basic humanity are forgotten in the struggle for survival. The shattering also brings into focus, quite strongly, the strength of Jaya who holds onto her dignity and humaneness in spite of all the trauma and disillusionment that she faces. The loud sound and jagged light forces the audience to ask, is Jaya (as her name suggests) victorious over the forces trying to exploit her?. The lighted, flickering globe moving around on the stage creates an eerie but contrived atmosphere and this ambience negates any notions of the play being only a piece of evening entertainment and

refuses to absolve the audience of active participation. The end of the play where images are created out of thin air, the shattering of the globe along with the guards shouting for Jaya to open the door are enough to disturb the complacency of the spectator and provoke him/her into thinking of some kind of intervention to the chaos on stage. It forces the spectator to imagine her/himself in Jaya's shoes and taste for a brief moment her desperation.

Q) How do you bring about the concept of globalization in *The Harvest*?

The economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid financial and trade liberalization, the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social and cultural problems have been made worse by the workings of the global free-market economy and the soaring degree of attack by elements of terrorism are some of what have characterized globalization today. It means developing nations have faced more problems than ever as a result of the phenomenon of globalization. He further describes it as a "dystopian play" because nothing is good in the lives of Om and his immediate family. You sell your body organs in order to improve your standard of living, only for you to lose it all in the end. The play indicts America which is the greatest promoter of globalization and liberalization because Ginni –the Receiver of the body parts is American. She controls the family in the play until toward the end of the play. The play exposes the true extent of psychological coercion that abounds in the globalization world. It also shows the patterns of seduction and policing the developed world ensures on the developing world. Globalization deceives a lot that is why Om becomes ecstatic: "We'll have more money than you and I have named for! "He says to Ma "who'd believe there is so much money in the world?" (P.219). When Jaya expresses her reservations for what he has done he becomes defensive: "You think I did it lightly. But ... we will be rich! Insanely rich! But you'd rather live in this one small room I suppose! Think it such as a fine thing. Like monkeys in a hot case lulled to sleep out by our neighbors rhythmic farting! ... And starving (P.223). When Jaya accuses him of making the wrong choice.

Padmanabhan goes to the extreme of the unholy relations between the Third World and the First World where the basic commodities of exchange are the body organs. This is on the basis of

individual autonomy. Om's last statement confirms the aghast state: "How could I have done this to myself? What sort of fool am I? ( P.238). Om's mother, Ma, expresses no such regret, she is mesmerized: "What kind of job pays a man to sit at home?" The "new" mass culture engineered by globalization encourages consumption and a life of "abundance". The InterPlanta services can be seen as some of the international organizations that aid in exploiting the developing nations of the world whether in terms of global politics, justice and economics. Organization such as the World Bank, IMF, International Court of Justice, etc have come to mean almost nothing to the Third World because of the „little“ that is realized from them in terms of benefits and justice. Now Ginni represents the developed world and she appears to control everything that Om and his family do including the time they eat: Om: You know how Ginni hates it when we were late to eat" (p.228). Ginni ensures this control through her Contact Module which can also be seen as the hi-tech media gadgets used by advanced nations to mystify the Third World and further attract the latter on to itself Ginni keeps telling Om that he should make sure he smiles. This is because if he smiles, it means his body from which organs are going to be removed for the survival of Ginni is healthy. It means you should not complain when you are being exploited. Now Jaya, the only surviving character of the play, becomes the glimpse of hope of the Third World nations who opposes Om's decision in the final scene of the play, comes to the moment of no surrender. Om has abandoned Jaya having willfully chosen to seek out Ginni and give up his body to her. Ma is plugged into her Video Coach; Jaya faces Virgil, the unfamiliar voice on the Contact Module. She chooses to win by losing. This portends a lot for the developing nations. Globalization through its evils is pushing the developing nations to the brink, perhaps, to the moment where, like Jaya, it must threaten total annihilation. It would be wrong to say that it is inappropriate the way Padmanabhan portrays how the First World cannibalizes the Third World to fulfill its own desires. Like Padmanabhan, artists in the developing world must rise to the occasion of salvaging their traditions and stick to what gives them identity, and guard their economies for their own survival. **The Artist in the Age of Globalization** Padmanabhan has written *Harvest* to remind us that the situation we are in is not comfortable for all of us in the age that we are in. Since this phenomenon is the defining process of this age, then artists must rise to the occasion to make sure that people do not neglect what has helped humanity right from time. A peep in to the prevailing socio-economic atmosphere of both

the developed and the developing nations would reveal that the whole world is at a moment of unease. It cannot be a surprise if some one wonders whether we are happy or not.

The playwright should guide his/her society towards the path of true impendence in production and utilization of what is produced. This is because every people have shown a capacity for independently increasing their ability to live a more satisfactory life through exploiting the resources of nature. Every continent independently participated in the early epochs of the extension of man's control over his environment-which means in effect that every continent can point to a period of economic development. So Asia, Africa and Latin America are not exceptions to this fundamental truth of existence. The playwright's role in the polity may not be piquant as he or she can invoke a moment of unease and make the audience to feel quite uncomfortable as in the case of Padmanabhan who creates a situation in the play that is really not palatable for a reader or an audience that is seeking pleasure. Padmanabhan confirms this fact in an interview when says that: I knew at the time I wrote it that there would be no question of writing it for its own sake\_ I had no doubt that a play of its type would find no takers in India\_ and even after the publicity it got, the play has certainly not been popular in any form. It does not surprise me in the least. It presents a harsh view of reality and has very little comfort to offer the average reader (2006). It is really a play that elicits the description that is somewhat rough as in crass obscenity. This is because it deals with the sale of human parts - macabre like. She paints the picture of the Third World populace caught in the brackets of the exploitative First World who leave no chance of survival for the former. This scenario is really not comfortable to the reader/audience. In Nigeria, the situation is a little bit different; women are hired and gathered somewhere hidden to be impregnated by men. When those women deliver their babies, they are paid to leave the babies to the buyers. Those places are known in Nigeria as „Baby Factories“. Most Nigerians believe that those babies are used for ritual or occultism. There is no practice or hegemony that is really beyond the probing pertinence of art. A lot of negative myths and stereotypes have been created about the Southern parts of the globe, though most countries in Asia and South America are getting their development efforts very correct, China, India, Malaysia, and Brazil among others are dominating the global economy today. It is also said that India has not really defined its position and policies in global politics that is if the praises it receives are not mere shibboleths. Pant (2008:1) states that: In its seventh decade after independence, India today stands at a crossroad in its relations with the rest of the world. Being

one of the most powerful economies in the world today gives India clout on the global stage matched only by a few other states. Padmanabhan portrays India as a very vulnerable and helpless country in the hands of America which is representing other advanced world, while Pant sees India as capable of „shifting the global balance of power“. This is why India’s traditional view of world affairs has to change because of its growing stature in international system. Now India is expected to move to the centre of operation in global politics when it had always viewed such a system with suspicion and in solidarity with other Third World nations. This can be seen through its years of “sloganeering” position. India still sees other world powers as imperial powers who perpetrate nothing but hegemony in the global markets, arts and politics. But African countries are taking very little to the globalization table; they are more or less consumer nations and a dumping ground for all kinds of worn out and fairly used articles and materials including cars and clothes. Corruption, nepotism, tribalism, embezzlement of public funds, disregard for constituted authorities and the tension occasioned by terrorist attacks are the trappings that accompany the imperialistic tendencies in the continent. Thus we can say that the play focuses on globalization.

- 3) How does this play fit into a modern historical context, and how might it be different based on where it was staged?
- 4) Would it change the play if the names were changed to fit the specific cultural site in which the play was being staged?

### **Short Questions and Answers:**

Q. Why is globalization considered to be an evil in the play?

A. The evils of globalization is considered to be a major theme of Harvest. Globalization is evil because it does not foster the humanity of things in the world. What it drives towards is for the greater benefit of the developed or the First World countries. Khor (2005:1) opines that: The reasons for the changing perception of and attitude towards globalization are many. Among the important factors is the lack of tangible benefits to most developing countries from opening their economies, despite the well -publicized claims of export and income gains.... The economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid

financial and trade liberalization, the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social and cultural problems have been made worse by the workings of the global free-market economy and the soaring degree of attack by elements of terrorism are some of what have characterized globalization today. It means developing nations have faced more problems than ever as a result of the phenomenon of globalization.

How does this play launch a scathing attack on the organs market?

*Harvest* is a play which, can be argued, launches a scathing critique of the organs market and of the global, predatory capitalism that results in the commoditization of the third-world body. Indian writer Manjula Padmanabhan's 1997 play confronts us with a futuristic Bombay of the year 2010, a time when legal, moral and bioethical debates about organ sales and transplants have been overcome. The trade in human organs is now fully institutionalised and smoothly operated by the entity embodying all the rapacious forces of global capitalism: a transnational corporation named Interplanta Services. The cast, Padmanabhan's stage directions tell us, is divided into two main groups consisting of Third World donors and First World receivers.

# **The Lion And The Jewel**

## **1 Introduction**

## **2 About the author**

## **3 Summary of the play**

## **4 Analysis of the play**

## **5 Characters of the play**

## **6 Theme of the play**

## **7 Conclusion**

## **8 Questions for Practice**

### **8.1 Long Questions and Answers**

### **8.2 Short Questions and Answers**

#### **1 Introduction:**

*The Lion and the Jewel* was written in London and was one of the first of Soyinka's plays to be performed in Africa. It was performed at the Ibadan Arts Theatre in 1959, where it was well received. *The Lion and the Jewel* was the first major play to draw on traditional Yoruba poetry, music, and dance to tell a Nigerian story in English. The play enabled Nigerian drama to become part of world theater.

*The Lion and the Jewel* is a comedy set in the small remote village of Ilujinle. There are three central characters: Lakunle, an eager but naïve schoolteacher who accepts Western ideas and modernity without really understanding them; Baroka, the village chief, who sees modern ideas as a threat to his power; and Sidi, the jewel of the village, a beautiful woman who will choose one of the men for a husband. The characters are exaggerated: Lakunle is arrogant and talks too much, and Baroka is cunning, but they are ultimately likable. Unlike many of Soyinka's later plays, there is no evil in this play, and the author pokes only gentle fun at his characters. In the end, the men will have to deal with each other. As Baroka says, "the old must flow into the new."

The play focuses on several conflicts that Soyinka presents but does not attempt to resolve. Lakunle and Baroka embody the contrary urges toward modernity and tradition. It chronicles how Baroka, the lion, fights with the modern Lakunle over the right to marry Sidi, the titular Jewel. Lakunle is portrayed as the civilized antithesis of Baroka and unilaterally attempts to modernize his community and change its social conventions for no reason other than the fact that he can. The transcript of the play was first published in 1962 by Oxford University Press. Soyinka emphasises the theme of the corrupted African culture through the play as well as how the youth should embrace the original African culture. Wole Soyinka has been recognized as one of the most talented of twentieth century writers. This Nigerian writer, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, always emphasizes his Yoruban roots in his works. Soyinka's most popular play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, was published in 1959, just before Nigeria became independent and while Nigerians were debating whether to move into the future or leave their past behind. The focus of this paper is to explain how Soyinka uses character, plot, and structure, including pantomime, to investigate the Nigerian conflict between modernity and tradition. This paper was written as a research assignment in English 1023H, Introduction to Literature for Honors Students. It is a response to one of the prompts given to the class asking that modernity and tradition be compared in reference to *The Lion and the Jewel*.

*The Lion and the Jewel*, although an early play by Wole Soyinka, is perhaps his most widely known and performed drama. It was first produced along with *The Swamp Dwellers* (pr. 1958, pb. 1963); both plays are concerned with a society in flux and treat the issue with humor. *The Lion and the Jewel* differs in tone in that it conveys a sense of physical danger that is not apparent in the former. *The Lion and the Jewel* contains most of the dramatic themes and literary devices that Soyinka enlarges upon in later plays. Although it is lighthearted and contains music, dance, and mime, it also has a serious underlying theme—the possible dangers inherent in the clash between the old and the new.

Wole Soyinka is a renowned Nigerian dramatist, who was awarded Nobel Prize in 1986, for his accomplishment in the field of literature. He is a prolific writer and versatile genius of Africa. Being a social conscious writer, he is acclaimed worldwide, yet his home country rewarded him with solitary confinements, sentence to death and many exiles. However, no orders and punishment subdued his strong will. Instead, like a sphinxes, he came out from all difficulties



with great energy to enlighten and serve his people. Such a consciousness reflects in his play with more aesthetic in sense and socially instructive. His works are based on society, culture, tradition and politics of Africa.

He infuses the western stage with new dramatic possibilities while commenting on Yoruba tradition and Africa's modern political and social realities. He is a keen observer of his land, culture and customs and very eminent in expressing the observance in writings.

The admirable traits of Soyinka writings hinge upon a certain pillars of literary forms such as comedy, tragedy and scathing satire. His laughter provoking comedies have an underlying object of high seriousness of satire. The tragic plays of Soyinka are written in comic vein, though monotonous and grim, very suitable to the atmosphere of the play.

Soyinka's "The Lion and the Jewel" is a comical play based on African society, written in 1959 and published in 1963. Jeyifo comments upon the play, "*The Lion and the Jewel* occupies a unique place in Soyinka's dramas. It is perhaps the only play by him that is written entirely in a comic spirit uncomplicated by a dark, brooding humor and satire" ("Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism", 106). The play portrays a conflict between tradition and modernism. In the play, there is ample use of dance, song and mime. The play is very simple in its structure and it is a poetic drama or musical play. It shows deep familiarity of Soyinka with the various aspects of African tradition and the influence of the modern world on the African mind. Soyinka gives an account of the origins of the play in an interview, in that he mentions about the custom and culture of Yoruba.

*The Lion and the Jewel* takes place in Ilujinle, a small African village facing rapid change. As the play begins, it is morning, and the audience sees a marketplace, dominated by an immense odan tree. To the left of the stage is part of the village school, within which the students chant the "Arithmetic Times." Sidi enters the stage; she is a beautiful, slim girl with plaited hair—the true village belle. Balancing a pail on her head and wearing a broad cloth, Sidi attracts the attention of Lakunle, the young schoolteacher, who looks out the school windows to admire her beauty.

Lakunle, dressed in an old-style, threadbare, unironed English suit, scolds Sidi for carrying the pail on her head, telling her that the weight of the pail will hurt her spine and shorten her neck. He wants her to be a “modern” woman. Sidi, however, quickly reminds him of the times he has sworn that her looks do not affect his love for her. There is a comic exchange of charge and countercharge between the two, revealing Lakunle’s uncomfortable attitude about Sidi’s showing parts of her body: “How often must I tell you, Sidi, that a grown-up girl must cover up her. . . . Her shoulders.”

This first scene also introduces Baroka, the Bale (the village chief): Sixty-two years old, wiry, goateed, he is also attracted by Sidi. The Bale, the opposite of Lakunle, is an artful, traditional man who resists the building of roads and railways, trying to keep his society insulated from “progress.” The dialogue between these two men constitutes the crux of the play: the conservative, clear view of life represented by the Bale versus the progressive sloganeering of Lakunle. Beneath this sociopolitical theme is the other struggle—the war for Sidi’s love.

It was actually inspired by an item which said: “Charlie Chaplin... a man of nearly sixty has taken to wife Oona O’Neill” who was then about 17 something like that. ... from Charlie Chaplin, and again thinking of the old man I knew in my society who at 70 plus, 80, would still take some new young wives – and always seemed perfectly capable of coping with the onerous tasks which such activity demanded of them! I just sat down and that’s how Baroka came into existence. (“Soyinka in Zimbabwe”, 82). “The Lion and the Jewel” is the most simplest among Soyinka’s plays, connotes much by means of abstract signs and plain usual symbols. The subject of the frail average African’s challenges with the whims and fancies of the white forms the central nucleus of the play. This play unfolds a venue for elaborating the state of Nigeria to be the plethora of sources of English speaking drama. Here Soyinka not only handles dramatically the rich folk material but also the text of the off shoot of modern on tribal tradition

In Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*, there is a constant confrontation between tradition and modernity. Soyinka published the play in 1959, when Nigeria was struggling for independence under British control. Nigeria had been united as the “Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria” since 1914 and by the late 1950s was facing the

challenge of whether or not it was ready for independence and capable of handling modern Western civilization. Some Nigerians felt that it was time for change while others wondered if they should move from their present culture. In this paper, I relate modernity to the influence of British culture during the 1940s and 1950s on Nigerian ways of life. This relates tradition to Nigeria's traditional Yoruban culture. The main characters of the drama—Sidi, Lakunle, and Baroka—all exhibit internal and external conflicts with modernity and tradition. The battle between Lakunle and Baroka for Sidi's hand in marriage is the main plot of the play and reveals a confrontation between their two ways of life.

With Western civilization's influence advancing into Soyinka's Nigeria, the village school teacher, Lakunle, has become more fond of the modern way of life and wants the village of Ilujinle to back away from tradition as well. This task is not made easy because villagers refuse to put aside their Yoruban roots and traditions. The village belle, is the popular, attractive girl amongst the village, and the Bale is the ruler or chief over the people. Sidi, Baroka, and Lakunle all have their modern and traditional standards, but they don't hesitate to use each to their own advantage. The confrontation between Yoruban tradition and modern civilization is evident through the characters, plot, and structure of the drama.

The play's most modern and westernized character is Lakunle, a school teacher who is determined to rid himself and others around him of traditional ways of life. In the opening scene of the play, Lakunle's desire for modernity is obvious in his initial request of Sidi. "Let me take it," he says, seizing a pail of water that Sidi has been carrying on her head (Soyinka 891). This is Lakunle's way of being the "modern gentlemen" and relieving Sidi of her heavy load, as most gentlemen would do today, trying to break the tradition of a woman's task. Lakunle goes on to request her hand in marriage as a Westerner would, but will not pay the bride-price. His rejection of the traditional bride price is another part of his modern ways. Lakunle is madly in love with Sidi and "offers her a 'Western' monogamous marriage"

Lakunle justifies his refusal to pay the bride-price, saying, "To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall" (Soyinka 897). James Gibbs, argues that

Lakunle “uses or abuses the ‘traditional’ in accordance with his own needs and situation. Thus he adopts a misinformed Western attitude towards bride-price partially because he is in a bad economic position” (307). Lakunle’s Westernized and modern form of courtship is constantly shot down by Sidi’s desire to be traditional.

Sidi exhibits her traditional views in her rejections of Lakunle’s many modern advances toward her. As mentioned earlier, she enters the first scene carrying a small pail of water in a traditional manner. She denies Lakunle’s request to carry the pail for her because she is aware of his motives for doing it. She is aware of his desire to court her in a modern fashion, but will not put aside her values to allow him to do so. Sidi is most adamant about Lakunle paying her bride-price in order to marry her. She makes it clear to him that her declination of his marriage proposal is based solely on his refusal to pay the price, because she would not be a “cheap bowl for the village to spit”.

Although Sidi can initially be characterized as a traditional village belle, her character is to be reexamined when she learns of her own beauty. With European technology coming into the village, a glossy picture of Sidi has been published on the cover and throughout a magazine. This gives Sidi’s ego a big boost and makes her traditional platform a little shaky. After the picture is published, the Bale, Baroka, requests that she become his youngest wife. Sidi declines the more traditional choice of being his last wife (and later the senior wife after Baroka’s death), but demonstrates modern thoughts by saying that Baroka is too old and unattractive. She does not look at the marriage as a convenience, but more as her being famous and happier without him. Baroka portrays himself as a strictly traditional, Yoruban ruler and is determined to keep his village the same way, but he later reveals his transition into modernity. His first display of displeasure with modern ways of life takes place in his first appearance in the play. Baroka enters a scene where a pantomime, which is movement and action without words, is taking place, and all in attendance, except Lakunle, give a traditional kneel and greeting of “Kabiyesi, Baba.” This is a Yoruban greeting used to address a ruler and Baroka is upset when he gets a simple “good morning” from Lakunle. In his anger, Baroka begins to question why he is not getting the respect that he expects and

deserves.

Baroka's desire to keep tradition in his village is also displayed when he stops Western civilization from spreading to his village. The Public Works attempt to build a railway in Ilujinle, but Baroka is against progress. The Public Works send in workers and surveyors to tear down jungles in order to run a railway through the village. When Baroka learns of this, he pays off the surveyor with money, a coop of hens, and a goat. Pleased, the surveyor and workers pack up their things and leave "convinced" that the tracks were intended to be laid further away. There is no question that Baroka's motive for turning progress away is to preserve his village in its traditional essence. The overall plot of the play, Lakunle and Baroka's fight for Sidi's love, displays another confrontation between tradition and modernity. Between the two of them, Sidi has to choose between having a modern or traditional marriage. Lakunle's refusal to accept tradition causes modernity to falter. Sidi responds to one of his many proposals stating, "...I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid" (Soyinka 896). This is an obvious indication that if Lakunle will only stuck to the traditional bride-price, "the modern man" could have had his bride. His choice for modernity leaves the door open for Baroka to enter. Knowing the rules of tradition and using Sidi's ego against her, Baroka knows that if he can seduce Sidi, she will not have a choice in marrying him because she will no longer be a maid. This is the battle which causes tradition to triumph over modernity.

Not only is there an external conflict between tradition and modernity, but there is also an internal conflict in all three of the characters. Each of these characters uses both tradition and modernity to their advantage and convenience. As suggested by Gibbs, Lakunle "adopts his misinformed Western attitude" due to the fact that, as a school teacher, he cannot afford to pay Sidi's bride-price. In the middle of the play, Sidi's internal conflict is revealed as well. When she is offered the position of being Baroka's youngest wife, she uses Lakunle's modern ideas about being property by saying, "He seeks to have me as his property where I must fade beneath his jealous hold" (Soyinka 907). Although she is a traditional maiden, she has absorbed the modern idea of not becoming Baroka's property. Baroka's internal conflict is revealed in his use of the

stamp machine, which is a western innovation. He uses this technology to persuade Sidi to be with him. Baroka promises Sidi that he will have her face placed on the village stamp which he knows will appeal to Sidi's new egotistical character.

The structure of this play is characterized by the conflict between tradition and modernity as well. Soyinka incorporates his Yoruban traditions throughout the play which creates a minor conflict with one of the characters. In the morning scene of the play while Sidi and Lakunle are talking, a number of dancers and drummers begin a traditional pantomime and dance. The dancers begin to chant and whirl around Lakunle, trying to encourage him to participate. In his attempt to break away from tradition, Lakunle does not want to participate in the play, but they finally wear him down with their chanting and dancing. Lakunle joins in as they reenact the photographer's first visit to Ilujinle. They take the shape of wheels, and Lakunle acts as the photographer taking numerous pictures of Sidi. Another pantomime takes place towards the end of the play. This dance is a dramatization of women celebrating and mocking the fact that Baroka is impotent. Baroka's head wife, Sadiku, joins in this dance where women are dancing around a comic figure of Baroka, taunting him.

The confrontation between modernity and tradition is incorporated through all the components of Soyinka's drama. Lakunle and Baroka display external conflicts in their battle for Sidi's love. The characters also display internal conflicts when they use both tradition and modernity to their own advantage. Furthermore, the overall plot and structure of the play are indications of this constant conflict. Although this conflict is not the only theme of the play, Soyinka thoroughly incorporates the theme of tradition and modernity.

Soyinka's continued concern with the theme of the battle between a traditional and an emerging society appears in later plays such as *A Dance of the Forests* (pr. 1960, pb. 1963) and *The Trials of Brother Jero* (pr. 1960, pb. 1963): The former views history as a cyclical movement; the latter unfolds a satire of undiscovered identities. Similar dramatic conventions

appear in *Death and the King's Horseman* (pb. 1975, pr. 1976), in which traditional customs are challenged, and the age-old idea of self-sacrifice is shown to be no mere mechanical ritual. The protagonist, Elesin, is confronted with the same danger of change that confronts the Bale. When Elesin's son, Olunde, assumes the traditional responsibility.

## **2 About the author:**

Wole Soyinka is the recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is often referred to as one of Africa's finest living writers. His plays, novels, and poetry blend elements of traditional Yoruban folk drama and European dramatic form to create both spectacle and penetrating satire. His narrative technique is based on the African cultural tradition where the artist functions as the recorder of the mores and experiences of his society. Soyinka's works reflect this philosophy, serving as a record of twentieth-century Africa's political turmoil and the continent's struggle to reconcile tradition with modernization. Through his nonfiction works and essay collections, Soyinka has established an international reputation as an unflinching commentator on political injustice and knowing provocateur of social criticism.

Wole Soyinka was born in Ìsarà, Nigeria, on July 13, 1934. As a child he became increasingly aware of the pull between African tradition and Western modernization. Aké, his village, was populated mainly with people from the Yoruba tribe and was presided over by the *ogboni*, or tribal elders. Soyinka's grandfather introduced him to the pantheon of Yoruba gods and other figures of tribal folklore. He was a precocious student, he first attended the parsonage's primary school, where his father was headmaster, and then a nearby grammar school in Abeokuta, where an uncle was principal. Though raised in a colonial, English-speaking environment, Soyinka's ethnic heritage was Yoruba, and his parents balanced Christian training with regular visits to the father's ancestral home in Ìsarà, a small Yoruba community secure in its traditions. His parents, however, were representatives of colonial influence: his mother was a devout Christian convert, and his father was a headmaster at the village school established by the British. Soyinka recalls his father's world in *Ìsarà, A Voyage Around "Essay"* (1989) and recounts his own early life in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), two of his several autobiographical books. *Aké* ends in 1945 when Soyinka is eleven, with his induction into the protest movement that during the next decade won Nigeria's freedom from British rule. The

political turbulence of these years framed Soyinka's adolescence and early adulthood, which he chronicles in his most recent autobiographical work, *Ibadan, The Penkeleles Years, A Memoir: 1946-1965* (1994).

Wole Soyinka is among contemporary Africa's greatest writers. He is also one of the continent's most imaginative advocates of native culture and of the humane social order it embodies. Born in Western Nigeria in 1934, Soyinka grew up in an Anglican mission compound in Aké. A precocious student, he first attended the parsonage's primary school, where his father was headmaster, and then a nearby grammar school in Abeokuta, where an uncle was principal. Though raised in a colonial, English-speaking environment, Soyinka's ethnic heritage was Yoruba, and his parents balanced Christian training with regular visits to the father's ancestral home in `Isarà, a small Yoruba community secure in its traditions.

Soyinka recalls his father's world in *`Isarà, A Voyage Around "Essay"* (1989) and recounts his own early life in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), two of his several autobiographical books. *Aké* ends in 1945 when Soyinka is eleven, with his induction into the protest movement that during the next decade won Nigeria's freedom from British rule. The political turbulence of these years framed Soyinka's adolescence and early adulthood, which he chronicles in his most recent autobiographical work, *Ibadan, The Penkeleles Years, A Memoir: 1946-1965* (1994).

At twelve Soyinka left Aké for Ibadan to attend that city's elite Government College and at 18 entered its new university. But in 1954, his ambition focused on a career in theater, Soyinka traveled to England to complete a degree in drama at Leeds, under the well-known Shakespearean critic, G. Wilson Knight. After graduation in 1957, Soyinka extended his European apprenticeship by working several years as a script-reader, actor, and director at the Royal Court Theatre in London. This period also saw the composition of Soyinka's first mature plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*, and their successful staging in both London and Ibadan. In 1960 a Rockefeller research grant enabled Soyinka, now 26, to return to Nigeria. There he assembled his own acting company, produced a new play, *A Dance of the Forests*, and timed its opening to coincide with the country's official celebration of independence



in October.

Though Soyinka's return from England had been widely welcomed, *A Dance of the Forests* at once placed him at odds with Nigeria's newly installed leaders as well as with many of his fellow intellectuals. Thematically, the play presents a pageant of black Africa's "recurrent cycle of stupidities," a spectacle designed to remind citizens of the chronic dishonesty and abuse of power which colonialism had bred in generations of native politicians. Stylistically, *A Dance of the Forests* is a complex fusion of Yoruba festival traditions with European modernism. Hostility greeted the play from almost all quarters. Nigerian authorities were angered by Soyinka's suggestion of wide-spread corruption, leftists complained about the play's elitist aesthetics, and African chauvinists -- those proponents of pure Negritude whom Soyinka labels "Neo-Tarzanists" -- objected to his use of European techniques.

What Soyinka's critics failed to appreciate was the radical originality of his approach to liberating black Africa from its crippling legacy of European imperialism. He envisioned a "New Africa" that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present onto the stock of its own ancient traditions. Native myth, reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality, was to be the foundation of the future, opening the way to "self-retrieval, cultural recollection, [and] cultural security."

From this perspective, the critics of *A Dance of the Forests* appear unwitting neocolonialists, their ideas mere replays in African costume of the West's own indigenous myths of liberalism, Marxism, and regressive racism. Soyinka dreamed instead of a truly de-colonized continent, where an autonomous African culture assimilated only those progressive elements of recent history that were consistent with its own authentic identity.

Over the next seven years, from posts at the universities in Ife, Lagos, and Ibadan, Soyinka pursued his hopes for a reborn Nigeria with inventiveness and energy. He wrote and directed a variety of plays, ranging from comedies like *The Trials of Brother Jero*, a popular exposé of religious charlatans, to a series of politically charged tragedies, *The Road*, *The Strong Breed*, and *Kongi's Harvest*, each of which turns on the modern world's interruption of ancient ritual practice. Beyond these full-length plays, Soyinka composed satirical revues, organized an improvisational "guerrilla theater," and wrote for radio and television. He also published his first

novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), and his first book of poetry, *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967).

Not only did much of this large body of work openly challenge Nigerian authorities, but Soyinka also involved himself in practical politics. His actions led to a brief detention, trial, and acquittal in 1965. Then in 1967 came extra-judicial arrest and imprisonment for more than two years, much of it in solitary confinement. Soyinka recounts this trauma in *The Man Died* (1972), another of his autobiographical works.

Following his release in 1969, Soyinka went into voluntary exile and soon after entered a second period of intense creativity. Among its highlights were a book of poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), a new novel, *Season of Anomy* (1973) -- both bitter reflections on his years of confinement -- additional street satires, and, perhaps most important, two extraordinary tragic dramas, *Madmen and Specialists* (1970) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975).

Complementing this literary outburst, Soyinka delivered lectures and wrote essays that discussed the nature of his art, traced its roots in Yoruba tradition, and compared his aesthetic principles and practice to those of other writers, both African and European. Some of this criticism Soyinka revised and published as *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976). Most of the rest he collected a decade later in *Art, Dialogue & Outrage* (1988). The political history that animates Soyinka's cultural thought in these two volumes is the subject of *The Open Sore of a Continent* (1996). This book traces Nigeria's decline into increasingly inhumane military governments, a deterioration epitomized by the 1995 execution of fellow playwright Ken Saro-Wiwa as well as by the death sentence pronounced on Soyinka himself in 1997.

For Euro-American readers, these three books form an indispensable introduction to Soyinka's art. At its center and guiding its artistic mission lies the idea of "organic revolution," which Soyinka contrasts with the neocolonial practices that black Africa absorbed from European imperialism. As he defines the concept, organic revolution is a process of communal renewal reached in moments of shared cultural self-apprehension -- moments whose manner and content are particular to each society. Such revolution is inherently local and cyclical, qualities more appropriate to African culture, Soyinka argues, than the global teleologies of either Marxist communism or capitalist nationalism. Indeed, Soyinka's mode of liberation ultimately displaces the logic of Western politics with the rhythms of native ritual. For the revolution he advocates

rejects the abstractions of both dialectical materialism and market economics for the particularity of ceremonial healing -- of the divisions that isolate individuals from society and sever both from their sustaining integration with nature.

The god whose ritual Soyinka offers as the model for this organic restoration is Ogun, who risks his own life to bridge the abysses that separate the three stages of Yoruba existence -- the world of the ancestors, the world of the living, and the world of the unborn. Ogun, as Soyinka reads the myth, is unique among tribal deities because he is at home in none of these three structured states of experience. Rather, his realm is the chaotic region of transition between them, what Soyinka calls the "fourth stage" of the Yoruba universe, a condition where opposites collide without resolution in "a menacing maul of chthonic strength that yawns ever wider to annihilate" all social and natural order. Ogun's heroic passage through this realm not only preserves the connections between the ancestors, the living, and the unborn. It also revitalizes the Yoruba cosmos by benignly channeling into it fresh energies from the fourth stage.

This model of social revolution is essentially one of recurring crisis, where novel and alien forces are regularly mastered and integrated into the matrix of tradition and custom. It is to the challenge of this crisis that Soyinka commits his art, and only within its context can the signature gestures of his style achieve their full meaning. But once seen in the framework of Ogun's encounter with the fourth stage, Soyinka's discordant mixing of genres, his willful ambiguities of meaning, his unresolved clashes of contradictions cease to be the aesthetic flaws Western critics often label them and become instead our path into an African reality fiercely itself and utterly other.

Soyinka published poems and short stories in *Black Orpheus*, a Nigerian literary magazine, before leaving Africa to attend the University of Leeds in England. He returned to Nigeria in 1960, shortly after the country's independence from colonial rule. In 1965 Soyinka was arrested by the Nigerian police, accused of using a gun to force a radio announcer to broadcast incorrect election results. No evidence was ever produced, however, and the PEN writers' organization soon launched a protest campaign, headed by William Styron and Norman Mailer. Soyinka was eventually released after three months. He was next arrested two years later,

during Nigeria's civil war for his vocal opposition to the conflict. Soyinka was particularly angered by the Nigerian government's brutal policies toward the Ibo people, who were attempting to form their own country, Biafra. After he traveled to Biafra to establish a peace commission composed of leading intellectuals from both sides for the conflict, the Nigerian police accused Soyinka of helping the Biafrans to buy jet fighters. This time Soyinka was imprisoned for more than two years, although he was never formally charged with a crime. For the majority of his arrest, he was kept in solitary confinement. Although he was denied reading and writing materials, Soyinka created his own ink and began to keep a prison diary, writing on toilet paper and cigarette packages. This diary was published in 1972 as *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*. In 1993 Soyinka began a period of self-imposed exile from Nigeria due to General Ibrahim Babangida's refusal to allow a democratic government to take power. Babangida appointed General Sani Abacha as head of the Nigerian state and Soyinka, along with other pro-democracy activists, was charged with treason for his criticism of the military regime. Facing a death sentence, Soyinka left the country in 1994, during which time he traveled and lectured in Europe and the United States. Following the death of Abacha, who held control for five years, the new government, led by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, released numerous political prisoners and promised to hold civilian elections, prompting Soyinka to return to his homeland. Soyinka has held teaching positions at a number of prestigious universities, including the University of Ghana, Cornell University, and Yale University. He also served as the Goldwin Smith professor for African Studies and Theatre Arts at Cornell University from 1988 to 1991. Soyinka has received several awards for his work, such as the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 and the Enrico Mattei Award for Humanities in 1986.

## **Major Works**

Soyinka's early dramas focus upon the dichotomies of good versus evil and progress versus tradition in African culture. For example, *The Swamp Dwellers* (1958) condemns African superstition by showing religious leaders who exploit the fears of their townspeople for personal gain. Commissioned as part of Nigeria's independence celebration in 1960, *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) warns the newly independent Nigerians that the end of colonial rule does not mean an end to their country's problems. The play features a bickering group of mortals who summon up the egungun—spirits of the dead, revered by the Yoruba people—for a festival. They

have presumed the egungun to be noble and wise, but they discover that their ancestors are as petty and spiteful as anyone else. While Soyinka warns against sentimental yearning for Africa's past in *A Dance of the Forests*, he lampoons the indiscriminate embrace of Western modernization in *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959). The plot revolves around Sidi, the village beauty, and the rivalry between her two suitors. The story also follows Baroka, a village chief with many wives, and Lakunle, an enthusiastically Westernized schoolteacher who dreams of molding Sidi into a “civilized” woman. *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1960) was written in response to a request for a play that could be performed in a converted dining hall in Ibadan. Drawing on his observations of the separatist Christian churches of Nigeria, on Ijebu folk narratives, and on theatrical conventions exploited by dramatist Bertolt Brecht, Soyinka constructed a vigorous comedy around the character of a messianic beach prophet. Brother Jero—a trickster figure who sets up a shack on Bar Beach, Lagos, prophesying golden futures in return for money—belongs to one of the revivalist Christian sects that existed at the time of Nigerian independence. In *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), the demented dictator of the state of Isma, has imprisoned and dethroned the traditional chief, Oba Danlola. To legitimize his seizure of power, Kongi has laid claim to the Oba's spiritual authority through his consecration of the crops at the New Yam Festival.

Stylistically separated from his early farces, Soyinka's later plays rely heavily on classical theatrical devices as a vehicle for Soyinka's potent political and social satires. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973), an adaptation of the play by Euripides, reinvents the classic tale as a meditation on the nature of personal sacrifice within unjust societies. *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) combines powerful dramatic verse and characterization with a structure that incorporates contrast and juxtaposition. The play is based on an actual 1945 incident of a colonial officer's intervention to prevent the royal horseman, the Elesin, from committing ritual suicide at his king's funeral, whereupon the Elesin's son would take his father's place in the rite. *A Play of Giants* (1984) is a surreal fantasy about international poetic justice in which an African dictator, on a visit to the United Nations in New York, takes a group of Russian and American delegates hostage. He threatens to release the Soviet-supplied rockets from his embassy arsenal unless an international force is sent to crush the uprising in his own country. *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kaleidoscope* (1995) centers around Sanda,

a security guard at a Lagos shopping mall, who ensures that customers are protected when entering and leaving the shop. Despite his position at the mall, the charming Sanda routinely organizes local scams and robberies. It is eventually revealed that Sanda is an ex-revolutionary who had sacrificed his higher education to organize political protests. Soyinka's fictional work expands on the themes expressed in his plays, constructing sweeping narratives of personal and political turmoil in Africa. Soyinka's first novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), is essentially a plotless narrative loosely structured around the informal discussions between five young Nigerian intellectuals. Each has been educated in a foreign country and has returned on the eve of Nigerian independence, hoping to shape Nigeria's destiny. They are hampered by their own confused values, however, as well as by the corruption they encounter in their homeland. *Season of Anomy* (1973), takes the central concerns from *The Interpreters* and selects a new moment at which to consider the choices confronting those working for change. The plot follows a variety of characters including an artist named Ofeyi, a cold-blooded assassin named Isola Demakin, and a harmonious community called Aiyero in a narrative that is thematically linked to the myths of Orpheus and Euridice.

The prose in Soyinka's nonfiction works and essay collections is largely based on his own life and his personal political convictions. *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* collects Soyinka's diaries during his imprisonment by Nigerian police for travelling to Biafra to establish a peace commission. He has also composed a trilogy that reflects on his life and the life of his family—*Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), *Ìsarà: A Voyage around Essay* (1989), and *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: A Memoir, 1946-65* (1994). While *Aké* and *Ibadan* focus on Soyinka's personal life—*Aké* concerns his childhood, while *Ibadan* recounts his teen years to his early-twenties—*Ìsarà: A Voyage around Essay* is a biography of Soyinka's father. *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (1976), Soyinka's first essay collection, combines lucid criticism of specific texts with discussions that reveal the scope of Soyinka's acquaintance with literary and theatrical traditions as well as his search for an idiosyncratic perspective. He further explores his interest in the role that politics and literature play in modern Africa in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (1988). *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996) reprints a series of vitriolic lectures where Soyinka denounces the Nigerian government under the dictator Sani Abacha and laments the

indifference of the West to the present state of Nigerian politics. In *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* (1999), Soyinka discusses the role of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and questions the nature of objective political truths.

Soyinka has also published several collections of poetry, including *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988). Composed over a period of twenty-four hours, *Idanre* collects a series of mythological poems that feature Yoruba terminology and display subtle manipulations of words, images, and idioms. In *Idanre*, Soyinka draws particular influence from stories associated with the Yoruba mythological figures Ogun, Atunda, Sango, and Oya, and the Idanre Hills. In the twenty-two-page poem *Ogun Abibiman*, Soyinka combines a direct call for African states to take action against the Apartheid movement in South Africa with a mythologized manifesto for the country's liberation. The treatise describes Ogun, Yoruba god of war, joining forces in a violent and mystical union with the legendary Zulu chieftain Shaka. Soyinka published *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* in 2002, a poetry collection that offers reflections on modern politics, his exile from Nigeria, and such writers as Josef Brodsky and Chinua Achebe.

### **3 Summary of the play:**

*The Lion and the Jewel* was the first major play to draw on traditional Yoruba poetry, music and dance to tell a Nigerian story in English. It was also the first Nigerian drama to be recognised as an important work in a western-dominated world theatre in the 20th century.

The play is a comedy set in the small remote village of Ilujinle. There are three central characters: Lakunle, an eager but naïve schoolteacher who accepts Western ideas and modernity without really understanding them; Baroka, the village chief, who sees modern ideas as a threat to his power; and Sidi, the jewel of the village (and of the play's title), a beautiful woman who will choose one of the men for a husband. The characters are exaggerated: Lakunle is arrogant and talks too much, and Baroka is cunning, but they are ultimately likable.

Unlike many of Soyinka's later plays, there is no evil in this play, and the author pokes only gentle fun at his characters. Ultimately, the men will have to deal with each other. As Baroka says, "the old must flow into the new." One of the main themes in the play is the theme

of progress versus tradition, as represented in the two main male characters, the progressive schoolteacher Lakunle, and the traditional tribal chief Bale "The Lion". Throughout the play they engage in argument over ideals and beliefs, all with the goal of winning Sidi's love. Sidi herself as a character is to an extent emblematic of this struggle, representing many contemporary Nigerians' hesitation between competing attractions of tradition and modernism. Sidi sees value in them both, and it is hard for her to commit to one view over the other; many of the Nigerians of the period were caught between these opposing ideals.

*The Lion and the Jewel*, written in London, was one of the first of Soyinka's plays to be performed in Africa. It was performed at the Ibadan Arts Theatre in 1959, where it was well received. *The Lion and the Jewel* was the first major play to draw on traditional Yoruba poetry, music, and dance to tell a Nigerian story in English. The play enabled Nigerian drama to become part of world theater.

*The Lion and the Jewel* is a comedy set in the small remote village of Ilujinle. There are three central characters: Lakunle, an eager but naïve schoolteacher who accepts Western ideas and modernity without really understanding them; Baroka, the village chief, who sees modern ideas as a threat to his power; and Sidi, the jewel of the village, a beautiful woman who will choose one of the men for a husband. The characters are exaggerated: Lakunle is arrogant and talks too much, and Baroka is cunning, but they are ultimately likable. Unlike many of Soyinka's later plays, there is no evil in this play, and the author pokes only gentle fun at his characters. In the end, the men will have to deal with each other. As Baroka says, "the old must flow into the new."

The play focuses on several conflicts that Soyinka presents but does not attempt to resolve. Lakunle and Baroka embody the contrary urges toward modernity and tradition. They personify the two sides of the major social and political issue in Africa during the last half.

### **Analysis of the Play:**

The play focuses on the failure of an elementary school teacher to apprehend the sense of culture, advancement or civilization. The word "progress" needs to be under stern scrutinization



interpreting varied features connected with it and also the aspects unrelated to it. The play "The Lion and the Jewel" evolves a subject almost classical in its worth with the juxtaposition of the values that forms a required dramatic confrontation. J.Z. Kronenfeld writes, "the comedy clearly operates in terms of the characters adjusting ideology [tradition or modern], or selecting convenient aspect of it, in accordance with their situation and their psychological needs" (307). The major characters create the phenomena of jollity mainly due to the ordeals they encounter with and the consequent indecisiveness. The dark forces are inevitable in essence. They assume serious and heinous proportions. The dramatic environment that Soyinka creates has been enriched with variegated realistic scenes portraying African life very exactly and fashions and characters holding a mirror up to nature and presenting life as it is. The characters are very real to life. His object of representing something to express something else exemplifies more than what the surface meaning offers. This play is combined with a real flavour of African rural life in the context at which idea of development requires a psyche transformation. The sense of progress undergoes necessary transition. The custom of polygamy and bride barter are challenged. Lakunle is endowed with the glimpses of the Comedy of Manners carrying a stigma of the exaggerated, caricature like portrayal. But the crafty, unscrupulous aged fox, the Bale Baroka is quite satisfactory in his cunning warfare waged against modernism and in the strong method of winding stairs for adopting polygamy. Lakunle, who stands to represent "progress" and cultured romance fails Sidi at the crucial hours, captivated by her own charm, keeps her head against Lakunle but loses it while encountering the old lion. Sidi presents a full spectrum of the panorama of the heart of an African village as against Lagos, which stands for advancement in accordance with definition of Lakunle. Oyin Ogunba remarks the major theme of the play is the "choice between the rival worlds of tradition and modernism"

The locale of the play is Ilujinle, a typical Nigerian village. Soyinka's dramatic creation the Bale Baroka, the old lion of the village, metaphorically expresses the traditional good and bad.

Having experienced the amassing opulence and power, the Bale has a harem full of the most beautiful ladies in the area, new commodities annexed frequently. The dramatist exhibits his skill through the depiction of the Bale's hard headed conservatism gaining, when Lakunle's sloganeering defeats to compromise. Lakunle treats himself to be the representative of the modern revolution against men like Bale and asserts what he considers a moral war. Lakunle

develops an association with Sidi, the village beauty, ascends upon the steps of modernisation means of civilising the bush girl. Lakunle, the semi-European, wants to make some revolutionary changes in the village. He apparelled in the English suit of an ancient kind. At first, he imposes his ideas on his love, Sidi. To her, all his ideas are new and unlikely. Yet she has soft corner for him more as a jocular character narrating comic and mysterious tales to her as a reformer. When he proposes his love and talks of marriage to her, she demands the bride-price to marry him.

*The Lion And The Jewel*, one of Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka's best-known plays, was first performed in 1963. It is very much a work of its time: like compatriot Chinua Achebe's novels of the 1960s, or poems such as *Song of Lawino* (by Ugandan Okot p'Bitek), which appeared in 1966, it expresses the tensions felt in many newly-independent African countries between traditional beliefs or customs and the forms of modernity typically associated with the West.

Soyinka has been criticised for a writing style that betrays a Eurocentric bias, but this play is ultimately an affirmation of "the old" rather than "the new". Whereas Achebe's fiction tends towards the tragic and the tone of Okot's poetry became darker and angrier in later years, *The Lion And The Jewel* offers a comic – and, it could be argued, problematic – resolution. The tradition-vs-modernity debate may be a well-rehearsed one, but it shows no signs of going away. Certainly, James Ngcobo, director of the production currently running at the State Theatre in Pretoria, considers the material relevant. Soyinka's play is strangely apposite in twenty-first century South Africa, but perhaps not in the ways that Ngcobo and his cast have in mind.

The narrative hinges on an unusual love-triangle. Lakunle (Fezile Mpela) is a schoolteacher who wants to marry Sidi (Nthathi Moshesh) but refuses to pay a bride-price for her, ostensibly because it is one of many outdated practices of the Yoruba people that do not match his civilised opinions. Sidi, the "jewel" of the title, seems to return Lakunle's affection but is constantly angered by his condescension towards her as an "uneducated bush girl" and by his highfalutin phrasemaking. Moreover, her sense of self-worth according to "traditional" criteria for desirability as a bride-to-be is (ironically) increased by her prominence in a recently-published book of photographs taken by a visitor to the village.

When the *bale* or autocratic head of the village, Baroka (Sello Maake kaNcube), seeks a new bride to add to his harem, Sidi's growing reputation makes her the most eminent candidate. Sidi rejects his proposal – more out of egotism than fidelity to Lakunle or opposition to a polygamous system – but when she hears that Baroka is impotent, she decides to pretend that she will accept him, in order to taunt him when he is unable to perform in bed.

Not for nothing is “the lion”, Baroka, also known as “the fox”, for he has cunningly circulated a false rumour about “the end of his manhood” in order to lure Sidi to his bedroom, where he seduces her (or is it rape?). When Lakunle hears of this, he despairs – until he realises that Sidi, who is no longer a maiden, does not merit a bride-price. Thus, he thinks, the barrier to their marriage has been removed; and he asks her again to marry him. But Sidi, impressed by (or scared of) Baroka's physical prowess, chooses instead to marry the chief.

Soyinka's language is rich and unabashedly lyrical. It abounds in imagery, digressive soliloquising and verbal flourishes, marking his style off from the terse “realist” dialogue often associated with theatre since World War Two. The cast does justice to this aspect of the script, clearly enjoying bringing the dense text to life.

The staging is dynamic, with a multi-level set dominated in the centre by a wire baobab tree rising suggestively above and behind Baroka's bed. The cast make full use of this space as actors and dancers move across the stage in sharp, coordinated movements; indeed, energetic dancing and drumming feature prominently, particularly in those scenes where Soyinka has constructed masques, charades or plays-within-the-play to echo Yoruba pageantry and oral literary techniques.

This insistence on meta-narrative – foregrounding the story-telling process at the very moment of telling a story – is present from the start of the play. Two schoolgirls (Gontse Ntshegang and Lesedi Job), Lakunle's pupils, argue over how best to present the tale, as the audience is ushered from the written word into a performed world in which the girls function simultaneously as narrators, as protagonists and as a kind of chorus.

These schoolgirls are not innocents, however; they taunt Lakunle, and they take a cruel pleasure in narrating his downfall. In fact, the story they tell should not really be rendered comically and, despite the strengths of this particular production, towards the end of the play I found myself disappointed with Soyinka's views about gender as implemented onstage.

Ultimately, irrespective of whether the "traditional" or the "modern" prevails, the play appears to take patriarchy for granted. At first, when Lakunle uses his "book learning" to defend chauvinist principles, his arrogance is undercut by his bumbling speeches. The "ignorant" Sidi matches him argument for argument, and it seems that traditional ways are vindicated: perhaps it is a good thing that neither roads nor railways reach the little village of Ilunjile, bringing with them the false enlightenment of the city (Lagos or London).

Likewise, it seems that the urban corrupts the rural. Sidi becomes proud and disdainful when she sees her image printed in a book. The Christian Bible provides no better moral compass than "pagan" West African gods such as Sango.

But here the justification of the "old ways" breaks down. Baroka is comical in his obsession with still being able to father children at a ripe old age. We hardly feel sorry that this once-great "big man of Africa" has lost his manhood. This hints at a possible critique of phallocentrism – why should the procreating penis, sower of seed, be the basic premise on which a claim to power is built?

Unfortunately, however, the play does not explore this possibility; virility remains an unquestioned *sine qua non* of the right to rule. Sadiku (Warona Seane) is Baroka's first wife, and has been responsible for procuring his other wives. When Baroka tells her that he is impotent, she is sent into a frenzied soliloquy in which she celebrates having "dried him up", and bitterly affirms that it is in fact women who control men because they eventually exhaust men sexually: "Take warning, my masters – we'll scorch you in the end!"

Now, this is patent hogwash. To suggest that women are *actually* in charge of patriarchal societies in Africa because, sooner or later, every man loses his sexual potency, is to

accept that the phallus should be at the centre and to ignore that women across Africa are oppressed, raped and abused by men who operate on this basis.

That Baroka is finally able to “wow” Sidi with his virility and potency, to obtain her as a wife by a show of force (foreshadowed by his wrestling match with a servant), does little but perpetuate male-female relations that are built on deceit and sexual *realpolitik*. It really isn’t funny.

### **Custom of Bride Price:**

Encyclopaedia Britannica says regarding the bride-price, “the practice is common in most parts of the globe in one form or another, but it is perhaps most prevalent in Africa.” Bride-price is money or property given by the bridegroom to the family of his bride. Such a system is still followed by the native Africans and Muslims in their religion. Even in India, the same system followed in olden days, but it had gone reverse in the later period. However, the primitive African societies follow the footsteps of tradition and culture, demanding the bride-price to the bridegroom. It is honour to the bride who receives a good price. If a girl marries without the price, it is assumed that she is not a virgin or she is not worth to marry.

Sidi the traditional African girl, who is untouched by the foreign ideas and culture, insists on the bride-price and its honour to Lakunle, I have told you, and I say it again I shall marry you today, next week Or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid.... But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have The full bride-price. Will you make me A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please. But Sidi will not make herself A cheap bowl for the village spit....They will say I was no virgin That I was forced to sell my shame And marry you without a price. (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 8)

According to the custom of Africa, a girl marrying without the bride-price is a disgrace to the bride. Sidi, the beauty of the village, expects Lakunle to pay more bride-price for her beauty and virginity. But Lakunle, who has European sensibilities, is an iconoclast of the African traditional manner. He attacks the traditional African customs of marriage. He calls the system of bride-price: “A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated ... unpalatable” (“The Lion and the Jewel”,

8). As the teacher educated by west, he objects it due that his influence on the western concept of gender equality or his empty pocket. He believes that the custom is a disgrace and humiliation to women, “to pay the price would be / To buy a heifer off the market stall” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 9).

### **Child Bearing:**

Getting child, after one’s marriage, is one of the most vital purposes of marriage. That is the only way to make the world exist. But the iconoclast and lover of western values, Lakunle does not consider the child bearing is a must. He says that he does not seek wife “To fetch and carry, / To cook and scrub, / To bring forth children by the gross ...” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 9). But Sidi could not make a grasp his modernism means even child bearing as an issue of contempt in the wife. Out of fear, immediately she utters, “Heaven forgive you!” to save him from the punishment of Gods.

The custom treats child bearing is not only the part of life, but also it qualifies the married couple’s life meaningful. Lauretta Ngcobo writes more about this:

As elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman’s fertility to the husband’s family group

### **Significance of Chastity:**

In the play, the playwright until the end does not show that the bride-price is paid to Sidi by her spouse. After Sidi is seduced by Baroka, Lakunle readily accepts to marry her, there he says, “... it is only fair/ That we forget the bride-price totally/ Since you no longer can be called a maid” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 54). But she chooses the seducer as her husband than the semi-witted, Lakunle.

Her decision is due to the concept of chastity. Through Sidi, Soyinka brings out the culture of the tradition based rigid society. She would have chosen young Lakunle to marry, but her loss of virginity makes her to marry the old Baroka,

Marry who ...? You thought ...

Did you really think that you, and I ...

Why, did you think that after him,

I could endure the touch of another man? ("The Lion and the Jewel", 57)

Chastity is the only reason that prevents her to accept the proposal of Lakunle. It is not the manliness of Baroka impresses her and she decides to marry him, but the age old tradition of marrying and living with only one man ceases her to take any other decisions. Even though she is portrayed as not fully matured girl, but she is the one of the strong representatives of the tradition in the play. R. Sethuraman comments on her decision at end, "Sidi in "The Lion and the Jewel" is fleetingly metamorphosed into the glittering girl of the magazine by the Western photographer, although common sense prevails on her in the end" (224).

### **Polygamous Society:**

In the play, Soyinka portrays the African polygamous society. The marrying of multiple wives is legal in Nigeria and it is a prominent feature of traditional life. Lofts and wives are the criteria of wealth of a person. It is accepted that the old man marrying the young girls. Toyin Falola in his book "Culture and Customs of Nigeria", states regarding polygamy, "...the function of the family as an economic unit of production. Especially for those in agrarian production, a large family provides the labour necessary for the maintenance and growth of the business" (56). And he adds more, that the tradition allows widow inheritance, in which a man marries the widow of a deceased brother. This practice ensures that the woman and her children remain under the economic and social care of the family (58). Sometimes the successor of dead Bale or chief of the area marries the last and favourite wife of the dead Bale, as his first wife. According to the custom, the first wife of the Bale becomes the senior and receives all honours in the family.

According to the tradition, a Bale can have as much as wives he can, but he has to follow some conditions like, treating all equally, distributing resources equally to all wives and children, avoid discrimination among wives and children (Falola 59). Baroka, the Bale of the village, has many wives. His harem is already full with his number of wives from Sadiku to latest favourite wife, Ailatu. The desire for more girls has not left him even at the age of sixty two. Una Maclean

calls the play a “Nigerian bedroom farce” for its convention of polygamy (51). After seeing Sidi’s beautiful pictures in a glossy magazine, he desires to have her on that night and he expresses his wish to his first wife, Sadiku to woo that young girl for him. It is the custom of the village that the first wife has to persuade and makes the girls to marry her husband; it is a part of her duty to ensure his happiness. By this act, the society emphasizes that the wives have to obey and do furnish all sorts of his desire. It is settled in the minds of the women in the society. Sadiku is the veteran representative of the tradition. She is proud of her role as the chief wife of a family in a polygamous society. While she is wooing Sidi for Baroka, states another tradition in the society that last wife of the Bale becomes chief wife to the next Bale. She tempts Sidi by narrate the tradition:

Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale’s last wife? I’ll tell you. When he dies ... it means that you will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you shall be his favourite. No living in the outhouses for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace; first as the latest bride, and afterwards, as the head of the new harem ... It is a rich life, Sidi. (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 20). The surprising fact is the successor, most probably the dead Bale’s son, becoming husband to his step-mother. It is not a serious matter in the society that a woman became wife to both father and son.

Sadiku is an instance of such a practice prevails in the society. She reveals that she is the bare witness of Okiki’s, father of Baroka, impotency “I was there when it happened to your father, the great Okiki. I did for him, I, the youngest and freshest of the wives” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 30).

These words state that she was the youngest wife of Okiki and now according to the custom, she has become the senior wife to Baroka, i.e. she married father and after his death she became wife to her step-son. It is quite strange custom to the Indian readers. But Yoruba calls it is the responsibility of the king to take care of the youngest wife and children of the previous sovereign. This custom is called “isupo” among the Yoruba (Timothy).

## **Romance**



In the play, both men, Lakunle and Baroka play the role of romantic lovers in a different way. Lakunle plays this role for much of the play; he praises Sidi's beauty, kneels to her and performs services for her. Baroka, who seems anti-romantic to many of us, turns in a brief performance as a romantic lover. Having appealed to Sidi's vanity through the stamp-printing machine he weaves a spell of words around her:

In Baroka's part, we see that certain qualities of slyness in him make him win Sidi which are not manifested in Lakunle. From the very beginning she cannot tolerate Lakunle and till the end she is consistent in expressing her hatred to this callous chap. On the other hand, when she is seduced by Baroka, she decides to choose one single man whom she would let herself touch in future and that single man should be Baroka who has already touched her enough. The Bale impresses her with his skill at wrestling; he pretends not to know about the offer of marriage and implies that Sadiku is always trying to make matches for him. Moreover, he cunningly appeals to her loyalty to the old village ways and he praises her depth and wisdom, too. He flatters her with his talk of having her portrait on the stamps and all the time he talks to Sidi in a soothing tone with the most flattering seriousness as well as stressing the responsibilities of the village head. Lakunle obviously lacks this foresightedness and therefore Sidi cannot get reliability as well as practicality in him.

### **Victory of Old Africa?**

*The Lion and the Jewel* shows the triumph Baroka over Lakunle and many readers and critics regard this as a victory of old Africa over foreign-educated parvenu or upstarts. It is true that the vitality of Africa has been demonstrated and the established rulers have been shown as dignified, arrogant and powerful. But the way Soyinka presents Baroka is not acceptable to those who want to romanticize traditional African leaders. Baroka is not a straightforward conservative; he has made many a significant innovations and his language shows his familiarity with alien idioms and ideas. Several small African nations make a large part of their national income by selling beautiful stamps to collectors abroad. It is not then too surprising that the Bale should view stamp sales as a major

source of revenue.

### **The Old and the New – Complementing Each Other**

Soyinka has portrayed Baroka and Lakunle- these two men to complement one-another, and his argument in the play is worked out through the juxtaposition of them. Baroka is presented in a much more favourable light than Lakunle, but Soyinka is dealing in relative rather than in absolute terms. He has taken us into a grey area and he forces us to look closely and distinguish different shades of grey. He does not allow us to „sit back and separate the black from the white at a quick glance“. (Gibbes, 54) We may, therefore, say that this play is not in favour of reckless progress and false imitation of so-called western practices; simultaneously it is not in favour of simply standing still. Like all good fictions, it gives us something to think and argue about.

### **Reactionary Answer?**

Some critics accused Wole Soyinka of giving in *The Lion and the Jewel*, a reactionary (that is, a backward looking) answer to these problems. Soyinka is not a writer who believes that „progress“ is always a good thing. As a small example, he shares Baroka's view that modern roads are „murderous“. On the other hand, like Baroka he has stated his belief that „the old must flow into the new“. One critic replied to the charge that *The Lion and the Jewel* is a reactionary play by arguing that „one of the first duties of the comedian is the exploding of cliché“. In other words, it had become a mechanical thing – a cliché - to say that the new must be preferable to the old. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Wole Soyinka had simply refused to reproduce that cliché. (Blishen 1975)

### **Wedding:**

Another tradition mentioned in the play is wedding. There are no much details of the wedding and its related functions, yet some descriptions and words of Sadiku and Lakunle state the culture of wedding in Yoruba. Before the marriage, the bride packs her clothes and trinkets

and oils herself as a bride. And she is accompanied by her relatives to bridegroom's house with a group of musicians and dancers of the village. The marriage has many ceremonies, Lakunle verbalises it "... I have to hire a praise-singer, / and such a number of ceremonies / must firstly be performed" ("The Lion and the Jewel", 56). Soyinka narrates the decoration of the bride,

*"Sidi now enters. ...she hold a bundle, done up in a richly embroidered cloth. She is radiant, jewelled, lightly clothed, and wears light leather-thong sandals", "Festive air, fully pervasive"* ("The Lion and the Jewel", 57-58). These words show that the ceremony of marriage is very colourful and mirthful ambience with songs and dance.

### **Oaths on Pantheon of Gods:**

As well as, Soyinka has included some religious tradition like making oaths on Yoruba pantheon of Gods like Ogun and Sango. These two gods are usually invoked in oaths. Ogun is he god of oaths and justice. In Yoruba courts, devotees of the faith swear to tell the truth by kissing a machete sacred to Ogun. The Yoruba consider Ogun fearsome and terrible in his revenge; they believe that if one breaks a pact made in his name, swift retribution will follow (Horton). In the play, when a girl gives the news to Sidi about her photograph published in a western magazine, at first she could not believe and asks,

SIDI: Is that the truth? Swear! Ask Ogun to  
Strike you dead.

GIRL: Ogun strike me dead if I lie. ("The Lion and the Jewel", 12)

In the scene of Sadiku woos Sidi for her husband, Sidi's acts make her to pray to the God Sango to restore her sanity, "May Sango restore your wits. For most surely some angry god has taken possession of you" ("The Lion and the Jewel", 22). Sango is considered as god of thunder and lightning. His anger is sudden and terrible. He strikes his enemies down with lightning. And Yoruba believe that only Sango can relive the people who behave abnormal or possess by any angry god or evil spirit.

### **Songs, Dance and Mime:**

Songs, dance and mimes are the major components in the play. Soyinka has made use of these elements to forward the action of the play. Russell McDougall considers the usage of “dance as the illumination of dramatic form” (102). In the first part of the play, “Morning,” Sidi and her village girls and Lakunle performs a dance and mime of “the dance of the lost traveller”. In the dance, the villages enact the experiences of the western photographer on his first visit to Ilujinle. The second mime is performed by Lakunle to Sidi and Sadiku about the coming of the railway, and of its rerouting away from the village when the Bale bribes the Surveyor. In this episode, Lakunle seeks to expose the wiliness of self-indulgent Baroka by telling them how the Bale has sabotaged all schemes of connecting the village to modern civilization. The next dance is performed by Sadiku after Baroka has confided in her the loss of his manhood. Sadiku gloats over it and places a carved figure of Baroka in the village centre and she performs “victory dance”. The fourth mime is the wrestling match between Baroka and a wrestler. The wrestling motions are mimed in order to impress Sidi with his prowess and virility. Baroka keeps on talking warmly and affectionately to Sidi and defeats the wrestler also. Russell McDougall opines regarding the act of the Bale: “His argument is shaped and timed so as to suggest almost inevitably the descriptive metaphor of dance” (111). The final song, dance and mime are performed in the end of the play, after Sidi has announced to Lakunle that her intention of marrying Baroka and bear his children. Sidi sings and dances the “dance of virility

### **Role of Women in the Society:**

The vision of Soyinka is not clearly present in this play. Till the end it is ambiguous that whether he exalts the customs and tradition of his people or not. To the readers some of the tradition and customs portrayed in the play are new to them. The polygamous society gives importance to the Bale, it allows him to marry as many girls he can, he uses the girls only for his pleasure, and after a new arrival of favourite he sends the last favourite to an outhouse. It shows the society never give respect to women, and they are used to, as Lakunle tells, “pounds the yam or bends all the day to plant the millet ... to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub, to bring forth

children by the gross” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 7 & 9). The custom of dead Bale’s last wife becomes the senior wife to the successor, i.e. son. The custom is very awkward and surprise to almost all the readers, particularly to the Indian readers. However, the playwright does not make any condemn, dislike or rejection of it. Instead, by ending the play with the marriage ceremony of the Bale and the girl seems to show that Soyinka nods approval to this custom. By the marriage of the cunning Bale and ignorant and pride Sidi, the author emphasizes that chastity is only for female. All these show that the female society is highly marginalized by the males. The female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of the doubly oppressed in the society. They are the symbol of self-marginality, particularly Sidi:

... she never allows any rational idea into her mind, which is advised by Lakunle.  
...greatly supports and argues for her society and its tradition. She does not want to come out of the conventional ideologies. She does not know that she is marginalizing herself for the ideologies of the society. (Kumar, 46)

In the play, Lakunle like a champion of feminism, voices for the females, who are fastened with the traditions of the society. But he is portrayed as a foolish and stupid teacher, who never gets any respect from anyone, Sidi chides his state in the village, “You and your ragged books dragging your feet to every threshold and rushing them out aging as cruses greet you instead of welcome.... The village says you’re man, and I begin to understand” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 5 & 10). Even after so much humiliation he tells his dream of new, improved and modern society to her. But his expectation of development is a mirage. And through the character of Baroka, playwright expresses that the society is not ready to accept the changes, even if it is necessary. By portraying Lakunle as a hallow-modernist, Soyinka presents the stubbornness of society. C.N. Ramachandran concludes his character, “Lakunle represents not western culture but only hallow Westernization, not real but only the image. The play abundantly establishes that Lakunle is a modern version of Don Quixote, a book nourished shrimp “(201). Eldred Jones calls Lakunle “the half-baked Westernized African” (24) rather Florence Stratton posits, “he is a caricature of the alienated African – a ridiculous figure in any case, but not in the latter an object of pity” (539). Onwueme in his article states that Soyinka made “a mild satire against Baroka’s ruthless leadership and brutal force in society” (64). Even the mild satire also made only through the

weak character Lakunle. On support of Lakunle, Basavaraj Naiker writes that Lakunle's protestation against the payment of bride price, instead of cunning ways of drawing Sidi into bed, his rational method of convincing her to marry her, and his aesthetics of love and poetic sensibility have no significance in the tradition-ridden society (112). The society is out of its sensibility, which never heeds to words of educated.

Along with that, the playwright satirizes the educational system in his land through the character Lakunle. Through him, the dramatist brings out the African tendency to imitate the life of

the white man. He presents an ironical situation through the depiction of the character. Lakunle is an embodiment of the qualities found in the foreign educated African student. He must be an intelligent herald of the revolution against old customs and blind faith. But he is stuffed with empty bombastic words, and unclear vision to change his society. The sphere of education requires a complete sense of devotion. But pretensions, affection, hypocrisy, lack of depth, have clouded the atmosphere. It is so disheartening to note that in the context of newly evolving nation like, Africa, where the universities do not promote the custodians to upgrade the sphere of education, instead they breed bugs as in any other fields.

The antithesis to Lakunle, Baroka is a very impressive character in the play. He does not sounds like Lakunle, the chatterbox, rather through his actions, he proves himself as a man of action. Physically he is very strong and vigorous. His worldly wisdom keeps him as a head of the village for a long time. He keeps control the village under his rule; he isolates the commoners as far as possible from modern ideas, even modern transportation, like railways. He combines courage with cunning to pursue pleasures. He enjoys the privileges and power with zest, with care and caution. At the outset, he represents tradition, but the study of his character brings out that he represents neither tradition nor modern. He utilizes both the ideologies for his personal satisfaction

Anthony Graham White remarks that Soyinka approved neither headman's (Baroka) tradition nor the schoolteacher's modernism (130). The statement is made out of the reason that nowhere in the play, Soyinka satirizes both the ideologies. James Gibbs comments about the purpose of writing the play "the play should be digested as an experience, not chewed over in

search of an easily summarised message or a moral of general relevance” (“Notes on The Lion and the Jewel”, 55). By all the description of traditions and hindrances to modernism, and the portrayal of Lakunle as hallowmodernist, the playwright leads the reader to the assumption that he does not support the tradition or modernity instead he merely records and pictures the tradition and people’s life in the African society.

But a deep reading of the play clearly depicts that Soyinka’s support to indigenous tradition. In last part of the play, Sidi rejects the modernism through act of handing over the magazine to Lakunle and the rejection of western way of life is mentioned by rejecting Lakunle. “The verbal elements of the scene identify the final dance by its traditional function, as a ritualisation of community, so that the motive behind Sidi’s invocation of the gods of fertility is to ensure cultural continuity” (McDougall 116). This seems to be the issue of Baroka’s triumph, i.e. triumph of tradition.

The play is very mirthful to read, and makes the reader to enjoy the play more without any other difficult tangent philosophies or ideologies. Ultimately, the play is on the surface plane portraying the tribal life and its confrontation with the culture of the West. And playwright reiterates upon the idea that the West has not made any deep impact on African culture and the tradition in the society is typical with all its merits and demerits. The play exemplifies a voracity that amidst the search for requirements, conflicts and confrontation, man must channelize the stream of his mental faculty unfettered by the tyranny of customs and beliefs, as worthless as desert, preserving the mental resources for the functioning modes of national mechanism with the knowledge unhampered by the constraints of ideologies.

Plot :

The play takes place over the span of a day (Sunday). It is divided into three parts; morning, noon, and night.

*The Lion and the Jewel* takes place in Ilujinle, a small African village facing rapid change. As the play begins, it is morning, and the audience sees a marketplace, dominated by an immense odan tree. To the left of the stage is part of the village school, within which the students chant the “Arithmetic Times.” Sidi enters the stage; she is a beautiful, slim girl with plaited hair—the true village belle. Balancing a pail on her head and wearing a broad cloth, Sidi attracts the attention of Lakunle, the young schoolteacher, who looks out the school windows to admire her beauty.

Lakunle, dressed in an old-style, threadbare, unironed English suit, scolds Sidi for carrying the pail on her head, telling her that the weight of the pail will hurt her spine and shorten her neck. He wants her to be a “modern” woman. Sidi, however, quickly reminds him of the times he has sworn that her looks do not affect his love for her. There is a comic exchange of charge and countercharge between the two, revealing Lakunle’s uncomfortable attitude about Sidi’s showing parts of her body: “How often must I tell you, Sidi, that a grown-up girl must cover up her. . . . Her shoulders.”

This first scene also introduces Baroka, the Bale (the village chief): Sixty-two years old, wiry, goateed, he is also attracted by Sidi. The Bale, the opposite of Lakunle, is an artful, traditional man who resists the building of roads and railways, trying to keep reserved to himself.

## **Morning**

A schoolteacher is teaching a class the times table when Sidi walks past carrying a pail of water on her head. The teacher peers out of the window and disappears. Two 11-year-old schoolboys start ogling her, so he hits them on the head and leaves to confront her. At this point, we find out that the schoolteacher is Lakunle. He is described as wearing a threadbare and rumpled clean English suit that is a little too small for him. He wears a tie that disappears beneath his waistcoat. His trousers are ridiculously oversized, and his shoes are blanco-white. He comes out and insists on taking the pail from Sidi. She refuses, saying that she would look silly. Lakunle retorts, saying that he told her not to carry loads on her head or her neck may be shortened. He also tells her not to expose so much of her cleavage with the cloth she wears around her breasts. Sidi says that it is too inconvenient for her to do so. She scolds him, saying that the village thinks him stupid, but



Lakunle says that he is not so easily cowed by taunts. Lakunle also insults her, saying that her brain is smaller than his. He claims that his books say so. Sidi is angry.

When they are done arguing, Sidi wants to leave, but Lakunle tells her of his love for her. Sidi says that she does not care for his love. Eventually, we find out that Sidi does not want to marry him because Lakunle refuses to pay her bride-price as he thinks it a uncivilised, outrageous custom. Sidi tells him that if she did so, people will jeer at her, saying that she is not a virgin. Lakunle further professes how he wants to marry her and treat her "just like the Lagos couples I have seen". Sidi does not care. She also says that she finds the Western custom of kissing repulsive. She tells him that not paying her bride price is mean and miserly.

Enter the village girls. They decide to play "the dance of the Lost Traveller" featuring the sudden arrival of a photographer in their midst some time ago. They tease the traveller in the play, calling his motorbike "the devil's own horse" and the camera that he used to take pictures "the one-eyed box". Four girls dance the "devil-horse", a youth is selected to play the snake and Lakunle becomes the Traveller. He seeks to be excused to teach Primary Four Geography but Sidi informs him that the village is on holiday due to the arrival of the photographer/traveler.

We also find out that the photographer made a picture book about the village based on the photos he took. There is a picture of Sidi on the front page, and a two-page spread of her somewhere inside. Baroka is featured too, but he "is in a little corner somewhere in the book, and even that corner he shares with one of the village latrines". They banter about for a while, Lakunle gave in and participated because he couldn't tolerate being taunted by them.

### **The Dance of the Lost Traveller**

The four girls crouch on the ground, forming the wheels of the car. Lakunle adjusts their position and sits in air in the middle. He pretends to drive the "car". The four wheels rotate their upper halves of their bodies parallel to the ground in tune with the beat of the drum. The drum beat speeds up to a final crash. The girls dance the stall. They shudder, and drop their faces onto their laps. He pretends to try to restart the "car". He gets out and checks the "wheels" and also pinches them. He tries to start the "car", fails and takes his things for a trek.

He hears a girl singing, but attributes it to sunstroke, so he throws the bottle that he was drinking from in that general direction. He hears a scream and a torrent of abuse. He takes a closer look and sees a girl (played by Sidi). He tries to take photos, but falls down into the stream.

The cast assembles behind him, pretending to be villagers in an ugly mood hauling him to the *odan* tree in the town centre. Then Baroka appears and the play stops. He talks to Lakunle for a while, saying that he knew how the play went and was waiting for the right time to step in. He drops subtle hints of an existing feud between him and Lakunle, then makes the play continue. The villagers once again start thirsting for his blood. He is hauled before Baroka, thrown on his face. He tries to explain his plight. Baroka seems to understand and orders a feast in Lakunle's honour. Lakunle takes the opportunity to take more photos of Sidi. He is also pressed to drink lots of alcohol, and at the end of the play, he is close to vomiting.

The play ends. Sidi praises him for his performance. Lakunle runs away, followed by a flock of women. Baroka and the wrestler sit alone. Baroka takes out his book, and muses that it has been five full months since he last took a wife.

## **Noon**

Sidi is at a road near the market. Lakunle follows her, carrying the firewood that Sidi asks him to help her get. She admires the pictures of her in the magazine. Then Sadiku appears, wearing a shawl over her head. She informs her that the Lion (Baroka) wishes to take her as a wife. Lakunle is outraged, but Sidi stops him. Lakunle changes tactics, telling her as his lover to ignore the message. Sadiku took that as a yes, but Sidi dashed her hopes, saying that since her fame had spread to Lagos and the rest of the world, she deserves more than that. Sadiku presses on, dissembling that Baroka has sworn not to take any more wives after her and that she would be his favourite and would get many privileges, including being able to sleep in the palace rather than one of the outhouses. As Baroka's last wife, she would also be able to become the first, and thus head wife, of his successor, in the same way that Sadiku was Baroka's head wife. However, Sidi sees through her lies, and tells her that she knew that he just wanted fame "as the one man

who has possessed 'the jewel of Ilujinle'. Sadiku is flabbergasted and wants to kill Lakunle for what he has done for her.

Sidi shows the magazine. She says that in the picture, she looks absolutely beautiful while he simply looks like a ragged, blackened piece of saddle leather: she is youthful but he is spent. Sadiku changes techniques, saying that if Sidi does not want to be his wife, will she be kind enough to attend a small feast in her honour at his house that night. Sidi refuses, saying that she knows that every woman who has eaten supper with him eventually becomes his wife. Lakunle interjects, informing them that Baroka was known for his wiliness, particularly when he managed to foil the Public Works attempt to build a railroad through Ilujinle. Baroka bribed the surveyor for the route to move the railroad much farther away as "the earth is most unsuitable, could not possibly support the weight of a railway engine". Lakunle is distraught, as he thinks just how close Ilujinle was to civilisation at that time.

The scene cuts to Baroka's bedroom. Ailatu is plucking his armpit hairs. There is a strange machine with a long lever at the side. It is covered with animal skins and rugs. Baroka mentions that she is too soft with her pulls. Then he tells her that he plans to take a new wife, but that he would let her be the "sole out-puller of my sweat-bathed hairs". She is angry, and deliberately plucks the next few hairs a lot harder. Sadiku enters. He shoos Ailatu away, lamenting about his bleeding armpit.

Sadiku informs him that she failed to woo Sidi. She told her that Sidi flatly refused her order, claiming that he was far too old. Baroka pretends to doubt his manliness and asks Sadiku to massage the soles of his feet. Sadiku complies. He lies to her that his manhood ended a week ago, specifically warning her not to tell anyone. He comments that he is only sixty-two. Compared to him, his grandfather had fathered two sons late on sixty-five and Okiki, his father, produced a pair of female twins at sixty-seven. Finally Baroka falls asleep. The summary is explained in this way, Sidi walks, engrossed in her picture in the magazine, while being followed by Lakunle. Sadiku approaches them and tells Sidi that Baroka wants her to become one of his wives. She refuses the privilege based on Baroka's age, and the fact that she believes that he is jealous of her fame. Sidi believes that Baroka wants to marry her in order to own her and triumph over her. Lakunle agrees with her assessment and Sadiku believes that Lakunle's

madness has transferred to Sidi. She then invites Sidi to a small feast, or supper, but Sidi refuses this invitation as well. She does so on the basis of the unfavourable rumours that surround 'Baruka's suppers'. Every woman who has supper with Baruka ends up being a wife or a prostitute. We then find out, from Lakunle, why Baruka is referred to as the fox. He deviously prevented a railway from running through the town by bribing the officials in charge. Saduka interrupts Baruka's armpit plucking session, with his favourite wife, with Sidi's rejection. He reacts by going from shocked, to defensive, to resigned. He tells Saduka to keep his defeat a secret between them. The chapter can be explained in this way, Sidi passes the school and Lakunle rushes out to speak to her. He reprimands her for carrying water on her head and flip flops from wooing her one moment, to insulting her the next. The reader learns that Sidi is not opposed to marrying Lakunle, but the fact that he refuses to pay her bride price annoys her. Lakunle refuses to pay the bride price because he believes that it is a primitive practice. The villagers, who believe Lakunle is mad, rush to tell Sidi that the strangers have brought the book. She learns that she is the star, and that Baroka was given only a small part. The villagers re-enact that first encounter with the stranger, with Lakunle accepting the role of the stranger. He does so unwillingly, at first, then with zeal. Baroka interrupts the re-enactment, then the audience learns of his intention to marry Sidi.

## **Night**

Sidi is at the village centre, by the schoolroom window. Enter Sadiku, who is carrying a bundle. She sets down a figure by the tree. She gloats, saying that she has managed to be the undoing (making him impotent) of Baroka, and of his father, Okiki, before that. Sidi is amazed at what she initially perceives to be Sadiku going mad. She shuts the window and exits, shocking Sadiku. After a pause, Sadiku resumes her victory dance and even asks Sidi to join in. Then Lakunle enters. He scorns them, saying that "The full moon is not yet, but the women cannot wait. They must go mad without it." Sidi and Sadiku stop dancing. They talk for a while. As they are about to resume dancing, Sidi states her plans to visit Baroka for his feast and toy with him. Lakunle tries in vain to stop her, telling her that if her deception were to be discovered she would be beaten up. Sidi leaves. Lakunle and Sadiku converse. Lakunle states his grand plans to modernise the area by abolishing the bride-price, building a motor-road through the town and

bring city ways to isolated Ilujinle. He goes on to spurn her, calling her a bride-collector for Baroka.

The scene is now Baroka's bedroom. Baroka is arm-wrestling the wrestler seen earlier. He is surprised that she managed to enter unchallenged. Then he suddenly remembers that that day was the designated day off for the servants. He laments that Lakunle had made his servants form an entity called the Palace Workers' Union. He asks if Ailatu was at her usual place, and was disappointed to find out that she had not left him yet despite scolding her severely. Then Sidi mentions that he was here for the supper. Sidi starts playing around with Baroka. She asks him what was up between him and Ailatu. He is annoyed. Changing the subject, Sidi says that she thinks Baroka will win the ongoing arm-wrestling match. Baroka responds humbly, complimenting the strength and ability of the wrestler. She slowly teases Baroka, asking if he was planning to take a wife. She draws an example, asking if he was her father, would he let her marry a person like him?

Sidi takes this opportunity to slightly tease him, and is rewarded by his violent reaction by taking the wrestler and slinging him over his shoulder. The wrestler quickly recovers and a new match begins again. The discussion continues. Baroka is hurt by the parallels and subtle hints about his nature dropped by Sidi. Sidi even taunts him, saying that he has failed to produce any children for the last two years. Eventually he is so angered that he slams the wrestler's arm down on the table, winning the match. He tells the defeated wrestler to get the fresh gourd by the door. In the meantime, Baroka tries to paint himself as a grumpy old man with few chances to show his kindness. The wrestler returns. Baroka continues with his self-glorification. Then he shows her the now-familiar magazine and an addressed envelope. He shows her a stamp, featuring her likeness, and tells her that her picture would adorn the official stamp of the village. The machine at the side of his room is also revealed to be a machine to produce stamps. As she admires the pictures of her in the magazine, Baroka happens to mention that he does not hate progress, only its nature which made "all roofs and faces look the same". He continues praising Sidi's looks, appealing to her.

The scene cuts back to the village centre, where Lakunle is pacing in frustration. He is mad at Sadiku for tricking her to go see Baroka, and at the same time concerned that Baroka will

harm or imprison her. Some mummers arrive. Sadiku remains calm, despite Lakunle's growing stress. Sadiku steals a coin from Lakunle to pay the mummers. In return, the mummers drum her praises, but Sadiku claims that Lakunle was the real benefactor. Then they dance the Baroka story, showing him at his prime and his eventual downfall. Lakunle is pleased by the parts where they mock Baroka. Sadiku mentions that she used to be known as Sadiku of the duiker's feet because she could twist and untwist her waist with the smoothness of a water snake.

Sidi appears. She is distraught. Lakunle is outraged, and plans to bring the case to court. Sidi reveals that Baroka only told her at the end that it was a trap. Baroka said that he knew that Sadiku would not keep it to herself, and go out and mock his pride. Lakunle is overcome with emotion, and after at first expressing deep despair, he offers to marry her instead, with no bride-price since she is not a virgin after all. Lakunle is pleased that things have gone as he hoped. Sadiku tells him that Sidi is preparing for a wedding. Lakunle is very happy, saying he needs a day or two to get things ready for a proper Christian wedding. Then musicians appear. Sidi appears, bearing a gift. She tells Lakunle that he is invited to her wedding. Lakunle hopes that the wedding will be between Sidi and himself and her, but she informs her that she has no intention of marrying him, but rather will marry Baroka. Lakunle is stunned. Sidi says that between Baroka and him, at sixty, Baroka is still full of life but Lakunle would be probably "ten years dead". Sadiku then gives Sidi her blessing. The marriage ceremony continues. A young girl taunts Lakunle, and he gives chase. Sadiku gets in his way. He frees himself and clears a space in the crowd for them both to dance. Therefore the summary of the chapter is explained in this way. Sadiku dances around a tree, celebrating the fact that the lion, Baroka, is defeated. She shares the secret of Baroka's defeat, at the hands of a woman, and they both rejoice. Lakunle enters and is also made aware of the lion's demise. Sidi wants to flaunt herself before the lion and mock him, but Sadiku warns her of his cunning and Lakunle warns her of his savagery. Sidi ignores the warnings and runs off to mock the lion, and Lakunle is left with Sadiku, who makes derisive comments to him. Sidi enters Baroka's home, but there are no servants to greet her. She enters the lion's bedroom, where he is wrestling with a gentleman. A verbal dance occurs between the two wrestlers, with both of them winning and losing at different points. After Baroka wins his wrestling match, he turns his attention to Sidi and starts to beat her at the verbal game that she initiates. Baroka tells Sidi that he will place her face on a stamp, and relentlessly

enlightens her about the advantages of the young learning from the old. She later returns to Lakunle and Sadiku and reports her failed attempt at mocking the lion, as well as her lost virginity. Lakunle offers to marry Sidi, despite the loss of her valuable virginity, but refuses to pay the bride price. She laughs at Lakunle's offer and chooses Baruka, the lion and The drama ends.

## **5 Major characters**

**Baroka** - The Balè or viceroynal chieftain of Ilujinle, a Yoruba village in the realm of the Ibadan clan's kingdom. A crafty individual, he is the Lion referred to in the title. At sixty-two years of age, he has already sired sixty-three children. He is called the “Bale” of Ilujinle, the “Lion” in the title of the play. This village chief is sixty-two years old, very proud, deceptive, and cunning. His attempt to win the village belle, Sidi, through deception is the central focus of the play. The Bale manipulates the other characters by feigning sexual impotence.

Baroka's desire to keep tradition in his village is also displayed when he stops Western civilization from spreading to his village. The Public Works attempt to build a railway in Ilujinle, but Baroka is against progress. The Public Works send in workers and surveyors to tear down jungles in order to run a railway through the village. When Baroka learns of this, he pays off the surveyor with money, a coop of hens, and a goat. Pleased, the surveyor and workers pack up their things and leave “convinced” that the tracks were intended to be laid further away. There is no question that Baroka's motive for turning progress away is to preserve his village in its traditional essence.

In the course of the story Baroka's qualities of cunning, discrimination and strength are shown to advantage; Lakunle is provided with a number of opportunities to display his talents but he fails recurrently. Finally Sidi's decision to marry Baroka reflects the playwright's opinion that in the context provided by the play, Baroka is the better man and his attitudes are the more substantial as well as worthy.

**Lakunle** - The progressive and absurdly arrogant Westernised teacher. He is in his twenties. He is a young, “modern,” and stylishly dressed liberal. He is in fact a conservative who pretends to be interested in social revolution; his real concern is for Sidi or any other available young woman in

the village. Lakunle's supposed platonic love for Sidi is no match for the Bale's cunning and experience, and Lakunle proves to be a poor adversary.

Lakunle is the schoolteacher of the village. He deeply admires Western culture and seeks to emulate, often to comically inadequate effect. He is portrayed by Soyinka as clumsy in both actions and words, throwing together phrases from the Bible and other Western works in hope of sounding intelligent. He is "in love" with Sidi, but can not marry her because she demands that he pay the traditional bride-price, something he refuses to do. Initially we chalk up this refusal to his Western beliefs, and the belief that women shouldn't be bought and sold, but later in the play he reveals his true self - when Sidi's virginity is taken away, he leaps at the chance to bypass the bride-price by saying that she can't really expect him to pay the bride price now that she's no longer "pure". He represents one extreme of the play's central pendulum - the Western values

**Sidi** - A beautiful, yet somewhat egotistical village girl who is wooed by both Baroka and Lakunle. She is the Jewel in the title. She is the village belle, about eighteen years old, very pretty and coquettish. She distracts the young schoolteacher, Lakunle, attracts a traveling photographer who wants her picture to be in a magazine, and passively flirts with the Bale, unaware of the Bale's vast experience in romance. Sidi is tricked into making love with the Bale at the end of the comedy.

Sidi is a young girl in the village who has just had her ego boosted by a visit from a bigcity photographer, who has taken her pictures and published them in a magazine. From then on, she is extremely conceited, thinking herself even higher than the Baroka, the Bale, the Chief of Illujinle. She refuses to marry Lakunle until he pays the bride price, and eventually goes to visit Baroka because she believes that she will be able to humiliate him by exposing his impotence. However, Baroka proves to be a cunning man and she falls right into his trap. She is the needle of the pendulum; she wavers from end to end, confused, before finally settling on the traditional side.

**Sadiku** - The chief's sly great wife, chieftess of his harem. One of her principal jobs is to woo younger wives for the Bale. She convinces Sidi in her own seducing way. She is the primary wife of the Bale. One of her principal jobs is to woo younger wives for the Bale. She convinces



Sidi that the young woman should marry the Bale by telling her that the Bale is old and that Sidi will have the honor of being the senior wife of the new Bale.

**Ailatu** - Baroka's favourite, but not so towards the end of the drama due to an altercation over Baroka's choice to take a new wife.

### **The favorite**

The favorite, the Bale's present young woman. She tries to please him, but she is informed by the Bale that she has no time to improve her affection because he is taking a new wife. She represents another conquest by the Bale.

### **The surveyor**

The surveyor, an outsider who is planning to build a road through the village. He is easily bought off by the Bale, who offers gifts if he will build the road in another place, thus preserving the land and the traditions of his people.

### **Minor Characters:**

Village girls, a wrestler, a surveyor, schoolboys, his assorted consorts and various musicians, dancers, mummers, prisoners, traders

### **6 Themes of the Play:**

The most prominent theme of this story is the rapid modernisation of Africa, coupled with the rapid evangelisation of the population. This has driven a wedge between the traditionalists, who seek to nullify the changes done in the name of progress due to vested interests or simply not liking the result of progress, and the modernists, who want to see the last of outdated traditional beliefs at all cost.

Another core theme is the marginalisation of women as property. Traditionally, they were seen as properties that could be bought, sold or accumulated. Even the modern Lakunle also falls

victim to this, by looking down on Sidi for having a smaller brain and later by wanting to marry her after she lost her virginity since no dowry was required in such a situation.

There is also the conflict between education and traditional beliefs. The educated people seek to spread their knowledge to the tribal people in an attempt to make them more modern. This in turn is resisted by the tribal people who see no point in obtaining an education as it served them no use in their daily lives.

Finally, there is the importance of song and dance as a form of spreading information in a world where the fastest route of communication is by foot. It is also an important source of entertainment for the otherwise bored village youths.

*The Lion and the Jewel*, on one level, is a comedy about love. Lakunle, the naïve, modernist schoolteacher, attempts to win Sidi's love by teaching her about the "new" woman's role, a role based largely on Western society. Opposing him is the shrewd Bale, striving to win Sidi's love by any means he can, including the ruse about his supposed impotence.

Lakunle's dress and speech indicate the shallowness of his role of reformer: His clothes show his rejection of the traditional dress of the villages, and his speech expresses his undigested ideas comically. He rejects a traditional element of the marriage ceremony, "the bride price." He addresses Sidi as an ignorant girl, demonstrating his impetuous lack of control; he alienates himself from the audience with his lack of valid ideas.

The Bale, who wins the sex war, presents himself more favorably. He impresses Sidi with his postage stamp machine, which does not work, and by allowing his servants to form a trade union and allowing them one day off. He is nevertheless, a conservative who plans to keep the village as it has always been. The Bale is a supreme protagonist: Lakunle is simply no match for him. Wole Soyinka's humorous caricature of Lakunle has the audience taking the Bale's side. Sidi and Sadiku also win the audience, with their sly understanding of the falseness of both men. Soyinka maintains the humor of the play through his characters.

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The play also has an allegorical level. Sidi represents the Nigerian people, who are tempted to believe the impotence of the past, but eventually experience its power. The Bale represents the centuries of tradition that extend into the present. The mimes, which take place twice in the play, present flashbacks that give the play added historical depth. The play's energetic combination of dance, song, mime, and comic dialogue reinforces its themes. Soyinka shows a passionate concern for his society, seeking freedom for all. His ideas are not only African, however: His characters and mannerisms are African, but his people represent the whole race. Although many characters are potential victims of their own ingenuity, his heroes are marked ultimately by their ceaseless striving.

## **7 Conclusion**

The confrontation between modernity and tradition is incorporated through all the components of Soyinka's drama. Lakunle and Baroka display external conflicts in their battle for Sidi's love. The characters also display internal conflicts when they use both

tradition and modernity to their own advantage. Furthermore, the overall plot and structure of the play are indications of this constant conflict. Although this conflict is not the only theme of the play, Soyinka thoroughly incorporates the theme of tradition and modernity.

## **8 Questions For practice:**

### **8.1 Long Answer questions:**

- 1) Bring out the feminist element in this play?

The vision of Soyinka is not clearly present in this play. Till the end it is ambiguous that whether he exalts the customs and tradition of his people or not. To the readers some of the tradition and customs portrayed in the play are new to them. The polygamous society gives importance to the Bale, it allows him to marry as many girls he can, he uses the girls only for his pleasure, and after a new arrival of favourite he sends the last favourite to an outhouse. It shows the society never give respect to women, and they are used to, as Lakunle tells, “pounds the yam or bends all the day to plant the millet ... to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub, to bring forth children by the gross” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 7 & 9). The custom of dead Bale’s last wife becomes the senior wife to the successor, i.e. son. The custom is very awkward and surprise to almost all the readers, particularly to the Indian readers. However, the playwright does not make any condemn, dislike or rejection of it. Instead, by ending the play with the marriage ceremony of the Bale and the girl seems to show that Soyinka nods approval to this custom. By the marriage of the cunning Bale and ignorant and pride Sidi, the author emphasizes that chastity is only for female. All these show that the female society is highly marginalized by the males. The female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of the doubly oppressed in the society. They are the symbol of self-marginality, particularly Sidi:

... she never allows any rational idea into her mind, which is advised by Lakunle.

...greatly supports and argues for her society and its tradition. She does not want to come out of the conventional ideologies. She does not know that she is marginalizing herself for the ideologies of the society. (Kumar, 46)

In the play, Lakunle like a champion of feminism, voices for the females, who are fastened with the traditions of the society. But he is portrayed as a foolish and stupid teacher, who never gets any respect from anyone, Sidi chides his state in the village, “You and your ragged books dragging your feet to every threshold and rushing them out aging as cruses greet you instead of welcome.... The village says you’re man, and I begin to understand” (“The Lion and the Jewel”, 5 & 10). Even after so much humiliation he tells his dream of new, improved and modern society to her. But his expectation of development is a mirage. And through the character of Baroka, playwright expresses that the society is not ready to accept the changes, even if it is necessary. By portraying Lakunle as a hallow-modernist, Soyinka presents the stubbornness of society. C.N. Ramachandran concludes his character, “Lakunle represents not western culture but only hallow Westernization, not real but only the image. The play abundantly establishes that Lakunle is a modern version of Don Quixote, a book nourished shrimp” (201). Eldred Jones calls Lakunle “the half-baked Westernized African” (24) rather Florence Stratton posits, “he is a caricature of the alienated African – a ridiculous figure in any case, but not in the latter an object of pity” (539). Onwueme in his article states that Soyinka made “a mild satire against Baroka’s ruthless leadership and brutal force in society” (64). Even the mild satire also made only through the weak character Lakunle. On support of Lakunle, Basavaraj Naiker writes that Lakunle’s protestation against the payment of bride price, instead of cunning ways of drawing Sidi into bed, his rational method of convincing her to marry her, and his aesthetics of love and poetic sensibility have no significance in the tradition-ridden society (112). The society is out of its sensibility, which never heeds to words of educated.

## 2) What is the main theme of this play?

The most prominent theme of this story is the rapid modernisation of Africa, coupled with the rapid evangelisation of the population. This has driven a wedge between the traditionalists, who seek to nullify the changes done in the name of progress due to vested interests or simply not liking the result of progress, and the modernists, who want to see the last of outdated traditional beliefs at all cost.

Another core theme is the marginalisation of women as property. Traditionally, they were seen as properties that could be bought, sold or accumulated. Even the modern Lakunle also falls victim to this, by looking down on Sidi for having a smaller brain and later by wanting to marry her after she lost her virginity since no dowry was required in such a situation.

There is also the conflict between education and traditional beliefs. The educated people seek to spread their knowledge to the tribal people in an attempt to make them more modern. This in turn is resisted by the tribal people who see no point in obtaining an education as it served them no use in their daily lives.

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3) How has the traditions and customs of Yoruba are typically presented in the play?

The prolific writer and the versatile genius of Africa, Wole Soyinka's works are based on society, culture, tradition and politics of Africa. The dramatic environment that Soyinka creates has been enriched with variegated realistic scenes portraying African life very exactly and fashions and characters holding a mirror up to nature and presenting life as it is. The traditions and customs of Yoruba are typically presented in the play. Some of the customs like, bride-price, polygamy, wife wooing girls for her husband, are emphasised much and challenged these outdated customs and traditions. Apart from that, the playwright sheds light on some of the indigenous customs like, marriage, songs, dance, mimes, etc. Songs, dance and mimes are the major components in the play. Soyinka has made use of these elements to forward the action of the play. Through the play, playwright brings out the native tradition, livelihood of the people, politics, moreover, role of women is emphasized.

4) How does the writer investigate the Nigerian conflict between modernity and tradition?

In Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, there is a constant confrontation between tradition and modernity. Soyinka published the play in 1959, when Nigeria was struggling for independence under British control. Nigeria had been united as the "Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria" since 1914 and by the late 1950s was facing the challenge of whether or not it was ready for independence and capable of handling modern Western civilization. Some Nigerians felt that it was time for change while others wondered if they should move from their present culture. In this paper, I relate modernity to the influence of British culture during the 1940s and 1950s on Nigerian ways of life. relate tradition to Nigeria's traditional Yoruban culture. The main characters of the drama—Sidi, Lakunle, and Baroka—all exhibit internal and external conflicts with modernity and tradition. The battle between Lakunle and Baroka for Sidi's hand in marriage is the main plot of the play and reveals a confrontation between their two ways of life.

With Western civilization's influence advancing into Soyinka's Nigeria, the village school teacher, Lakunle, has become more fond of the modern way of life and

wants the village of Ilujinle to back away from tradition as well. This task is not made easy because villagers refuse to put aside their Yoruban roots and traditions. The village belle, Sidi, and the village Bale, Baroka, stand for tradition. In Yoruban culture, the belle the people. Sidi, Baroka, and Lakunle all have their modern and traditional standards, but they don't hesitate to use each to their own advantage. The confrontation between Yoruban tradition and modern civilization is evident through the characters, plot, and structure of the drama.

The play's most modern and westernized character is Lakunle, a school teacher who is determined to rid himself and others around him of traditional ways of life. In the opening scene of the play, Lakunle's desire for modernity is obvious in his initial request of Sidi. "Let me take it," he says, seizing a pail of water that Sidi has been carrying on her head (Soyinka 891). This is Lakunle's way of being the "modern gentlemen" and relieving Sidi of her heavy load, as most gentlemen would do today, trying to break the tradition of a woman's task. Lakunle goes on to request her hand in marriage as a Westerner would, but will not pay the bride-price. His rejection of the traditional brideprice is another part of his modern ways. Lakunle is madly in love with Sidi and "offers her a 'Western' monogamous marriage"

Lakunle justifies his refusal to pay the bride-price, saying, "To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall" (Soyinka 897). James Gibbs, argues that Lakunle "uses or abuses the 'traditional' in accordance with his own needs and situation.

Thus he adopts a misinformed Western attitude towards bride-price partially because he is in a bad economic position" (307). Lakunle's Westernized and modern form of courtship is constantly shot down by Sidi's desire to be traditional.

Sidi exhibits her traditional views in her rejections of Lakunle's many modern advances toward her. As mentioned earlier, she enters the first scene carrying a small pail of water in a traditional manner. She denies Lakunle's request to carry the pail for her because she is aware of his motives for doing it. She is aware of his desire to court her in a modern fashion, but will not put aside her values to allow him to do so. Sidi is most adamant about Lakunle



paying her bride-price in order to marry her. She makes it clear to him that her declination of his marriage proposal is based solely on his refusal to pay the price, because she would not be a “cheap bowl for the village to spit” (Soyinka 896).

Although Sidi can initially be characterized as a traditional village belle, her character is to be reexamined when she learns of her own beauty. With European technology coming into the village, a glossy picture of Sidi has been published on the cover and throughout a magazine. This gives Sidi’s ego a big boost and makes her traditional platform a little shaky. After the picture is published, the Bale, Baroka, requests that she become his youngest wife. Sidi declines the more traditional choice of being his last wife (and later the senior wife after Baroka’s death), but demonstrates modern thoughts by saying that Baroka is too old and unattractive. She does not look at the marriage as a convenience, but more as her being famous and happier without him.

5) Make an analysis of the over all plot of the play.

The overall plot of the play, Lakunle and Baroka’s fight for Sidi’s love, displays another confrontation between tradition and modernity. Between the two of them, Sidi has to choose between having a modern or traditional marriage. Lakunle’s refusal to accept tradition causes modernity to falter. Sidi responds to one of his many proposals stating, “...I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid” (Soyinka 896). This is an obvious indication that if Lakunle will only stuck to the traditional bride-price, “the modern man” could have had his bride. His choice for modernity leaves the door open for Baroka to enter. Knowing the rules of tradition and using Sidi’s ego against her, Baroka knows that if he can seduce Sidi, she will not have a choice in marrying him because she will no longer be a maid. This is the battle which causes tradition to triumph over modernity

6) Give your comments about the conclusion of the play.

The confrontation between modernity and tradition is incorporated through all the components of Soyinka's drama. Lakunle and Baroka display external conflicts in their battle for Sidi's love. The characters also display internal conflicts when they use both tradition and modernity to their own advantage. Furthermore, the overall plot and structure of the play are indications of this constant conflict. Although this conflict is not the only theme of the play, Soyinka thoroughly incorporates the theme of tradition and modernity.

## **8.2 Short Answer Questions:**

- 1) Who was Baroka?
- 2) What idea do you get about the child marriage in this play?

# **Anthills of the Savannah**

**- Chinua Achebe**

## **1 Introduction**

## **2 About the author**

## **3 Summary of the novel**

## **4 Analysis of the characters of the novel**

## **5 Chapter wise Analysis of the novel**

## **6 Theme**

## **7 Questions and Answers**

### **1 Introduction:**

Chinua Achebe published *Anthills of the Savannah* in Great Britain in 1987 after a twenty-one-year hiatus from writing . It was published in the United States the following year. The novel *A Man of the People*, a book that foreshadows the military coups that would figure largely in Nigerian politics in the coming years was published just prior to *Anthills of the Savannah* . To many of Achebe's readers, *Anthills of the Savannah* is the logical extension of this novel as it depicts the inner workings and consequences of such a coup.

Critical reception was overwhelmingly positive, and many critics regard this novel as Achebe's best to date. Achebe was already respected as one of the founding fathers of Nigeria's literary coming-of-age, so the success of *Anthills of the Savannah* only confirmed his place among Nigeria's leading intellectuals. In 1987 *Anthills of the Savannah* was a finalist for the Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious award for literary achievement. A well-written and thought-provoking novel about the men who run African governments and strong African women. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was the first African novel that was read by many other Americans. Since it was published in 1958, he has continued to write and comment on his homeland. He is a great storyteller and skilled writer who continues to create interesting plots and creatures.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe tells the story of politics in the imaginary nation of Kangan. Those more knowledgeable about Africa may recognize who and where is being depicted better than I. After a coup, His Excellency leads the country. Chris is his Commissioner for Information and Ikem the editor of the state-run newspaper. The three had been boyhood friends, but their new relationship soured that friendship. As Chris observes at the start of the book, “this was a game that began innocently enough and then turned poisonous.” Achebe is obviously frustrated by the governments, both civilian and military that have emerged since independence. He seems to consider them as the *Anthills of the Savannah* of his title. His criticism of the men running them is sharp, and he comments frequently on their flaws. In the end, the main problem he sees is “the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being.” He has no better opinion of non-African powers. While he no longer considers Britain a “menace,” for him, “the real danger is that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire” the United States. Achebe does, however, continue to see the need for stories and storytellers like himself.

It is the story that outlives the sounds of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters...The story provides us with the escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbors. Political intrigues run through the book giving it an element of suspense, but gradually the male political storyline is joined by that of the women who share the lives of Chris and Ikem. Chris’s lover, Beatrice, is the English-educated daughter of an African religious leader and holds a responsible position in the Finance Ministry. More importantly, she is articulate, observant and strong. In the course of the story, she is joined by Elewa, a store clerk and Ikem’s lover, and her own Evangelical maid, Agatha. In a long, dramatic statement, Achebe praises African women. He tells the story of the water goddess, the daughter of Almighty, and the spread of her worship. He declares “Mother is supreme,” and to be kept in reserve. “Then, as the world crashes around Man’s ears, Woman in her supremacy will step in and sweep the shards together.”

Beatrice's response is to point out that women ought to be allowed to act before situations reach their worst. With her response, Achebe seems to admit the limits of his own perspective. At the end of the book, it is the women who lead into a new beginning—with a few good men joining in. They advocate a new society that honors both people and ideas, but readers are left with little idea of how that new society will be created.

In an interview when Achebe was asked why he had not turned the government over to the women in the novel, Achebe reiterated that the women would lead, but that he was unsure whether or not they would choose to work within or outside of government. His answer raises intriguing questions. Is he dismissive of all government? Can affective leadership take place outside of formal political channels? The answer is unclear in *Anthills*. Others who have read more of Achebe's writings, and know Africa, may have better answers than I do. One problem I must admit. I had trouble following what was being said in the dialogue of the uneducated characters in the book. With his use of dialect, Achebe makes clear the divisions that exist among Africans. He treats the characters who use dialect with great respect and makes a point of integrating them with the English-speaking characters.

## **2 About the author:**

**Albert Chinualumogu Achebe**, popularly known as **Chinua Achebe** was born on 16 November 1930. His parents were Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam. He was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic. He was best known for his first novel and magnum opus, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), which is the most widely read book in modern African literature. Raised by his parents in the Igbo town of Ogidi in southeastern Nigeria, Achebe excelled at school and won a scholarship for undergraduate studies. He became fascinated with world religions and traditional African cultures, and began writing stories as a university student. After graduation, he worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) and soon moved to the metropolis of Lagos. He gained worldwide attention for *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s; his later novels include *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Achebe wrote his novels in English and defended the use of English, a "language of colonisers", in African literature. In 1975, his lecture *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* featured a famous criticism of Joseph

Conrad as "a thoroughgoing racist"; it was later published in *The Massachusetts Review* amid some controversy.

When the region of Biafra broke away from Nigeria in 1967, Achebe became a supporter of Biafran independence and acted as ambassador for the people of the new nation. The war ravaged the populace, and as starvation and violence took its toll, he appealed to the people of Europe and the Americas for aid. When the Nigerian government retook the region in 1970, he involved himself in political parties but soon resigned due to frustration over the corruption and elitism he witnessed. He lived in the United States for several years in the 1970s, and returned to the U.S. in 1990 after a car accident left him partially disabled.

Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. From 2009 until his death, he served as a professor at Brown University in the United States.

Achebe's parents, Isaiah Okafo Achebe and Janet Anaenechi Iloegbunam, were converts to the Protestant Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria. The elder Achebe stopped practising the religion of his ancestors, but he respected its traditions. Achebe's unabbreviated name, Chinualumogu ("May God fight on my behalf" was a prayer for divine protection and stability. The Achebe family had five other surviving children, named in a similar fusion of traditional words relating to their new religion: Frank Okwuofu, John Chukwuemeka Ifeanyichukwu, Zinobia Uzoma, Augustine Nduka, and Grace Nwanneka.

### **His Early life:**

Achebe stood at a crossroads of traditional culture and Christian influence; this made a significant impact on the children, especially Chinualumogu. After the youngest daughter was born, the family moved to Isaiah Achebe's ancestral town of Ogidi, in what is now the state of Anambra.

Storytelling was a mainstay of the Igbo tradition and an integral part of the community. Chinua's mother and sister Zinobia Uzoma told him many stories as a child, which he repeatedly requested. His education was furthered by the collages his father hung on the walls of their home, as well as almanacs and numerous books – including a prose adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1590) and an Igbo version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Chinua also eagerly anticipated traditional village events, like the frequent masquerade ceremonies, which he recreated later in his novels and stories.

## **Education**

In 1936, Achebe entered St Philips' Central School. Despite his protests, he spent a week in the religious class for young children, but was quickly moved to a higher class when the school's chaplain took note of his intelligence. One teacher described him as the student with the best handwriting in class, and the best reading skills. He also attended Sunday school every week and the special evangelical services held monthly, often carrying his father's bag. A controversy erupted at one such session, when apostates from the new church challenged the catechist about the tenets of Christianity. Achebe later included a scene from this incident in *Things Fall Apart*.

At the age of twelve, Achebe moved away from his family to the village of Nekede, four kilometres from Owerri. He enrolled as a student at the Central School, where his older brother John taught. In Nekede, Achebe gained an appreciation for Mbari, a traditional art form which seeks to invoke the gods' protection through symbolic sacrifices in the form of sculpture and collage. When the time came to change to secondary school, in 1944, Achebe sat entrance examinations for and was accepted at both the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School in Onitsha and the even more prestigious Government College in Umuahia.

Modelled on the British public school, and funded by the colonial administration, Government College had been established in 1929 to educate Nigeria's future elite. It had rigorous academic standards and was vigorously elitist, accepting boys purely on the basis of ability. The language of the school was English, not only to develop proficiency but also to provide a common tongue for pupils from different Nigerian language groups. Achebe described this later as being ordered to "put away their different mother tongues and communicate in the

language of their colonisers". The rule was strictly enforced and Achebe recalls that his first punishment was for asking another boy to pass the soap in Igbo.

Once there, Achebe was double-promoted in his first year, completing the first two years' studies in one, and spending only four years in secondary school, instead of the standard five. Achebe was unsuited to the school's sports regimen and belonged instead to a group of six exceedingly studious pupils. So intense were their study habits that the headmaster banned the reading of textbooks from five to six o'clock in the afternoon (though other activities and other books were allowed).

Achebe started to explore the school's "wonderful library". There he discovered Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901), the autobiography of an American former slave; Achebe "found it sad, but it showed him another dimension of reality".[21] He also read classic novels, such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Treasure Island* (1883) together with tales of colonial derring-do such as H. Rider Haggard's *Allan Quatermain* (1887) and John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910). Achebe later recalled that, as a reader, he "took sides with the white characters against the savages"<sup>1</sup> and even developed a dislike for Africans. "The white man was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts."

### **University Education:**

In 1948, in preparation for independence, Nigeria's first university opened. Known as University College (now the University of Ibadan), it was an associate college of the University of London. Achebe obtained such high marks in the entrance examination that he was admitted as a Major Scholar in the university's first intake and given a bursary to study medicine.[23] After a year of grueling work, he changed to English, history, and theology. Because he switched his field, however, he lost his scholarship and had to pay tuition fees. He received a government bursary, and his family also donated money – his older brother Augustine gave up money for a trip home from his job as a civil servant so Chinua could continue his studies. From its inception, the university had a strong English faculty; it includes many famous writers amongst its alumni. These include Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, novelist Elechi Amadi, poet and playwright John Pepper Clark, and poet Christopher Okigbo.



In 1950 Achebe wrote a piece for the *University Herald* entitled "Polar Undergraduate", his debut as an author. It used irony and humour to celebrate the intellectual vigour of his classmates. He followed this with other essays and letters about philosophy and freedom in academia, some of which were published in another campus magazine, *The Bug*. He served as the *Herald's* editor during the 1951–52 school year.

While at the university, Achebe wrote his first short story, "In a Village Church", which combines details of life in rural Nigeria with Christian institutions and icons, a style which appears in many of his later works. Other short stories he wrote during his time at Ibadan (including "The Old Order in Conflict with the New" and "Dead Men's Path") examine conflicts between tradition and modernity, with an eye toward dialogue and understanding on both sides. When a professor named Geoffrey Parrinder arrived at the university to teach comparative religion, Achebe began to explore the fields of Christian history and African traditional religions.

It was during his studies at Ibadan that Achebe began to become critical of European literature about Africa. He read Irish novelist Joyce Cary's 1939 book *Mister Johnson*, about a cheerful Nigerian man who (among other things) works for an abusive British storeowner. Achebe recognised his dislike for the African protagonist as a sign of the author's cultural ignorance. One of his classmates announced to the professor that the only enjoyable moment in the book is when Johnson is shot.

After the final examinations at Ibadan in 1953, Achebe was awarded a second-class degree. Rattled by not receiving the highest level, he was uncertain how to proceed after graduation. He returned to his hometown of Ogidi to sort through his options

### **Teaching and producing:**

While he meditated on his possible career paths, Achebe was visited by a friend from the university, who convinced him to apply for an English teaching position at the Merchants of Light school at Oba. It was a ramshackle institution with a crumbling infrastructure and a meagre library; the school was built on what the residents called "bad bush" – a section of land thought to be tainted by unfriendly spirits. Later, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe describes a similar area called the "evil forest", where the Christian missionaries are given a place to build their church.

As a teacher he urged his students to read extensively and be original in their work. The students did not have access to the newspapers he had read as a student, so Achebe made his own available in the classroom. He taught in Oba for four months, but when an opportunity arose in 1954 to work for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS), he left the school and moved to Lagos.

The NBS, a radio network started in 1933 by the colonial government, assigned Achebe to the Talks Department, preparing scripts for oral delivery. This helped him master the subtle nuances between written and spoken language, a skill that helped him later to write realistic dialogue.

The city of Lagos also made a significant impression on him. A huge conurbation, the city teemed with recent migrants from the rural villages. Achebe revelled in the social and political activity around him and later drew upon his experiences when describing the city in his 1960 novel *No Longer at Ease*.

While in Lagos, Achebe started work on a novel. This was challenging, since very little African fiction had been written in English, although Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) were notable exceptions. While appreciating Ekwensi's work, Achebe worked hard to develop his own style, even as he pioneered the creation of the Nigerian novel itself. A visit to Nigeria by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956 brought issues of colonialism and politics to the surface, and was a significant moment for Achebe.

In 1956 he was selected at the Staff School run by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). His first trip outside Nigeria was an opportunity to advance his technical production skills, and to solicit feedback on his novel (which was later split into two books). In London, he met a novelist named Gilbert Phelps, to whom he offered the manuscript. Phelps responded with great enthusiasm, asking Achebe if he could show it to his editor and publishers. Achebe declined, insisting that it needed more work.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **Marriage and family**

In the year 1956 *Things Fall Apart* was published, Achebe was promoted at the NBS and put in charge of the network's eastern region coverage. He moved to Enugu and began to work on his administrative duties. There he met a woman named Christie Okoli, who had grown up in the area and joined the NBS staff when he arrived. They first conversed when she brought to his attention a pay discrepancy; a friend of hers found that, although they had been hired simultaneously, Christie had been rated lower and offered a lower wage. Sent to the hospital for an appendectomy soon after, she was pleasantly surprised when Achebe visited her with gifts and magazines.

Achebe and Okoli grew closer in the following years, and on 10 September 1961 they were married in the Chapel of Resurrection on the campus of the University of Ibadan. Christie Achebe has described their marriage as one of trust and mutual understanding; some tension arose early in their union, due to conflicts about attention and communication. However, as their relationship matured, husband and wife made efforts to adapt to one another.

Their first child, a daughter named Chinelo, was born on 11 July 1962. They had a son, Ikechukwu, on 3 December 1964, and another boy named Chidi, on 24 May 1967. When the children began attending school in Lagos, their parents became worried about the world view – especially with regard to race – expressed at the school, especially through the mostly white teachers and books that presented a prejudiced view of African life. In 1966, Achebe published his first children's book, *Chike and the River*, to address some of these concerns. After the Biafran War, the Achebes had another daughter on 7 March 1970, named Nwando. When asked about his family Achebe stated: "There are few things more important than my family." They have six grandchildren: Chochi, Chino, Chidera, C.J. (Chinua Jr.), Nnamdi and Zeal.

### **Postwar academia**

After the war, Achebe helped start two magazines: the literary journal *Okike*, a forum for African art, fiction, and poetry; and *Nsukkascope*, an internal publication of the University (motto: "Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True"). Achebe and the *Okike* committee later established another cultural magazine, *Uwa Ndi Igbo*, to showcase the indigenous stories and oral traditions of the Igbo community. In February 1972 he released *Girls at War*, a collection of short stories

ranging in time from his undergraduate days to the recent bloodshed. It was the 100th book in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst offered Achebe a professorship later that year, and the family moved to the United States. Their youngest daughter was displeased with her nursery school, and the family soon learned that her frustration involved language. Achebe helped her face the "alien experience" (as he called it) by telling her stories during the car trips to and from school.

As he presented his lessons to a wide variety of students (he taught only one class, to a large audience), he began to study the perceptions of Africa in Western scholarship: "Africa is not like anywhere else they know ... there are no real people in the Dark Continent, only *forces* operating; and people don't speak any language you can understand, they just grunt, too busy jumping up and down in a frenzy"

### **Criticism of Conrad**

Achebe expanded this criticism when he presented a Chancellor's Lecture at Amherst on 18 February 1975, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*. Decrying Joseph Conrad as "a bloody racist", Achebe asserted that Conrad's famous novel dehumanises Africans, rendering Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognisable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril."

Achebe also discussed a quotation from Albert Schweitzer, a 1952 Nobel Peace Prize laureate: "That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: 'The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother.' And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being." Some were surprised that Achebe would challenge a man honoured in the West for his "reverence for life", and recognised as a paragon of Western liberalism.

The lecture caused a storm of controversy, even at the reception immediately following his talk. Many English professors in attendance were upset by his remarks; one elderly professor reportedly approached him, said: "How dare you!", and stormed away. Another suggested that Achebe had "no sense of humour", but several days later Achebe was approached by a third professor, who told him: "I now realize that I had never really read *Heart of Darkness* although I have taught it for years." Although the lecture angered many of his colleagues, he was nevertheless presented later in 1975 with an honorary doctorate from the University of Stirling and the Lotus Prize for Afro-Asian Writers.

The first comprehensive rebuttal of Achebe's critique was published in 1983 by British critic Cedric Watts. His essay "A Bloody Racist: About Achebe's View of Conrad" defends *Heart of Darkness* as an anti-imperialist novel, suggesting that "part of its greatness lies in the power of its criticisms of racial prejudice." Palestinian–American theorist Edward Said agreed in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that Conrad criticised imperialism, but added: "As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them".

Achebe's criticism has become a mainstream perspective on Conrad's work. The essay was included in the 1988 Norton critical edition of Conrad's novel. Editor Robert Kimbrough called it one of "the three most important events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism since the second edition of his book..." Critic Nicolas Tredell divides Conrad criticism "into two epochal phases: before and after Achebe." Asked frequently about his essay, Achebe once explained that he never meant for the work to be abandoned: "It's not in my nature to talk about banning books. I am saying, read it – with the kind of understanding and with the knowledge I talk about. And read it beside African works." Interviewed on National Public Radio with Robert Siegel, in October 2009, Achebe remains consistent, although tempering this criticism in a discussion titled 'Heart of Darkness is inappropriate': "Conrad was a seductive writer. He could pull his reader into the fray. And if it were not for what he said about me and my people, I would probably be thinking only of that seduction.

### **Retirement and politics**

When he returned to the University of Kenya in 1976, he hoped to accomplish three goals: finish the novel he had been writing, renew the native publication of *Okike*, and further his study of Igbo culture. He also showed that he would not restrict his criticism to European targets. In an August 1976 interview, he lashed out at the archetypal Nigerian intellectual, who is divorced from the intellect "but for two things: status and stomach. And if there's any danger that he might suffer official displeasure or lose his job, he would prefer to turn a blind eye to what is happening around him." In October 1979, Achebe was awarded the first-ever Nigerian National Merit Award.

In 1980 he met James Baldwin at a conference held by the African Literature Association in Gainesville, Florida USA. The writers – with similar political perspectives, beliefs about language, and faith in the liberating potential of literature – were eager to meet one another. Baldwin said: "It's very important that we should meet each other, finally, if I must say so, after something like 400 years."

In 1982, Achebe retired from the University of Nigeria. He devoted more time to editing *Okike* and became active with the left-leaning People's Redemption Party (PRP). In 1983, he became the party's deputy national vice-president. He published a book called *The Trouble with Nigeria* to coincide with the upcoming elections. On the first page, Achebe says bluntly: "the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility and to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."

The elections that followed were marked by violence and charges of fraud. Asked whether he thought Nigerian politics had changed since *A Man of the People*, Achebe replied: "I think, if anything, the Nigerian politician has deteriorated." After the elections, he engaged in a heated argument – which almost became a fistfight – with Bakin Zuwo, the newly elected governor of Kano State. He left the PRP and afterwards kept his distance from political parties, expressing his sadness at the dishonesty and weakness of the people involved.

He spent most of the 1980s delivering speeches, attending conferences, and working on his sixth novel. He also continued winning awards and collecting honorary degrees. In 1986 he

was elected president-general of the Ogidi Town Union; he reluctantly accepted and began a three-year term. In the same year, he stepped down as editor of *Okike*

In October 2005, the London *Financial Times* reported that Achebe was planning to write a novella for the Canongate Myth Series, a series of short novels in which ancient myths from myriad cultures are reimagined and rewritten by contemporary authors. Achebe's novella has not yet been scheduled for publication.

In June 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize. The judging panel included US critic Elaine Showalter, who said he "illuminated the path for writers around the world seeking new words and forms for new realities and societies"; and South African writer Nadine Gordimer, who said Achebe has achieved "what one of his characters brilliantly defines as the writer's purpose: 'a new-found utterance' for the capture of life's complexity". In 2010, Achebe was awarded The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for \$300,000, one of the richest prizes for the arts.

In October 2012, Achebe's publishers, Penguin Books, released *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. Publication immediately caused a stir and re-opened the discussion about the Nigerian Civil War. It would prove to be the last publication during his lifetime.

Fondly called the "grandfather of Nigerian literature", Achebe died after a short illness on 21 March 2013 in Boston, United States. An unidentified source close to the family said that he was ill for a while and had been hospitalised in the city. Penguin publishing director Simon Winder said "we are all desolate to hear of his death." The New York Times described him in his obituary as "one of Africa's most widely read novelists and one of the continent's towering men of letters". The BBC wrote that he was "revered throughout the world for his depiction of life in Africa".

## **2.1 His Works:**

### *Things Fall Apart*

Heinemann published 2,000 hardcover copies of *Things Fall Apart* on 17 June 1958. According to Alan Hill, employed by the publisher at the time, the company did not "touch a word of it" in

preparation for release. The book was received well by the British press, and received positive reviews from critic Walter Allen and novelist Angus Wilson. Three days after publication, the Times Literary Supplement wrote that the book "genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside". The Observer called it "an excellent novel", and the literary magazine Time and Tide said that "Mr. Achebe's style is a model for aspirants".

Back in Nigeria, Achebe set to work revising and editing his novel (now titled *Things Fall Apart*, after a line in the poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats). He cut away the second and third sections of the book, leaving only the story of a yam farmer named Okonkwo who lives during the colonization of Nigeria. He added sections, improved various chapters, and restructured the prose. By 1957, he had sculpted it to his liking, and took advantage of an advertisement offering a typing service. He sent his only copy of his handwritten manuscript (along with the £22 fee) to the London company. After he waited several months without receiving any communication from the typing service, Achebe began to worry. His boss at the NBS, Angela Beattie, was going to London for her annual leave; he asked her to visit the company. She did, and angrily demanded to know why it was lying ignored in the corner of the office. The company quickly sent a typed copy to Achebe. Beattie's intervention was crucial for his ability to continue as a writer. Had the novel been lost, he later said, "I would have been so discouraged that I would probably have given up altogether."<sup>1</sup>

In 1958, Achebe sent his novel to the agent recommended by Gilbert Phelps in London. It was sent to several publishing houses; some rejected it immediately, claiming that fiction from African writers had no market potential. Finally it reached the office of Heinemann, where executives hesitated until an educational adviser, Donald MacRae – just back in England after a trip through west Africa read the book and forced the company's hand with his succinct report: "This is the best novel I have read since the war".

Initial reception in Nigeria was mixed. When Hill tried to promote the book in West Africa, he was met with scepticism and ridicule. The faculty at the University of Ibadan was amused at the thought of a worthwhile novel being written by an alumnus. Others were more supportive; one review in the magazine *Black Orpheus* said: "The book as a whole creates for the reader such a



vivid picture of Ibo life that the plot and characters are little more than symbols representing a way of life lost irrevocably within living memory."

In the book Okonkwo struggles with the legacy of his father – a shiftless debtor fond of playing the flute – as well as the complications and contradictions that arise when white missionaries arrive in his village of Umuofia. Exploring the terrain of cultural conflict, particularly the encounter between Igbo tradition and Christian doctrine, Achebe returns to the themes of his earlier stories, which grew from his own background.

*Things Fall Apart* went on to become one of the most important books in African literature. Selling over 8 million copies around the world, it was translated into 50 languages, making Achebe the most translated African writer of all time.

In 1960, while they were still dating, Achebe dedicated to Christie Okoli his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*, about a civil servant who is embroiled in the corruption of Lagos. The protagonist is Obi, grandson of *Things Fall Apart's* main character, Okonkwo.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on his time in the city, Achebe writes about Obi's experiences in Lagos to reflect the challenges facing a new generation on the threshold of Nigerian independence. Obi is trapped between the expectations of his family, its clan, his home village, and larger society. He is crushed by these forces (like his grandfather before him) and finds himself imprisoned for bribery. Having shown his acumen for portraying traditional Igbo culture, Achebe demonstrated in his second novel an ability to depict modern Nigerian life.

Later that year, Achebe was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship for six months of travel, which he called "the first important perk of my writing career". Achebe set out for a tour of East Africa. One month after Nigeria achieved its independence, he travelled to Kenya, where he was required to complete an immigration form by checking a box indicating his ethnicity: European, Asiatic, Arab, or Other. Shocked and dismayed at being forced into an "Other" identity, he found the situation "almost funny" and took an extra form as a souvenir. Continuing to Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now united in Tanzania), he was frustrated by the paternalistic attitude he observed among non-African hotel clerks and social elites.

Achebe also found in his travels that Swahili was gaining prominence as a major African language. Radio programs were broadcast in Swahili, and its use was widespread in the countries he visited. Nevertheless, he also found an "apathy" among the people toward literature written in Swahili. He met the poet Sheikh Shaaban Robert, who complained of the difficulty he had faced in trying to publish his Swahili-language work

In Northern Rhodesia (now called Zambia), Achebe found himself sitting in a whites-only section of a bus to Victoria Falls. Interrogated by the ticket taker as to why he was sitting in the front, he replied, "if you must know I come from Nigeria, and there we sit where we like in the bus. Upon reaching the waterfall, he was cheered by the black travellers from the bus, but he was saddened by their being unable to resist the policy of segregation at the time.

Two years later, Achebe again left Nigeria, this time as part of a Fellowship for Creative Artists awarded by UNESCO. He travelled to the United States and Brazil. He met with a number of writers from the US, including novelists Ralph Ellison and Arthur Miller. In Brazil, he met with several other authors, with whom he discussed the complications of writing in Portuguese. Achebe worried that the vibrant literature of the nation would be lost if left untranslated into a more widely spoken language

#### Voice of Nigeria and African Writers Series

Once he returned to Nigeria, Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting. One of his first duties was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Year's Day 1962, and worked to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. This objectivity was put to the test when Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, responding to a series of conflicts between officials of varying parties. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

In 1962 he attended an executive conference of African writers in English at the Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. He met with important literary figures from around the continent and the world, including Ghanaian poet Kofi Awoonor, Nigerian playwright and poet

Wole Soyinka, and US poet-author Langston Hughes. Among the topics of discussion was an attempt to determine whether the term African literature ought to include work from the diaspora, or solely that writing composed by people living within the continent itself. Achebe indicated that it was not "a very significant question", and that scholars would do well to wait until a body of work were large enough to judge. Writing about the conference in several journals, Achebe hailed it as a milestone for the literature of Africa, and highlighted the importance of community among isolated voices on the continent and beyond.

### *Arrow of God*

Achebe's third book, *Arrow of God*, was published in 1964. Like its predecessors, it explores the intersections of Igbo tradition and European Christianity. Set in the village of Umuaro at the start of the twentieth century, the novel tells the story of Ezeulu, a Chief Priest of Ulu. Shocked by the power of British intervention in the area, he orders his son to learn the foreigners' secret. As with Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Obi in *No Longer at Ease*, Ezeulu is consumed by the resulting tragedy.

The idea for the novel came in 1959, when Achebe heard the story of a Chief Priest being imprisoned by a District Officer. He drew further inspiration a year later when he viewed a collection of Igbo objects excavated from the area by archaeologist Thurstan Shaw; Achebe was startled by the cultural sophistication of the artefacts. When an acquaintance showed him a series of papers from colonial officers (not unlike the fictional *Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* referenced at the end of *Things Fall Apart*), Achebe combined these strands of history and began work on *Arrow of God* in earnest. Like Achebe's previous works, *Arrow* was roundly praised by critics. A revised edition was published in 1974 to correct what Achebe called "certain structural weaknesses".

In a letter to Achebe, the US writer John Updike expressed his surprised admiration for the sudden downfall of *Arrow of God's* protagonist. He praised the author's courage to write "an ending few Western novelists would have contrived". Achebe responded by suggesting that the individualistic hero was rare in African literature, given its roots in communal living and the degree to which characters are "subject to non-human forces in the universe"

### *A Man of the People*

*A Man of the People* was published in 1966. A bleak satire set in an unnamed African state which has just attained independence, the novel follows a teacher named Odili Samalu from the village of Anata who opposes a corrupt Minister of Culture named Nanga for his Parliament seat. Upon reading an advance copy of the novel, Achebe's friend John Pepper Clark declared: "Chinua, I *know* you are a prophet. Everything in this book has happened except a military coup!" Soon afterward, Nigerian Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu seized control of the northern region of the country as part of a larger coup attempt. Commanders in other areas failed, and the plot was answered by a military crackdown. A massacre of three thousand people from the eastern region living in the north occurred soon afterwards, and stories of other attacks on Igbo Nigerians began to filter into Lagos.

The ending of his novel had brought Achebe to the attention of military personnel, who suspected him of having foreknowledge of the coup. When he received word of the pursuit, he sent his wife (who was pregnant) and children on a squalid boat through a series of unseen creeks to the Igbo stronghold of Port Harcourt. They arrived safely, but Christie suffered a miscarriage at the journey's end. Chinua rejoined them soon afterwards in Ogidi. These cities were safe from military incursion because they were in the southeast, part of the region which would later secede.

Once the family had resettled in Enugu, Achebe and his friend Christopher Okigbo started a publishing house called Citadel Press, to improve the quality and increase the quantity of literature available to younger readers. One of its first submissions was a story called *How the Dog was Domesticated*, which Achebe revised and rewrote, turning it into a complex allegory for the country's political tumult. Its final title was *How the Leopard Got His Claws*. Years later a Nigerian intelligence officer told Achebe, "of all the things that came out of Biafra, that book was the most important."

### *Anthills and paralysis*

In 1987 Achebe released his fifth novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, about a military coup in the fictional West African nation of Kangan. A finalist for the Booker Prize, the novel was hailed in

the Financial Times: "in a powerful fusion of myth, legend and modern styles, Achebe has written a book which is wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from 'overseas' who see nothing ever new out of Africa." [130] An opinion piece in the magazine West Africa said the book deserved to win the Booker Prize, and that Achebe was "a writer who has long deserved the recognition that has already been accorded him by his sales figures." The prize went instead to Penelope Lively's novel Moon Tiger.

On 22 March 1990, Achebe was riding in a car to Lagos when an axle collapsed and the car flipped. His son Ikechukwu and the driver suffered minor injuries, but the weight of the vehicle fell on Achebe and his spine was severely damaged. He was flown to the Paddocks Hospital in Buckinghamshire, England, and treated for his injuries. In July doctors announced that although he was recuperating well, he was paralyzed from the waist down and would require the use of a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Soon afterwards, Achebe became the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; he held the position for more than fifteen years. In the autumn of 2009 he joined the Brown University faculty as the David and Marianna Fisher University Professor of Africana Studies.

Achebe's Style:

Oral tradition

The style of Achebe's fiction draws heavily on the oral tradition of the Igbo people. He weaves folk tales into the fabric of his stories, illuminating community values in both the content and the form of the storytelling. The tale about the Earth and Sky in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, emphasises the interdependency of the masculine and the feminine. Although Nwoye enjoys hearing his mother tell the tale, Okonkwo's dislike for it is evidence of his imbalance. Later, Nwoye avoids beatings from his father by pretending to dislike such "women's stories"

Another hallmark of Achebe's style is the use of proverbs, which often illustrate the values of the rural Igbo tradition. He sprinkles them throughout the narratives, repeating points made in conversation. Critic Anjali Gera notes that the use of proverbs in *Arrow of God* "serves to create through an echo effect the judgement of a community upon an individual violation." The use of

such repetition in Achebe's urban novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, is less pronounced.

For Achebe, however, proverbs and folk stories are not the sum total of the oral Igbo tradition. In combining philosophical thought and public performance into the use of oratory ("Okwu Oka" – "speech artistry" – in the Igbo phrase), his characters exhibit what he called "a matter of individual excellence ... part of Igbo culture." In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's friend Obierika voices the most impassioned oratory, crystallising the events and their significance for the village. Nwaka in *Arrow of God* also exhibits a mastery of oratory, albeit for malicious ends.

Achebe frequently includes folk songs and descriptions of dancing in his work. Obi, the protagonist of *No Longer at Ease*, is at one point met by women singing a "Song of the Heart", which Achebe gives in both Igbo and English: "Is everyone here? / (Hele ee he ee he)" In *Things Fall Apart*, ceremonial dancing and the singing of folk songs reflect the realities of Igbo tradition. The elderly Uchendu, attempting to shake Okonkwo out of his self-pity, refers to a song sung after the death of a woman: "For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well." This song contrasts with the "gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism" sung later by the white missionaries. Achebe's short stories are not as widely studied as his novels, and Achebe himself did not consider them a major part of his work. In the preface for *Girls at War and Other Stories*, he writes: "A dozen pieces in twenty years must be accounted a pretty lean harvest by any reckoning." Like his novels, the short stories are heavily influenced by the oral tradition. And like the folktales they follow, the stories often have morals emphasising the importance of cultural traditions

### Use of English

As the decolonisation process unfolded in the 1950s, a debate about choice of language erupted and pursued authors around the world; Achebe was no exception. Indeed, because of his subject matter and insistence on a non-colonial narrative, he found his novels and decisions interrogated with extreme scrutiny – particularly with regard to his use of English. One school of thought, championed by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, urged the use of indigenous African

languages. English and other European languages, he said in 1986, were "part of the neo-colonial structures that repress progressive ideas".

Achebe chose to write in English. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language", he discusses how the process of colonialism – for all its ills – provided colonised people from varying linguistic backgrounds "a language with which to talk to one another". As his purpose is to communicate with readers across Nigeria, he uses "the one central language enjoying nationwide currency". Using English also allowed his books to be read in the colonial ruling nations

Still, Achebe recognises the shortcomings of what Audre Lorde called "the master's tools". In another essay he notes:

For an African writing in English is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life. Caught in that situation he can do one of two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas ... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through their mastery of English and not out of innocence. In another essay, he refers to James Baldwin's struggle to use the English language to accurately represent his experience, and his realisation that he needed to take control of the language and expand it. The Nigerian poet and novelist Gabriel Okara likens the process of language-expansion to the evolution of jazz music in the United States.

Achebe's novels laid a formidable groundwork for this process. By altering syntax, usage, and idiom, he transforms the language into a distinctly African style. In some spots this takes the form of repetition of an Igbo idea in standard English parlance; elsewhere it appears as narrative asides integrated into descriptive sentences.

### **3 Summary of the novel:**

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe tells the story of politics in the imaginary nation of Kangan. Those more knowledgeable about Africa may recognize who and where is being

depicted better than I. After a coup, His Excellency leads the country. Chris is his Commissioner for Information and Ikem the editor of the state-run newspaper. The three had been boyhood friends, but their new relationship soured that friendship. As Chris observes at the start of the book, “this was a game that began innocently enough and then turned poisonous.” Achebe is obviously frustrated by the governments, both civilian and military that have emerged since independence. He seems to consider them as the *Anthills of the Savannah* of his title. His criticism of the men running them is sharp, and he comments frequently on their flaws. In the end, the main problem he sees is “the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation’s being.” He has no better opinion of non-African powers. While he no longer considers Britain a “menace,” for him, “the real danger is that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire” the United States. Achebe does, however, continue to see the need for stories and storytellers like himself.

It is the story that outlives the sounds of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters...The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbors. Political intrigues run through the book giving it an element of suspense, but gradually the male political storyline is joined by that of the women who share the lives of Chris and Ikem. Chris’s lover, Beatrice, is the English-educated daughter of an African religious leader and holds a responsible position in the Finance Ministry. More importantly, she is articulate, observant and strong. In the course of the story, she is joined by Elewa, a store clerk and Ikem’s lover, and her own Evangelical maid, Agatha. In a long, dramatic statement, Achebe praises African women. He tells the story of the water goddess, the daughter of Almighty, and the spread of her worship. He declares “Mother is supreme,” and to be kept in reserve. “Then, as the world crashes around Man’s ears, Woman in her supremacy will step in and sweep the shards together.”

Beatrice’s response is to point out that women ought to be allowed to act before situations reach their worst. With her response, Achebe seems to admit the limits of his own perspective. At the end of the book, it is the women who lead into a new beginning—with a few good men joining in. They advocate a new society that honors both people and ideas, but readers are left with little



idea of how that new society will be created. With his use of dialect, Achebe makes clear the divisions that exist among Africans. He treats the characters who use dialect with great respect and makes a point of integrating them with the English-speaking characters.

#### **4 Chapter-wise Analysis of the novel:**

##### **Chapter One**

After Chris has made several attempts to persuade Sam, the Head of State of Kangan to visit Abazon but to no avail, he regrets that his friends have invited Sam to head the military junta in the first place. No sooner the cabinet meeting ended than a group of protesters from Abazon invade the premises of the Presidential Palace. Major Sam is particularly angry at this new development as he lambastes the Inspector General of Police and his Chief Security Officer for not being sensitive enough to have nipped the insurrection in the bud.

This chapter reveals the callousness of African dictators who often see the constitutional rights of a people to express themselves as treasonable felony. For denying them their right to water, the people of Abazon visit the Presidential Palace to claim their rights but Major Sam sees their legitimate demand as an act of insurrection that needs to be nipped in the bud.

Since it is often said that water is life, for denying the people access to water, Sam has also denied them access to life. As far as he is concerned, the people of Abazon should die. This selfish attitude does not make Sam an ideal leader.

##### **Chapter Two**

Professor Okong visits Major Sam in his office and informs him about the delegation from Abazon who have come to pay him a solidarity visit and to declare their loyalty to him and his military government. Before he could finish his speech, Major Sam shows his indignation by telling Professor Okong that he also learns that the people of Abazon have come with a petition summoning him to visit their province to see how much damage the drought has caused. Major Sam then tells Professor Okong that he will not go out to address the delegation from Abazon, no matter how loyal their mission may be. According to him, this will serve as a deterrent to other groups who may want to pay him such visits.

After he has convinced Professor Okong with his opinion, Major Sam instructs him to address the delegation on his behalf telling them that the Head of State is too busy to see them. Before Professor Okong leaves, Major Sam tells him to arrange with a State House photographer who will take a picture of the delegation while he is addressing them and shaking hands with their leader. He also tells him to receive their petition if any and promise them that the President will look into it and respond to it in good time. He however warns him that no information about the petition should be published and there should not be any television coverage. Professor Okong tries to win cheap popularity with the Head of State by telling him that he feels some of his commissioners are not loyal to him but the Head of State dismisses him as a gossip.

After Professor Okong has left, Major Sam summons his Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice to his office and asks him about the intelligence reports he has received that his Commissioner for Information is no more loyal to him. With some reservations, the Attorney-General confirms that he does not think that Chris is hundred percent behind His Excellency. He goes on to give startling personal opinion to win cheap affection and to make Major Sam hate his boyhood friend the more but Major Sam dismisses him for want of concrete evidence to his claim.

Again, we see in this chapter one of the political gimmicks and insincerities which characterised most governments—military or democratic. Despite his dogged resolution to punish the people of Abazon for not supporting him to become a life president, Major Sam orders Professor Okong to attend to the delegation from Abazon off camera and to give them false hope that their petitions will be looked into. If you think that the petitions will be swept under the carpet, your guess is as good as mine.

### **Chapter Three**

Chris calls Ikem on the telephone and asks him to send a photographer to the Reception Room of the Presidential Palace to cover a goodwill delegation from Abazon. After a few objections, Ikem promises to oblige. Amidst the heavy traffic, Ikem drives speedily to the Presidential Palace.

Chapter Three reveals yet another paradox in the act of governance. While Chris sees the visit of the delegation from Abazon to the Presidential Palace as a goodwill delegation, Major Sam sees

it as an act of insurrection to be condemned. This different mentality and orientation marks the genesis of personal conflict between these two boyhood friends who now find themselves in the same boat of leadership.

#### **Chapter Four**

Earlier in the day, Ikem had picked up Elewa to his house to have fun with her and now it is quite late in the night. She has to go back to her house since Ikem does not always want her to spend a night in his house. They have to wait for a taxi to show up since the battery of Ikem's car is down. As they wait for the taxi, Elewa, who does not like the idea of her going back home instead of spending the night with Ikem, continues to nag and pester him in Pidgin. Amidst the nagging, a taxi finally shows up and as Ikem bids Elewa goodbye, he is happy to regain his freedom.

After a sad coverage of a public execution at a beach, Ikem writes an editorial appealing to the Head of State to amend the Public Executions Decree and the Head of State does accordingly but Chris argues that the gesture of the Head of State has nothing to do with Ikem's compelling editorial. To give vent to his anger, Chris calls Ikem into his office and rebukes him for his 'insensitive' editorials and vouches never to defend him at the cabinet meetings but Ikem promises never to relent.

Although Ikem and Chris are responsible educated leaders in Kangan, their sinful sexual relationship with their girlfriends is a stain on their personalities. Although many may not see anything wrong with men keeping girlfriends, it is indisputable that we don't expect men of their calibre to be so irresponsible. Again, many feminists may interpret the relationship between these men who are highly placed in the society and their so-called girlfriends, as an act of oppression and subjugation against women. Although we often see Beatrice helping Chris to fine-tune his political antenna, as far as Ikem is concerned, Elewa is only reserved for sexual gratification.

#### **Chapter Five**

Chris, Betrice, Ikem and Elewa pay a visit to Mad Medico who treats them to a curtail party with

Dick, his visitor from England. After they have left, Chris and Beatrice are now left alone and Chris shares his experiences with Beatrice.

This chapter shows the social intercourse which often takes place among African ruling elites and their western counterparts. During such parties, like the type we witness in this chapter, African leaders would throw caution to the winds and drink to stupor with their western counterparts.

### **Chapter Six**

Major Sam invites Beatrice to a private dinner at the Presidential Guest House at Abichi Lake. After Beatrice and other guests have been treated to sumptuous meals and drinks, Major Sam takes her to the dance floor and when he is fully charged, he takes her by the hand to the balcony to have sex with her. Beatrice resists Major Sam and tells him of similar experience she has had in London. Major Sam furiously storms away leaving her alone on the balcony.

Although it has often been argued that men are pathological sexual animals, one would not have expected Major Sam to descend so low to attempt to rape his subordinate. Again, this attempted rape does not only reveal the universal nature of man but also show how morally bankrupt a military regime could be. Since Major Sam does not have a wife or a girlfriend, I may be tempted to conclude that he is sexually loose and irresponsible.

Again, many morally sound people would salute the courage of Beatrice not give in to her randy boss. Arguably, not all women would be as courageous as Beatrice in a moment of temptation and "opportunity" like this. Many women in Beatrice's shoe would see it as an opportunity to win the affection of the Head of State while many may have to give in to keep their jobs. I may not have much evidence to say that Beatrice resistance is to protect her common law marriage with Chris, but I can say that she would still resist Major Sam's sexual demand even if she were not in a relationship.

### **Chapter Seven**

Beatrice returns from Gelegele market this Saturday but she feels too tired to cook. Agatha, her housemaid has gone to her Sabbath church as usual. Beatrice therefore finds a comfortable place

and sits. She begins to reminisce her girlhood experiences with her parent and her relationships with Ikem and Chris.

Personally, I see this chapter as the making of Achebe's central female character in *Anthills of the Savannah*. While reviewing her childhood and her present status in Kangan, Beatrice tells the world that whatever and whoever she is in the novel is the creation of the author.

### **Chapter Eight**

A few days after Beatrice has returned from the private dinner organised by Major Sam, Chris visits her to ask about her experience at the party. Beatrice first feigns angry at Chris's uncaring attitude of not calling or visiting her earlier. Chris however apologises to her when he discovers that she is crying. To reconcile, they have sex and lunch together.

After a few sexual bouts, Beatrice tells Chris how Major Sam made an attempt to rape her. This news makes Chris feel infuriated at his boss's randy behaviour. In order to pacify him, Beatrice tries to divert Chris's attention to the need to reconcile with his friend and subordinate, Ikem. Chris is too reluctant to bring himself to talking terms with his erstwhile friend. However, Chris feels trapped in the very cabinet he once cherished but he sees no better alternate to staying put.

Although it is natural for Chris to feel angry at Major Sam's attempt to rape Beatrice, we expect him at the same time to appreciate and salute Beatrice's resolve not to give in. However, Chris does not say anything to encourage Beatrice's courage. This oversight is not only proud but also patriarchal.

Apart from his sinful sexual relationship with Beatrice, Chris's refusal to reconcile with his boyhood friend, Ikem also reveals another human weakness in him.

### **Chapter Nine**

The leaders of Abazon pay a visit to Major Sam at the Presidential Palace but the Head of State would not meet them in person. They leave the palace and heads for Harmony Hotel where they hold another solidarity meeting for Ikem, the Editor of the *National Gazette*, who is also an indigene of Abazon.

After the meeting, Ikem goes out to where he parked his car and a policeman on duty at the hotel accuses him of not putting on his parking lights. Ikem explains that there was no need for parking lights since there are many electric lights in the premises. Despite his sound argument, the errant police constable collects his particulars and asks him to report at the Police Traffic Department the following Monday.

When Ikem visits the Police Traffic Department, the Police Superintendent lambastes the errant officer, apologises to Ikem and asks the officer to return his particulars.

Although it is often said that the police are callous, the attitude of the Police Superintendent at the Police Traffic Department shows that not all members of the force tolerate callousness. Perhaps the point Mr Achebe tries to make here is that even in an irresponsible and corrupt military regime, there are few people in uniform who still possess some sense of sanity and fair judgment like the Police Superintendent. However, one may also argue that the Police Superintendent does so because of the position of Ikem in the society. If we accept this argument, we can also conclude that the randy police officer wouldn't have shot Chris if he had known that he was the former Commissioner for Information.

## **Chapter Ten**

While preparing to visit Mad Medico with Elewa, Ikem is greeted by two men who turn out to be taxi drivers. One is the Chairman of the Taxi Drivers' Association while the other, who leads the way, happens to be the taxi driver who drove Elewa home from Ikem's house a week earlier. The purpose of their visit is to apologise to Ikem for their unbecoming attitude towards him when Ikem had a little scuffle with the chairman of the taxi union in the traffic. They also praise Ikem's bold attempts to address the plight of the dregs of the society through his pen. As they leave, they pledge Ikem their unflagging support.

This visit is very significant to Ikem because those words of appreciation and encouragement from the taxi drivers are the first and the last Ikem receives before his death. Their appreciation shows how Ikem's editorials have addressed the plight of common people.

## **Chapter Eleven**

Sequel to the security reports that Ikem has conspired with his townsmen from Abazon to scuttle

his government; Major Sam summons Chris to his office and orders him to serve Ikem a letter of suspension. Chris, who does not see any tangible proof why his colleague should be suspended, refuses to sign the letter and threatens to resign from the cabinet. Major Sam threatens to deal with him if he resigns. Later in the day, Ikem is served with a letter of suspension signed by the purported Chairman of Kangan Newspapers Corporation, publishers of the *National Gazette*. Ikem visits Chris with the letter and the estranged friends begin to plan how to avert the danger looming on them.

It is amazing to know that Ikem and Chris come to talking terms when Major Sam's regime becomes a threat to their lives and that of the entire nation. Naturally, one would expect them to speak in one voice to fight their common enemy. This is no time to keep malice. The two men now know who their enemy is.

However, I am not surprised at Major Sam's attitude to his boyhood friends. Such is the power drunk. Even in the Bible, when King Saul saw David (who once helped him to kill his enemy) as his enemy, he began to devise means to kill him. Again, this is why men are often regarded as political animals and in animal kingdom, cannibalism is natural.

## **Chapter Twelve**

Ikem delivers a soul-searching lecture at the main auditorium of the University of Bassa. The title of his lecture is "The Tortoise and the Leopard—a Political Meditation on the Imperative of Struggle". After his short lecture, which Ikem actually calls a meditation, the audience cry out for more. Ikem then encourages the audience to ask questions so that he can expound his message. After he has lambasted the excesses and political wantonness of public office holders, he then uses the forum to propound his self-styled *new radicalism*, which he wants the people to embrace.

Again, he moves on to give a fair share of his candid opinion on the excesses and corrupt practices of government employees and even university students such as hectic billing procedures, theft, arson, tribalism, rioting, religious extremism and electoral merchandising.

After the lecture, which has now encroached into mid-night, the chairman thanks Ikem for his stimulating and scintillating lecture but admonishes him and other literary activists in the so-

called Third World to always try to proffer solution to the numerous social ills they have denounced.

This chapter records some of the activists' activities of Ikem which make him dearer to the people and a deadly enemy of Major Sam. In fact, he is assassinated after this outing. Ikem symbolises numerous activists who have been martyred by corrupt and wicked military regimes all over the world and Africa in particular.

### **Chapter Thirteen**

Ikem's soul-searching lecture continues. While answering some of the question thrown at him by the audience, Ikem proposes the head of the president should be removed from the national currency if his image is put in the nation's currency. The press understands his message as a call for regicide. As usual, Major Johnson Ossai, Director of SRC swings into action as he summons mad Medico, whom he thinks, has some relationship with Ikem, for interrogation and consequently, deportation. Not quite long the Army Council announces his (Major Ossai's) promotion to the rank of full colonel.

When Chris gets the full detail of Mad Medico's deportation from Kangan, he tries to reach Ikem but to no avail. He visits him only to discover that he is not in the house, which is now in shambles. Upon enquiry, Chris learns from Ikem's neighbours that some men, who purportedly came from the State Research Council, came to pick Ikem up in army jeeps the previous night.

After contemplating the whereabouts of Elewa, Ikem's girlfriend, Chris tries frantically to speak with the President, the Attorney General or Major Ossai about the abduction of Ikem but to no avail. Professor Okong, on the other hand, denies knowing anything about the matter. Later in the day, the Directorate of State Research Council issues a bulletin announcing the treasonable plot by Ikem and his foreign allies to destabilize the country. The news also has it that Ikem has had a scuffle with the security officials and as a result, he has been fatally wounded by gunshot. As a result, the Kangan Military junta set up a high-level inquiry to look into the purported scuffle between Ikem and the security guards who were sent to carry out his arrest for question.

After listening to the news bulletin, Chris leaves to a hideout where he summons some foreign journalists to counter the lie of the military junta who have killed Ikem. Not quite long, Chris is



declared a wanted person by the military junta. Colonel Johnson Ossai calls Beatrice to ask about the whereabouts of Chris but Beatrice denies knowing his whereabouts.

Meanwhile the lie by the *National Gazette* to frame up Ikem has infuriated the Student Union members who publicly burn copies of the *National Gazette* which publishes the so-called regicide called by Ikem. They also write to the Editor of the same magazine demanding an apology for the calumnious and sensational headline about Ikem which they see as insult to students and their guest lecturer.

The Student Union leader meets Chris in his hideout and he gives him his article to counter the lie by the government about Ikem. The Student Union leader who sees this dastardly act by the military junta as suicidal promises to run two thousand copies of the article to be distributed to the students.

After his meeting with the Student Union leader, Chris grants an interview by the BBC and accuses the Kangan military junta of murdering Ikem with the false pretext that he died in the custody. The next day, the BBC correspondent who has granted Chris an interview is deported but the Student Union has already taken up the case demanding the immediate dismissal of Major Ossai and judicial inquiry into the death of Ikem. In the riot that ensue between Kangan Mobile Police sent to arrest the Student Union leaders and the students, the government announces an indefinite closure of Bassa University.

The man-hunt for Chris continues even as Beatrice tries to console Elewa just to pacify her own grief. No sooner has the duo lie down to sleep than some soldiers and police detectives drive in to search Beatrice's flat as the ultimate search for Chris continues. After an hour of thorough search, they leave without discovering the object of their search.

This chapter could be said to be the anticlimax of *Anthills of the Savannah*. Now that Ikem is killed and the manhunt for Chris has resumed, the reader is quite curious to know what is going to happen next. However, I'm not surprised at the turn of events in this chapter. In a military regime, one act of assassination always leads to another and to another, and to another and the cycle continues until all the so-called enemies of the State have been eradicated. This is exactly what we see in this chapter.

Unfortunately, one major event that serves as a catalyst for Ikem's death is the sensational headline about Ikem's call for regicide published by the *National Gazette* of which Ikem was the former editor. It is sad to know that whoever coined such an inciting headline neither respects nor protects their former boss.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

While Beatrice is preparing for work, a voice over the telephone advises her to tell Chris to move farther to save his dear life but she cannot tell whether the advice comes from a friend or a foe. Recovering from several fits of apprehensions, Beatrice summons enough courage to go to work but she has to return by a taxi because she mistakenly locked her car keys inside.

During the conversation Beatrice has with the taxi driver who visits Elewa, she learns that the Taxi Union members are going to protest against the gruesome murder of Ikem.

After Chris's last hideout has been raided, Beatrice has a short conversation with him telling him about the situation in the house. Chris is perhaps a bit relieved when he learns that there is not much trouble in the house with Beatrice.

Returning home later in the day, Beatrice feels pity for Elewa when she sees her eat dry bread served her by Agatha without an omelette. Beatrice is particularly disturbed by Agatha's overt wickedness despite her regular show of religiosity. While watching Elewa eat, Beatrice sinks into deep thought reminiscing the backgrounds of the two women—Elewa and Agatha.

As the chapter ends, Beatrice is particularly troubled by two recent developments, (1) the news published by the *National Gazette* that Chris has left the country in a foreign airliner bound for London disguised as a Reverend Father and wearing a false beard and (2) a police statement declaring Chris wanted in connection with the recent coup plot in the country. She sees these two developments as a ploy by the dastardly government of Major Sam to execute Chris just the way they did Ikem.

Again, all these plots, lies and character assassination are the disadvantages of military regimes. The only way to hang Chris is to give him a bad name.

## **Chapter Fifteen**

After the announcement by the police declaring Chris wanted, he decides to move out of Bassa for fear that some of his benefactors may hand him over to the police in order to buy their peace. He arranges with Emmanuel, his aide-de-camp, to move out of the GRA to the northern slums under the care of the taxi-driver, Braimoh.

After a brief arrangement, Chris is disguised and he travels to the north of the country in Braimoh's taxi leaving behind Emmanuel to rejoin him later. After they have passed three road blocks successfully, they come to the fourth where they are stopped by one of the soldiers on duty. Fortunately for Chris, the tired and grumbling officer cannot discern his true identity. After a friendly interrogation, Chris and his companion are allowed to go.

Like Jonathan in the Bible who tried to save David's life from Saul, Emmanuel and Braimoh are godsenders who help Chris to escape from the domain of Major Sam, his mortal enemy. But very little do these men know that a deadly fate still await their friend.

## **Chapter Sixteen**

After a night of brief reunion with Beatrice who has come to say goodbye to him, Chris leaves on a bus rather than in Braimoh's taxi in order not to draw unnecessary attention to himself. On their way to his self exile, Chris continues to reflect on the inscriptions on various parts of the luxurious bus on which they travel. He ponders on the high level of intelligence of the less educated artists who have inscribed such soul-searching words.

The inscriptions that Chris reads on the luxury bus are very common in major cities across Africa but the irony is that many drivers and conductors of such buses always behave in a way that questions their understanding of such inscriptions. Again, we should not forget the fact that it is not these drivers or their assistants that wrote those inscriptions since many of them are only hired to manage the buses. However, the point Mr Achebe is making here is that these so-called semi illiterate transporters are capable of profound and philosophical thoughts that can arrest any intellectual mind like Chris.

## **Chapter Seventeen**

After they have travelled for more than five hours, the driver pulls up at the market town of

Agbata where the passengers ease off. Chris and his companions disembark from the bus and join the other passengers to have a meal at a nearby restaurant.

After all the passengers have gone back onto the bus, Chris and other passengers resume their journey and get to a crowded rowdy scene where traffic is at a standstill. Upon an enquiry, Chris discovers that a crowd of police officers on duty and civilians have stopped a truck loaded with beer and have gathered to celebrate the sudden overthrow of the military government.

In the frenzy orgy, a police officer tries to rape a girl and Chris tries to rescue her and in the process, he is shot dead by the drunk police officer. In anger and despair, Braimoh runs after the trigger-happy cop but cannot apprehend him.

The chaos in this scene is a symbol of the chaotic state of the nation of Kangan. Sad enough, Chris is the first victim of the chaos. The frenzy orgies of the police officers here is also very natural in a moment of crisis in a nation. This attests to their humanity. In fact, the police are celebrating the demise of Major Sam's regime. We see this happen many times in Africa when a military junta is overthrown. Many civilians often think that all the officers in uniform are direct beneficiaries of a military regime but the truth is often revealed when there is another coup.

## **Chapter Eighteen**

Twenty-four hours after the coup, Major-General Ahmed Lango takes over as the new Head of State. He orders a state funeral for Chris but Beatrice is too distressed to attend the state burial of her husband. Not quite long, Braimoh and Emmanuel return with Adamma, a girl for whom Chris died. Beatrice's apartment soon becomes a temporary home and centre of political debates for her visitors who have been part of her life in recent time.

A week after Chris's burial, Beatrice summons enough courage to resume work but she is still hunted by the frightening thoughts of her irreparable losses. When Beatrice learns that Elewa's mother may not show up for the naming ceremony of Elewa's baby, she volunteers to conduct the naming ceremony. After a careful appraisal of the situation and circumstances of the baby's birth, Beatrice names her *Amaechina* which literally means May-the-path-never-close.

Immediately after the child has been named, Elewa's mother and her uncle arrive. When they learn that the baby has already been named, Elewa's mother demand a refund of the items she has

bought for her brother to conduct the naming but her brother ignores her and goes straight to perform the kola nut ritual pronouncing good times ahead of the baby.

This last chapter of the novel begins a new chapter in the lives of Beatrice and Elewa and all the people of Kangan. With the coming of a newborn baby, there is a glimmer that the path of Chris, Ikem and the people of Kangan will never close.

#### **4 Characters in the novel:**

**Adamma:** She is one of the passengers on the bus boarded by Chris, Emmanuel, and Abdul as they leave Bassa and head north for safety. She is the same girl whom Chris tries to save from being raped by a cop and in the process; Chris is shot dead by this trigger-happy cop. Like Jesus, Chris gives his life that she may live. Adamma's returning with Emmanuel to visit Beatrice is her kind way of paying the family back for what Chris has done for her. In other words, she gives her life to Chris's family. After all, we could not have expected anything less.

**Agatha:** Agatha is Beatrice's flighty, religious, and judgmental house girl. She is a devout Christian who attends services. Agatha is a semi illiterate housemaid of Beatrice and she appears as a flat character throughout the novel. Because of her educational level, she uses substandard English known as Pidgin. One may wonder why Beatrice employs a semi illiterate as a maid. She is not the only person who does this. Even Silvanus, Chris's cook and Sunday, Mad Madico's steward, are also from semi illiterate class. This is usually the trend in the country. Many educated rich people prefer the services of these semi illiterates for two major reasons: they are always available to do the job at a lower pay and they are easily controlled.

Like most people from her social class, Agatha attends the Yahweh Evangelical Sabbath Mission which holds its services on Saturdays. For this reason, she would not do any work on Saturdays, not even to light a stove.

**Agnes:** She is Ikem's neighbour's wife. Not much is heard from and about her except the little information she gives to unravel the mysterious disappearance of Ikem. Agnes is an image of a typical African housewife.

**Aina:** She is Braimoh's wife from Abazon. As a wife of a taxi-driver, she belongs to the lower class society and she speaks Pidgin, a version of English typical of people from her class. Although she is illiterate, she is intelligent and has sense of humour. Like many women of her class, Aina is at the bottom of the ladder as she has to raise a good number of children in a poorly-furnished room apartment.

**Alhaji Mahmoud:** He is the chairman of the Kangan-American Chamber of Commerce. Although he is an active public official, Alhaji Mahmoud does not always appear in public functions. He is more or less a recluse. He does not only avoid public appearances but also speaks very little when he does go public. There is a rumour that he is one of the smugglers with fifty companies and a bank.

**Attorney-General:** He is a professional lawyer who knows his profession and his worth. Unlike Professor Reginald Okong, Attorney-General does not develop cold feet when he is with the Head of State. Rather, he lets him know the ethics of his profession which sometimes guide his feelings as well as his actions and reactions. This is revealed when the Head of State summons him to his office and asks him about his opinion on whether Chris is loyal to him or not. However, I don't think that Attorney-General is in any way better than Professor Okong. Both are gossips. Even when Major Sam demands his confirmation or objection to his fears, Attorney-General speaks more than needed. In fact, his tirade sounds like a cabinet gossip. There is no doubt that his revelation will put more strain in the relationship between Major Sam and his boyhood friend, who is now his adulthood enemy.

**Beatrice Okoh:** Beatrice is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and an old friend of the two major male characters and a lover of Chris. She symbolizes modern African woman. In a way, I could say that she is the heroine of *Anthills of the Savannah*. Unlike other female characters in the novel, she is not only well educated but also intelligent. Her First Class Honours in English from University of London is a proof of her intelligence and brilliancy.

Although Beatrice grew up as an introvert in her rural Anglican Church compound, she is now an extrovert and an active part of crème-de-la-crème of a cosmopolitan society. Beatrice's baptismal name is *Nwanyibuife*, an Igbo name which means "a girl is also something". She

grows up to dislike her native name because it shows very little or no regard her Igbo traditional society has for female children in particular and women folk in general.

**Braimoh:** He is the taxi-driver who drives Chris out of his hideout in Bassa after an announcement by the police declaring him wanted. Like Emmanuel, Braimoh is loyal and selfless to Chris. He is not afraid that they could be intercepted by the police thereby putting his life in danger. Again, one would have expected Braimoh to disdain and condemn Chris, a member of a despotic government, to his fate but Braimoh seems to see the humanity of Chris rather than his occupation. It is this unselfish love that makes Braimoh runs after Chris's murderer.

**Captain Abdul Medani:** He is a soldier who has soft spot for the so-called bloody civilians. Unlike some of his fellow soldiers, Captain Medani mingles freely with the non-members of the armed forces. A typical example is when he gives Beatrice a strange call urging her to tell Chris to move farther to save his life. Again, we see him personally volunteer to bring the news of the gruesome murder of Chris to Beatrice and also remaining in her house to console her. Furthermore, the type of argument that Captain Abdul Medani engages with his civilian friends—Emmanuel and Braimoh is uncommon among members of the armed forces.

**Chris Oriko:** Chris is the Commissioner for Information in Kangan. He is an intellectual in government who still retains his sense of honour and morality even in a corrupt and wanton regime like the type we see in *Anthills*. However, his sense of honour and morality makes him an arch enemy of Major Sam despite the fact that they were both classmates at Lord Lugard College.

In my opinion, Chris is the hero of *Anthills*. Unlike other characters such as Ikem and Major Sam who die as a result of personal vendetta and direct consequence of greed and wickedness respectively, Chris dies so that the helpless and oppressed society represented by Adamma may live. It is this messianic death that makes me place him as the central character in the novel.

**Comfort:** She is Beatrice's girl friend. Although she is sensitive and attractive, she was not very lucky with her first husband, whose people did not accept her as a person. Fortunately for her,

she is now married to another man, who is not from her tribe and she has two kids. Although we don't hear her speak in the novel, her personality and experiences no doubt have some impression on Beatrice her friend.

**Dick:** He is Mad Madico's visitor from England and the founder of the new poetry magazine called *Reject*. Like many other characters in the novel, Dick is a flat character whose appearance only helps to emphasise the fact that Mad Madico is not abandoned by his race in the black nation of Kangan.

**Elewa:** She is from the lower-class society. Her relationship with Ikem symbolizes a classless society where there is connection between the poor and the highly educated. Expectedly, she speaks Pidgin English which is a lingua franca of the lower-class and semi-illiterate society. Perhaps Ikem commits this class suicide to marry her in order to show his solidarity for the poor and illiterate class. Although Elewa does not show any overt romantic love for Ikem throughout the novel, she no doubt weeps uncontrollably when she receives the news of his death. We cannot really tell whether she cries at the loss of a lover and a friend or at the loss of a benefactor and a status symbol. Well, in my opinion, it could be both.

**Emily:** She is Beatrice's late sister. We don't meet her when she is alive and for this reason, we cannot really scrutinize her character. We only hear about her from Beatrice, her younger sister. I believe that Emily must have been very dear to Beatrice.

**Emmanuel Obete:** He was the President of the Students Union. Also a fugitive wanted by the police, Emmanuel has come to join Chris in his hideout in the GRA and he is now Chris' aide-de-camp. Nothing is heard of him until in the latter part of the novel when he helps Chris to move out of the GRA to the northern slums after an announcement by the police declaring Chris wanted.

There is no doubt that Emmanuel is loyal to Chris. If not, he would have handed him over to the police. Again, he is fearless and selfless. He wouldn't mind sacrificing his own life for Chris if need be. He is actually a friend in deed. Emmanuel's intelligence is revealed when we learn that it was he who cooked a story of Chris's escape from the country and sold it to the press in order



to divert the attention of the police from looking for Chris within the country. Arguably, Emmanuel does all these not only to protect Chris but also to protect himself from the police.

**Guy:** Beatrice's boyfriend in England. Although we don't hear much from and about Guy, I can say that he is a playboy who runs after every creature in skirt. I don't wonder why Achebe names him "Guy" (Guy man), a name which is often used to denote an extravagant and irresponsible young man in Nigerian English.

**Ikem Osodi:** Until he is sacked, Ikem is the Editor of the government-controlled newspaper, the *National Gazette*. He is an intellectual and a poet who is very outspoken about the need to reform the entire polity. He is also a radical individual who is able to connect with the masses and affect social revolution. His affair with Elewa portrays such connection. Ikem is driven by compassion for Kangan's underclass. He decides to crusade against public executions immediately after attending one as a representative of the state-owned newspaper. It is Ikem's passion for honesty, equity and truth that make him an arch enemy of Major Sam and his military cronies such as Major Ossai. Ikem's assassination is a portrayal of numerous political assassinations which have trailed military regimes in Africa since independence.

**Irene:** She is one of guests at the dinner organised by Major Sam. We don't hear much about her in the novel. However, we can say that her appearance at the party goes a long way to show that women are carefully represented in every segment of the novel.

**Joe Ibe:** He is the Commissioner for Works in Kangan. There is no doubt that this commissioner is not as active as a commissioner of works should be. We don't hear much about him in the novel.

**John Williams:** He was Ikem's headmaster back in the primary school. Although we don't hear anything from him directly, from what we are told, by his pupil, John Williams belongs to the conservative class of English people and he has had great influence on Sam.

**Joy:** Ikem's friend. Unlike Elewa, Ikem does not seem to have a close relationship with Joy. In fact, the only time they come close to being together in the novel is when Ikem visits the

delegations from Abazon. I can say therefore that Joy is just a casual friend of Ikem.

**Louise:** She is Chris's ex-wife whom he married in London but divorced after six months. Louise is frigid and for this reason; she cannot make a good wife.

**Mad Madico:** John Kent, who is popularly known as Mad Madico, is a British employed by Major Sam as a hospital administrator.

**Major Ossai:** Major Johnson Ossai is the Director of the State Research Council (SRC) which operates as a state police. He is an intelligent young man who always wins the heart of Major Sam. Major Ossai is a puppet in the hand of Major Sam. In other words, Major Sam uses him to engineer and carry out most of his dastardly acts in the novel.

**Major Sam:** He is the new Head of State of Kangan after the coup. There is no doubt that Major Sam is a greenhorn in the art of governance. He comes to power without any preparation for political leadership and for this reason; he seeks ideas from his friends who are mostly civilians. Behind the facade of a harsh military dictator, Sam has a morbid fear of the civilians. This is overtly revealed in his fretting attitude when the people of Abazon lead peaceful demonstrations to the State House. Major Sam is a proud man who sees the civilian folks as mere appendages and puppets.

Apart from his brazen attitude of a soldier, Major Sam loves listening to English music, smoking English pipes and a perfect actor. As a younger man, he was an Anglo maniac. It was this mentality that drove him to the military profession when he learnt that the profession was meant for gentlemen. Even now, most of his actions and reactions are governed by his own perception of the outside world, especially the English people. He doesn't want them to see him as a failure. No wonder he tells Professor Okong that the rebellion of the Abazonians is his "funeral".

Although many may see him as the central character in the novel, Major Sam is only a representation of the tyranny of a military dictatorship. At the end of the novel, his wickedness and dastardly acts surely find him out.

**Major-General Ahmed Lango:** He is Chief of Army Staff in Major Sam's Kitchen Cabinet. We first see him as the chairman of the high-level inquiry set up by the Kangan Military junta to look into the purported scuffle between Ikem and the security officers who were sent to carry out his arrest for question.

Very little is heard of him until he assumes office as the new Head of State after the abduction and assassination of Major Sam in a palace coup. For conducting a state burial for Chris, I can say that General Lango's ideology, mentality and orientation are quite different from that of his former boss, Major Sam. Again, we should not forget the fact that one of the tactics of every successive military government, especially after a coup, is to sympathise with the plight of the people in order to gain acceptance and legitimacy. General Lango's gesture might just be one of such tactics.

**Miss Granford:** She is a journalist who works with the American United Press. She visits Bassa, the Capital of Kangan for a fact finding mission. We first come in contact with her when Major Sam introduces her to other guests at the dinner and ever since, we don't hear anything from or about her. Again, Achebe uses Miss Granford and other prominent female characters to silence his critics who always accuse him of sparsely representing women in his novels.

**Mr So Therefore:** The notorious Posts and Telegraphs employee in the next flat where Ikem lives. He is fond of beating his wife late at nights. I think that it is this social aberrant attitude that makes Mr Achebe name him "So Therefore", a name which could be deconstructed to mean, "I beat my wife, so therefore?" Since wife battering has become obsolete and condemnable, Achebe does not want to cause any tribal sentiment by giving this character an ethnic indigenous name.

**Professor Reginald Okong:** He is the Commissioner for Home Affairs in the kitchen cabinet of Sam. A funny character, Okong (as he is fondly called) was once an American Baptist minister before he became Professor of Political Science. Because of his extraordinary ingenuity, he was ordained a Baptist minister at the age of 26. Although he was an ordained minister of the gospel, Okong felt more comfortable pursuing his career as a lecturer, and the church hated and fought him for this. After backing his PhD, he ran a column titled "String Along with Reggie Okong" in

the *National Gazette*. Because of his ingenious use of words in his columns, he became a popular figure in the country and his brilliancy made Chris nominate him for as a member of cabinet of Major Sam led junta.

**Silvanus:** He is Chris's cook. Like Agatha and Sunday, Silvanus belongs to the lower class society. He is a minor character in the novel. Of course, we cannot expect a cook to be involved in the any major event in a novel. However, Silvanus's relationship with Beatrice shows that he is a nice person to be with.

**Sunday:** He is Mad Madico's steward. Sunday is intelligent although he is semi illiterate. Sunday represents those docile semi illiterate Africans who serve the Europeans and Americans diligently.

**The White Bearded Chief:** He is the leader of the delegation from Abazon. He is no doubt a statesman and an epitome of wisdom and wit. In his speech at the meeting with Ikem, he holds everyone spellbound by his speech which is occasional punctuated by proverbs and humour. As an elder, he is very careful in choosing his words although he is not happy at the reception given to him and his delegation at the Presidential Palace.

## **6 Theme:**

Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yousaf highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a precolonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Eurocentrically constructed imperial 'reality' ". Certain elements of Achebe's depiction of Igbo life in *Things Fall Apart* match those in Oluadah Equiano's autobiographical Narrative. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Ibo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Nigeria

## **Culture and colonialism**

A prevalent theme in Achebe's novels is the intersection of African tradition (particularly Igbo varieties) and modernity, especially as embodied by European colonialism. The village of Umuofia in *Things Fall Apart*, for example, is violently shaken with internal divisions when the white Christian missionaries arrive. Nigerian English professor Ernest N. Emenyonu describes the colonial experience in the novel as "the systematic emasculation of the entire culture". Achebe later embodied this tension between African tradition and Western influence in the figure of Sam Okoli, the president of Kangan in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Distanced from the myths and tales of the community by his Westernised education, he does not have the capacity for reconnection shown by the character Beatrice. The colonial impact on the Igbo in Achebe's novels is often effected by individuals from Europe, but institutions and urban offices frequently serve a similar purpose. The character of Obi in *No Longer at Ease* succumbs to colonial-era corruption in the city; the temptations of his position overwhelm his identity and fortitude. The courts and the position of District Commissioner in *Things Fall Apart* likewise clash with the traditions of the Igbo, and remove their ability to participate in structures of decision-making.

The standard Achebean ending results in the destruction of an individual and, by synecdoche, the downfall of the community. Odili's descent into the luxury of corruption and hedonism in *A Man of the People*, for example, is symbolic of the post-colonial crisis in Nigeria and elsewhere. Even with the emphasis on colonialism, however, Achebe's tragic endings embody the traditional confluence of fate, individual and society, as represented by Sophocles and Shakespeare.

Still, Achebe seeks to portray neither moral absolutes nor a fatalistic inevitability. In 1972, he said: "I never will take the stand that the Old must win or that the New must win. The point is that no single truth satisfied me—and this is well founded in the Ibo world view. No single man can be correct all the time, no single idea can be totally correct." His perspective is reflected in the words of Ikem, a character in *Anthills of the Savannah*: "whatever you are is never enough; you must find a way to accept something, however small, from the other to make you whole and to save you from the mortal sin of righteousness and extremism." And in a 1996 interview, Achebe said: "Belief in either radicalism or orthodoxy is too simplified a way of viewing things ... Evil is never all evil; goodness on the other hand is often tainted with selfishness."

### **Masculinity and femininity**

The gender roles of men and women, as well as societies' conceptions of the associated concepts, are frequent themes in Achebe's writing. He has been criticised as a sexist author, in response to what many call the uncritical depiction of traditionally patriarchal Igbo society, where the most masculine men take numerous wives, and women are beaten regularly. Others suggest that Achebe is merely representing the limited gendered vision of the characters, and they note that in his later works, he tries to demonstrate the inherent dangers of excluding women from society.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's furious manhood overpowers everything "feminine" in his life, including his own conscience. For example, when he feels bad after being forced to kill his adopted son, he asks himself: "When did you become a shivering old woman?" He views all things feminine as distasteful, in part because they remind him of his father's laziness and cowardice. The women in the novel, meanwhile, are obedient, quiet, and absent from positions of authority – despite the fact that Igbo women were traditionally involved in village leadership. Nevertheless, the need for feminine balance is highlighted by Ani, the earth goddess, and the extended discussion of "Nneka" ("Mother is supreme") in chapter fourteen. Okonkwo's defeat is seen by some as a vindication of the need for a balancing feminine ethos. Achebe has expressed frustration at frequently being misunderstood on this point, saying that "I want to sort of scream that *Things Fall Apart* is on the side of women...And that Okonkwo is paying the penalty for his treatment of women; that all his problems, all the things he did wrong, can be seen as offenses against the feminine."

Achebe's first central female character in a novel is Beatrice Nwanyibuife in *Anthills of the Savannah*. As an independent woman in the city, Beatrice strives for the balance that Okonkwo lacked so severely. She refutes the notion that she needs a man, and slowly learns about Idemili, a goddess balancing the aggression of male power. Although the final stages of the novel show her functioning in a nurturing mother-type role, Beatrice remains firm in her conviction that women should not be limited to such capacities.

Achebe has been called "the father of modern African writing", and many books and essays have been written about his work over the past fifty years. In 1992 he became the first living writer to be represented in the Everyman's Library collection published by Alfred A. Knopf. His 60th birthday was celebrated at the University of Nigeria by "an international Who's Who in African

Literature". One observer noted: "Nothing like it had ever happened before in African literature anywhere on the continent."

Many writers of succeeding generations view his work as having paved the way for their efforts. In 1982 Achebe was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Kent. At the ceremony, professor Robert Gibson said that the Nigerian writer "is now revered as Master by the younger generation of African writers and it is to him they regularly turn for counsel and inspiration." Even outside of Africa, his impact resonates strongly in literary circles. Novelist Margaret Atwood called him "a magical writer – one of the greatest of the twentieth century". Poet Maya Angelou lauded *Things Fall Apart* as a book wherein "all readers meet their brothers, sisters, parents and friends and themselves along Nigerian roads".]Nelson Mandela, recalling his time as a political prisoner, once referred to Achebe as a writer "in whose company the prison walls fell down." Achebe was the recipient of over 30 honorary degrees from universities in England, Scotland, Canada, South Africa, Nigeria and the United States, including Dartmouth College, Harvard, and Brown University. He was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, an Honorary Fellowship of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1982), a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2002), the Nigerian National Order of Merit (Nigeria's highest honour for academic work), the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. The Man Booker International Prize 2007 and the 2010 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize. are two of the more recent accolades Achebe received.

He twice refused the Nigerian honour *Commander of the Federal Republic*, in 2004 and 2011, saying:

"I have watched particularly the chaos in my own state of Anambra where a small clique of renegades, openly boasting its connections in high places, seems determined to turn my homeland into a bankrupt and lawless fiefdom. I am appalled by the brazenness of this clique and the silence, if not connivance, of the Presidency."

Some scholars<sup>1</sup> have suggested that Achebe was shunned by intellectual society for criticising Conrad and traditions of racism in the West. Despite his scholarly achievements and the global importance of his work, Achebe never received a Nobel Prize, which some observers viewed as

unjust. When Wole Soyinka was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature, Achebe joined the rest of Nigeria in celebrating the first African ever to win the prize. He lauded Soyinka's "stupendous display of energy and vitality", and said he was "most eminently deserving of any prize". In 1988 Achebe was asked by a reporter for *Quality Weekly* how he felt about never winning a Nobel Prize; he replied: "My position is that the Nobel Prize is important. But it is a European prize. It's not an African prize.... Literature is not a heavyweight championship. Nigerians may think, you know, this man has been knocked out. It's nothing to do with that."

### **Analysis of the book:**

Rivera uses the limited third person narrative perspective to tell the story, which means that the reader can witness the activities of all the characters but has access only to the thoughts and feelings of the young man. Don Trine's thoughts and motivations are never revealed, lending the necessary air of mystery to the plot line of the story.

The young men and the other migrant workers are never identified, leaving Don Trine as the focal point and the significant character amidst the group. This symbolizes Don's distinctive characteristics and unique thinking among the others, who do not assert any individualism or independent activity. The plight of the migrant worker is one of tedious, controlled toil, so Don is unique in his ability to break away from the others and experience a fuller life while in the midst of the sameness of everyday life.

**The Quest for Good Governance:** There is no doubt that *Anthills of the Savannah* centres on the art of governance. Arguably, every society is in a continuum of finding an ideal government which will make every citizen happy. The nation of Kangan, and by extension, Africa or Nigeria is not an exception.

After the coup, Ikem and Chris invite Sam, their boyhood friend and a military officer to take the mantle of leadership but when Sam turns to a dictator, the duo begin to devise a mean of dethroning him. The quest for an ideal leadership continues amidst tension and stiff opposition by Sam until the demise of the three principal characters including Sam himself. Even after the death of the trio, there is no hope for an ideal government.



Mr Achebe wants us to understand using *Anthills of the Savannah* as a template is that the act of governance is more complex than we think and the so-called utopian government could be far from reality.

As far as history is concerned the quest for good governance has been the bane of many nations in the world, especially those in Africa. After the extermination of colonialism, neo-colonialism came with its attendant evils. Every successive military regime comes with more oppressive policies and the people continue to fight to their own peril.

### **Symbolism in the novel:**

**The Drought in Abazon:** The drought in Abazon symbolizes the denial of people basic fundamental social amenities. It is a form of punishment for the wrong doers. This natural phenomenon is used in *Anthills of the Savannah* to symbolise the natural drought that bad government and inhumane leadership has subjected a people to. Ironically, it is during this time of drought that Major Sam denies the Abazon people access to water as a punishment for not supporting the referendum for his life presidency.

**The Death of Chris:** Although *Anthills of the Savannah* is not a religious literature, the death of Chris could be likened to the death of Christ. Like Christ who died to save humanity (Adam) from their sin so that they might gain eternal life, Chris gives his life to Adamma to save her from the evil sexual nature of the police officer.

**Anthills of the Savannah:** In fact, *Anthills of the Savannah* which is the title of novel is another powerful symbol that I have found in the novel. It seems to me that Mr Achebe uses anthills or termite mounds which are very common in Africa to symbolise independent selfish colonies which African despots have used the sweat of the people to build for themselves. It is also instructive to know that sometimes Savannah is used to represent Africa. For instance, a breed of wild cat called Savannah Cat and Savannah Monitor (medium sized specie of monitor lizard) have been researched to be native to Africa.

**The Newborn Baby:** Elewa's newborn baby at the end of the novel is a symbol of hope and regeneration not only for Beatrice and Elewa but also for the people of Kangan.

### **A Struggle to Overcome a History of Suffering**

*Anthills of the Savannah* is a chronicle of continuous struggle by the people to overcome a history of suffering brought about by bad government. A typical confirmation of this fact is that the novel begins with a coup and ends with another coup.

The sad reality is that every regime in Africa—military or civilian comes with its own oppressive mechanism and the people continue to suffer. Therefore the struggle to overcome a history of suffering is a continuous process. Arguably, the deaths of Major Sam, Ikem and Chris will not change anything. From this, we can also deduce that the death or exit of one oppressive military dictator in Africa does not in any way eradicate or assuage suffering but rather, it is an entrance of another dictator who comes with his cohorts to perpetrate more sufferings.

### **Power**

A critical analysis will reveal that Achebe is talking about the issue of power in the novel. This power issue can also be found in most of Soyinka's works. It should be noted that power without a responsibility is an abuse of power. It is this abuse of power Achebe is much concerned about. In looking at the abuse of power in *Anthills of the Savannah*, we look at Sam, a likeable, charming, intelligent, warm, social networker and a friendly general whose friends are Chris and Ikem. We can compare the bond between the trio with Jonathan and David in the Bible.

Unfortunately, friendship has been bastardized these days. People are now motivated by the pressure of needs. Friendship should be based on love, altruism, magnanimity and care. Because of the pursuit of power, one of the trios, Sam who was hitherto friends turns his back from his other friends and even threatens to kill them. This is why it is often said that power is nothing without control. Arguably, Major Sam does not control the power invested on him.

### **Betrayal of Trust**

*Anthills of the Savannah* also portrays betrayal of trust in relationships. Achebe tells us that Beatrice is beautiful but not flamboyant. He shows the relationship among Chris, Ikem and Sam on one hand and that of Chris and Beatrice and Ikem and Elewa on the other. The relationship between Chris and Beatrice and that of Ikem and Elewa is healthy. The relationship between Ikem and Elewa is quite significant. Perhaps Achebe is telling us that love breaks all barriers—

class, educational differences, tribe and ethnicity. Apart from the domestic relationships, there is also an unhealthy relationship between the so-called third worlds and the West. Every economic summit, bilateral relation and all other of such jargons is a ploy to rip the continent off. Unfortunately, it is African dictators that often connive with the West to rape the continents of its numerous resources.

However, the greatest form of betrayal of trust is revealed in *Anthills of the Savannah* when Major Sam betrays the trust repose in him by the people of Abazon. He misunderstands their peaceful demonstration as an act of rebellion and insurrection that needs to be crushed with a military might. Again, I think that Major Sam has betrayed his friends who invited him to head the military junta in the first place. Even in death, I don't think that Sam merits forgiveness considering the untold hardship he has subjected Beatrice and Elewa who are now young widows to.

### **Love and Feminism**

Despite the fact that Beatrice is Chris's girlfriend, Major Sam would want to sleep with her. Beatrice would not succumb to his advances. Beatrice seems to be a type cast on whose sensibility the destiny of the entire nation is hinged. She has a sense of religiosity. Her character is unique. She seems to draw her strength from all sources—a first class graduate from a western university and a product of a mission school. Achebe takes time to describe her.

In order to silence his critics, especially the feminists, Achebe has time to portray a few women realistically in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Beatrice is an epitome of an educated African woman who takes active part in political and social affairs while Elewa is a typology of the passive housewife.

### **Oppression**

*Anthills of the Savannah* also talks about oppression. This is very true as we recall the fracas between Chris and the soldier which later leads to Chris death. The masses are always tolerating the excesses of those in power. Achebe touches on the issue of a few being rich at the expense of the masses.

Again, the age-long oppression of women is revealed in Ikem's so-called love-letter to Beatrice. In his letter, he carefully recants the Biblical story of creation and the traditional variant of the same story which makes a woman a culpable scapegoat for causing the fall of man and trying to cause a catastrophe to the planet earth. Although many will not see this popular story of human evolution as a ploy to discredit women in order to oppress them, Achebe, through his mouthpiece, Ikem deems it so. However, to balance issue, Achebe again uses Ikem to advance his argument on human oppression thus:

The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are to believe the Book of Genesis, the very oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others—rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialised countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. The most obvious practical difficulty is the magnitude heterogeneity of the problem. There is no universal conglomerate of the oppressed. Free people may be alike everywhere in their freedom but the oppressed inhabit each their own peculiar hell. The present orthodoxies of deliverance are futile to the extent that they fail to recognise this. You know my stand on that. Every genuine artist feels it in his bone. The simplistic remedies touted by all manner of salesmen (including some who call themselves artists) will always fail because of man's stubborn antibody called surprise. Man will surprise by his capacity for nobility as well as for villainy: No system can change that. It is built into the core of man's free spirit. (98-99)

he above exegesis is not only the genesis of oppression but is also the genesis of patriarchal stronghold that put women at the receiving end. Beyond all of these, I see it as Achebe's "love-letter" to women folk. You see, over the years, many critics have faulted Achebe's negative portrayal of women in his works, especially in his classics: *Things Fall Apart*.

In order to answer his critics back, Achebe uses Ikem to show how he feels about women and his attitude toward their plight. Personally, I have always argued that Mr. Achebe does not hate women or feel prejudiced against the folks. What he does is to simply present women the way they are and accepted by his traditional Igbo society. I don't know if Achebe's critics would have wanted him to exaggerate his female characters by dressing them in foreign outfits.

### **Political Instability**

*Anthills of the Savannah* is a good example of political fervour. It is also historical—it expounds the excessive of military despotism and tyranny. It is also allegorical as power, the central theme of the novel is said to be naked. As a psychological fiction, Achebe uses it to mirror the inner landscape of the heart.

Arguably, political instability has been the bane of African development. From the north to the south, almost all African countries have had their fair share of political instability. As I said earlier, the exit of one oppressive political regime in the continent paves way to the entrance of another, and the cycle continues.

### **Radical Struggle**

Another major theme I have found in *Anthills of the Savannah* is radical struggle which is ongoing in the continent. When Major Sam becomes a monstrous despot, Ikem and Sam become activists who champion a radical struggle to free the masses from his oppressive tyranny. As it is often the case, the duo becomes the arch enemy of the state who must be martyred for the collective interest, which is personal interest in reality. Like the two men—Chris and Ikem, many political activists have lost their lives in the hands of military despots in Africa.

### **Corruption**

*Anthills of the Savannah* also x-rays all forms of corruption—political, moral and social—among the ruling elites. As we see in the novel and as it is in the most military regimes, Major Sam is not accountable to anybody. He squanders the nation's resources on extravagancies and personal aggrandisement. The funds which would have been used to develop the country are squandered on the so-called Presidential Palace which has become the Seat of Corruption.

Again, Major Sam's engagement in public execution which has become obsolete and his attempt to rape Beatrice at the party show how much moral corruption has eroded the continent

### **7 Questions and Answers**

- 1) What is the main theme of *Anthills of the Savannah*?

Ans. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe tells the story of politics in the imaginary nation of Kangan. Those more knowledgeable about Africa may recognize who and where is being depicted better than I. After a coup, His Excellency leads the country. Chris is his Commissioner for Information and Ikem the editor of the state-run newspaper. The three had been boyhood friends, but their new relationship soured that friendship. As Chris observes at the start of the book, "this was a game that began innocently enough and then turned poisonous." Achebe is obviously frustrated by the governments, both civilian and military that have emerged since independence. He seems to consider them as the *Anthills of the Savannah* of his title. His criticism of the men running them is sharp, and he comments frequently on their flaws. In the end, the main problem he sees is "the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being." He has no better opinion of non-African powers. While he no longer considers Britain a "menace," for him, "the real danger is that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire" the United States.

2) Make an analysis of the character of Major Sam.

Major Sam is the new Head of State of Kangan after the coup. There is no doubt that Major Sam is a greenhorn in the art of governance. He comes to power without any preparation for political leadership and for this reason; he seeks ideas from his friends who are mostly civilians. Behind the facade of a harsh military dictator, Sam has a morbid fear of the civilians. This is overtly revealed in his fretting attitude when the people of Abazon lead peaceful demonstrations to the State House. Major Sam is a proud man who sees the civilian folks as mere appendages and puppets.

Apart from his brazen attitude of a soldier, Major Sam loves listening to English music, smoking English pipes and a perfect actor. As a younger man, he was an Anglo maniac. It was this mentally that drove him to the military profession when he learnt that the profession was meant for gentlemen. Even now, most of his actions and reactions are governed by his own perception of the outside world, especially the English people. He doesn't want them to see him as a failure. No wonder he tells Professor Okong that the rebellion of the Abazonians is his "funeral".

Although many may see him as the central character in the novel, Major Sam is only a representation of the tyranny of a military dictatorship. At the end of the novel, his wickedness and dastardly acts surely find him out.

1. Discuss *Anthills of the Savannah* as a neo-colonial novel.
2. Compare and contrast the leadership qualities of Chris and Major Sam.
3. Discuss the major themes in the novel.
4. Compare Achebe's portrayal of women in *Anthills of the Savannah* with his earlier novels.
5. "Major Sam is neither a villain nor a saint". Discuss this assertion with close reference to *Anthills of the Savannah*.

#### Short Questions:

- 1) What did Major Sam like to do in his free time:  
Major Sam liked to listen English music.

- 2) Who is Chris and why is he important?

**Chris Oriko:** Chris is the Commissioner for Information in Kangan. He is an intellectual in government who still retains his sense of honour and morality even in a corrupt and wanton regime like the type we see in *Anthills*. However, his sense of honour and morality makes him an arch enemy of Major Sam despite the fact that they were both classmates at Lord Lugard College.

- 3) How is radical struggle brought about in this novel?

Ans. When Major Sam becomes a monstrous despot, Ikem and Sam become activists who champion a radical struggle to free the masses from his oppressive tyranny. As it is often the case, the duo becomes the arch enemy of the state who must be martyred for the collective interest, which is personal interest in reality. Like the two men—Chris and Ikem, many

political activists have lost their lives in the hands of military despots in Africa. Thus radical struggle is brought about in the novel.



# **The Glass Palace**

## **1 Introduction**

## **2 About the author**

## **3 Analysis of the novel**

## **4 Summary of the novel**

## **5 Characters of the novel**

## **6 Theme of the novel**

## **7 Questions and Answers**

### **7.1 Long Questions and Answers**

### **7.2 Short Questions and Answers**

#### **1 Introduction:**

Indian writing in English has stamped its greatness by mixing up tradition and modernity in the production of art. At the outset, the oral transmission of Indian literary works gained ground gradually. It created an indelible mark in the mind and heart of the lovers of art. The interest in literature lit the burning thirst of the writers which turned their energy and technique to innovate new form and style of writing. Earlier novels projected India's heritage, tradition, cultural past and moral values. But a remarkable change can be noticed in the novels published after the First World War, which is called, modernism. The novels written in the late 20th century, especially after the Second World War, are considered postmodern novels.

Amitav Ghosh is one among the postmodernists. He is immensely influenced by the political and cultural milieu of post independent India. Being a social anthropologist and having the opportunity of visiting alien lands, he comments on the present scenario the world is passing

through in his novels. Cultural fragmentation, colonial and neo-colonial power structures, cultural degeneration, the materialistic offshoots of modern civilization, dying of human relationships, blending of facts and fantasy, search for love and security, diasporas, etc... are the major preoccupations in the writings of Amitav Ghosh

The elemental traits of post-modernism are obviously present in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. As per postmodernists, national boundaries are a hindrance to human communication. They believe that Nationalism causes wars. So, post-modernists speak in favour of globalization. Amitav Ghosh's novels centre around multiracial and multiethnic issues; as a wandering cosmopolitan he roves around and weaves them with his narrative beauty. In The Shadow lines, Amitav Ghosh makes the East and West meet on a pedestal of friendship, especially through the characters like Tridib, May, Nice Prince etc., He stresses more on the globalization rather than nationalization. In The Glass Palace, the story of half-bred Rajkumar revolves around Burma, Myanmar and India. He travels round many places freely and gains profit. Unexpectedly, his happiness ends when his son is killed by Japanese bomb blast. The reason for this calamity is fighting for national boundaries.

## **2 About The Author:**

Amitav Ghosh is the internationally bestselling author of many works of fiction and nonfiction, including *The Glass Palace*, and is the recipient of numerous awards and prizes. Ghosh divides his time between Kolkata and Goa, India, and Brooklyn, New York. (*From the publisher.*)

Ghosh is a popular and highly respected Indian author. In his novels and essays, he draws heavily upon the character, traditions, and dichotomies of his native land, yet Ghosh's protagonists and themes often extend beyond India's actual boundaries, most notably toward the Middle East and Great Britain. Through this discourse, Ghosh's works expose the cross-cultural ties between India and its former colonial ruler as well as with its kindred neighbors. Ghosh has been hailed by critics as one of a new generation of cosmopolitan Indian intellectuals writing in English who are forging a contemporary literary métier.

Ghosh was born on July 11, 1956, in Calcutta, India, to Shailendra Chandra, a diplomat, and

Ansali Ghosh, a homemaker. He traveled frequently in his youth, living in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Sri Lanka, Iran, and India. Ghosh attended Delhi University and received his B.A. with honors in history in 1976 and his M.A. in sociology in 1978. In 1978, he began studies at Oxford University in social anthropology. While at Oxford, Ghosh studied archives of documents from twelfth-century Egypt and was granted a scholarship that allowed him to travel to a small Egyptian village in 1980 to further his research. The village was located in the delta of the Nile River and Ghosh lived among the fellaheen, or Egyptian peasants. He graduated from Oxford earning a Ph.D. in social anthropology in 1982. From 1983 to 1987, Ghosh worked in the Department of Sociology at Delhi University. In 1986, Ghosh's first English-language novel, *The Circle of Reason*, was published and was awarded France's Prix Medici Etrangère. In 1988 and 1990, Ghosh returned to the Egyptian village he visited previously to continue his research. His third book, *In an Antique Land* (1992)—which is both a travel-memoir and a historical study—resulted from Ghosh's continuing interest in twelfth-century Egyptian culture. Ghosh has won numerous awards, including the Annual Prize from the Indian Academy of Letters in 1990. In 2001, Ghosh declined a nomination for a regional Commonwealth Writers Prize. Ghosh has served as a visiting professor at several universities, including the University of Virginia, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, and American University in Cairo. Ghosh has also held the title of distinguished professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Queens College, City University of New York, and has worked as a contributing writer to *Indian Express*, *Granta*, and *New Republic* and was educated at The Doon School; St. Stephen's College, Delhi; Delhi University; and St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he was awarded a Ph.D. in social anthropology.

Ghosh lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, author of the Laura Riding biography *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (1993) and a senior editor at Little, Brown and Company. They have two children, Lila and Nayan.

He has been a Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. In 1999, Ghosh joined the faculty at Queens College, City University of New York as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature. He has also been a visiting professor to the English department of Harvard University since 2005. Ghosh has recently purchased a property in Goa and is returning to India.

## Major Works:

The majority of Ghosh's writing focuses on exploring geographical and social boundaries. His first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, is a complex tale of a young Indian boy, Alu, and his adventures in India and abroad. The novel was inspired by Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Alu becomes an apprentice weaver and, after a tragic event, flees across the ocean to the Middle East, eventually traveling to North Africa. In his travels, Alu encounters a myriad of eccentric characters of varied nationalities. It is in this atmosphere that Ghosh provides commentary on the nomadic proclivities of southern Asian and Middle Eastern societies. The work is divided into three sections, comprising the three main phases of Alu's life. Each of these phases also parallels a trio of concepts—reason, passion, and death—characteristic of ancient Indian literature and philosophy. In *The Shadow Lines* (1988), Ghosh juxtaposes the lives of two different yet intertwined families—one Indian and one English—to question the boundaries between their cultural and geographical settings. The title alludes to the blurring of the lines between nations and families, as well as the blurred lines within one's own self-identity. Ghosh depicts the characters of the novel as caught between two worlds, and the struggle to come to terms with both their present lives as well as their past forms the core of the narrative. *In an Antique Land* is based on the historical and anthropological research that Ghosh conducted in Egypt during the 1980s. In the twelfth century, Jewish settlers in and around Cairo were reluctant to discard written documents for fear that the name of God might be contained within and they would therefore be desecrated if the paper was soiled. The synagogue created a geniza, or cellar, where people could dispose of written material without fear of desecration. For seven centuries, local Jews deposited everything from shopping lists, letters, religious texts, and legal documents into the Cairo Geniza. At the end of the nineteenth century, Western scholars discovered the geniza, appropriated its contents, and its wealth of history was divided among the Western scholarly communities. While studying at Oxford, Ghosh discovered records of these documents and noticed a reference to a slave named Bomma. Ghosh traveled to Egypt in an effort to uncover more information about the slave and the time period in which he lived. *In an Antique Land* recounts both Ghosh's research and his experiences while living in a small Egyptian village. His descriptions of his adjustment to the rural Egyptian way of life, and the curiosity with which his neighbors viewed him, form a large portion of the work. *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) is a

science-fiction thriller set in three different time periods—late nineteenth century, 1995, and the near future—and three different locales—Calcutta, London, and New York. The mystery novel centers around the research for a cure for malaria. The narrative switches back and forth between time periods, revealing more and more clues to the puzzle. In *The Glass Palace* (2001), Ghosh revisits his recurring themes of displacement and the examination of boundaries. The novel begins with a young Indian boy, Raj, who witnesses the expulsion of the Burmese royal family by the British. The story follows both the forced exile of the royal family in India as seen through the eyes of Dolly, their loyal maid, and Raj's adolescence and success in capital ventures. As a prosperous young businessman, Raj travels to India and asks Dolly to marry him. She accepts and they move to Burma together. The novel recounts the lives of their family as they struggle to define their place in the world. One of their sons, Arjun, enlists in the British Army and transforms his lifestyle with an almost zealous energy—by eating taboo foods, dressing in Western style, and speaking British slang. He believes that, by becoming like the English, he is making himself a more ideal specimen of man. His blind faith in the British Empire quickly dissolves during the Japanese invasion of Malaya. Arjun discovers that, as an Indian, he has become a pawn to be used by the Empire, and he eventually rediscovers the beauty in the Indian ideology and culture.

*Sea of Poppies* (2008), the first installment of a planned trilogy, is an epic saga, set just before the Opium Wars, which encapsulates the colonial history of the East. The second in the trilogy, *River of Smoke* was published in 2011.

His previous novels are *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1990), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *Dancing in Cambodia*, *At Large in Burma* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), *The Glass Palace* (2000) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Ghosh's fiction is characterised by strong themes that may be somewhat identified with postcolonialism but could be labelled as historical novels. His topics are unique and personal; some of his appeal lies in his ability to weave "Indo-nostalgic" elements into more serious themes.

In addition to his novels, Ghosh has written *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), a large collection of essays on different themes such as fundamentalism, history of the novel, Egyptian culture, and literature).

In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government.

If we examine the works of Ghosh, like *The Glass Palace* and *The Shadow Lines*, we may find that he has examined **the truths of individuals in history** more completely in fiction than one can through mere knowledge of historical facts. While the *Shadow Lines* is set up against the backdrop of historical events like Swadeshi movement, Second World War, Partition of India **and Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta**, *The Glass Palace* is set in Burma, India, and Malay, spanning through a century, **from the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, through the Second World War to modern times.**

Focusing mainly on the early 20th Century, it explores a broad range of issues, ranging from the changing economic landscape of Burma and India, to pertinent questions about what constitutes a nation and how these change as society is swept along by the tide of modernity. The first chunk of this large book has a number of strands, but the author tries to hold the reader's interest easily with the exotic locales and swift changes forced on them and the characters. History is part of the problem. Ghosh feels compelled to explain the events not just from the characters' point of view but also to provide a gloss for readers who are unlikely to know the details. He tries a variety of approaches in providing this information, but they rarely fit smoothly in the rest of the story.

There is a similarity, vague, if not striking in the turning points of both the novels. It appears as a reader that both the books revolve around the theme of search.

- *The Glass Palace* tells of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. During the British invasion of 1885, when soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, the woman whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her. In *The Shadow Lines*, it is the grandmother's (or Thamma's) quest to find her Jethamoshay which takes her to Dhaka, post which follows the chaos of 1963-64 Bangladesh riots and the tale of 'final redemptive mystery'. Both the books, exploit the theme of travel and discovery in a background of social and political violence.

- Memory could almost be considered a character unto itself in both of Ghosh's novel. For instance, Rajkumar's life is utterly driven and shaped by his one, striking, boyhood memory of Dolly in the plundered Glass Palace during the invasion of Burma. Similarly, the can-be-called hero of *The Shadow Lines* named Tridib gives the narrator 'worlds to travel in' so much so that he is well-versed in the geographical detail of places that he had never visited before. To him, Colombo, Cuzco, Cairo or Madrid are familiar and household names of places that had, through Tridib's stories, come to be invested with a rare, uncontroversial reality, only through the space of memory.
- Ghosh constructs several unique, remarkable, and strong female characters in *The Glass Palace*: Dolly, Uma, Queen Supayalat, even the First Princess, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Each of these women tells us something different and important about the time and place in which she was living. eg. Uma is a particularly interesting character, as she illuminates one of the ideas central to Ghosh's novel. When we first encounter her, she is constantly worried about being the proper memsahib, following traditional domestic etiquette, and living up to the standards of her husband, the Collector. She soon realized, however, that her husband's dream was not in accordance with the rules of Indian custom, he longed "to live with a woman as an equal in spirit and intellect," and she could never, according to custom, fulfil those expectations. We see a monumental change in her disposition when she returns to India from New York. Similarly in *The Shadow Lines*, a brilliant fusion of contrasting women characters such as Thamma and Ila, or May Price (to name a few) exists and offer different opinions on the subject of freedom, travel, work, lifestyle etc.
- Lastly, to leave something untouched, try and figure out the following - a) If you're in a mood for some literary criticism, it is a good idea to come to the exploration of both the books being 'post-colonial' in nature. b) Just for fun? Try and see how is the theme of photography used in both the books.

The books are slightly lengthy, but once Ghosh being a Social Anthropologist manifests detail and description that will make you want to travel to some of the mentioned places. Be rest assured that Ghosh's writings are circular in nature, which is to say that you may not see a typical

linear pattern of telling a tale from the beginning till the end in terms of time, memory or space. There is a constant back and forth pattern scene, especially in *The Shadow Lines*.

### **3 Analysis of the Novel:**

*The Glass Place* is a perfect manifestation of almost all the major concerns of Ghosh, blended into a wonderful epic narrative. But overriding all the thematic concerns is the theme of post-coloniality. The homeless and displaced migrant native is an inseparable part of a post-colonial novel. The predicament of the lost and shattered migrant has been termed as 'exit-ential anxiety' by Rukmini Bhaya Nair:

"Any writer who seeks to present the soul of man under colonialism, as Amitav Ghosh does in his latest novel, *The Glass Place* is therefore condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma – wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame. This complex story weaves historical facts with a family saga spanning three generations, and examines the political and social issues of Burma, Malaya, and India during a tumultuous century.

This is the fourth novel by Amitav Ghosh opens on the eve of war in Mandalay, as the British prepare to capture the Burmese throne. An eleven-year-old Indian orphan named Rajkumar informs a crowd at a food stall that the booming sound they hear is a British cannon. The year is 1885, and a dispute between a British timber company and King Thebaw of Burma leads to battle. The Burmese army, defeated after only fourteen days by a force of ten thousand British and Indian soldiers, surrenders without informing the king.

Historically, the novel offers an intriguing glimpse into the minds of the royal family. King Thebaw, portrayed as a compassionate ruler though somewhat lacking as a military leader, owes much of his success to his wife, Queen Supayalat. It was the queen who arranged the execution of anyone in line for the throne, and after seventy-nine princes of various ages were killed, it appeared that the Konbuang dynasty would rule unchallenged, an assumption proved false by the British a mere seven years after Thebaw became king. The Glass Palace of the royal family ransacked, the humiliated King Thebaw and his family are escorted to a ship and ultimately sent to India.



During the looting of the royal palace, Rajkumar meets Dolly, one of the queen's handmaidens. He sees her standing to the side as the queen tries unsuccessfully to save various royal treasures. Rajkumar presents Dolly with a jeweled box, learns her name, and falls in love. He watches Dolly leave with the royal family the next day, a loyal servant following them into exile. Twenty years will pass before he sees her again.

Rajkumar is no stranger to hardship. His Indian parents moved to Burma after a family quarrel and lived in the village of Akyab until a fever killed his father and siblings. His mother attempted to flee the sickness and left with Rajkumar on a *sampan* up the Irrawaddy River. She succumbed to the fever during their journey. Left alone, Rajkumar finds work at a food stall in the market of Mandalay. It is through Ma Cho, the woman for whom he works, that Rajkumar meets Saya John.

A contractor for the Burmese teak camps, John Martins (called Saya John) becomes a teacher and mentor to young Rajkumar. It is in the teak camps that Rajkumar learns to work with timber and through timber that he ultimately finds wealth and success. Although he speaks many languages, Rajkumar is almost illiterate—his accomplishments result from hard work and taking risks. As an orphan, he is driven to maintain contact with those people who matter to him; thus, Saya John becomes his business partner, and after he makes his fortune he seeks Dolly.

While Rajkumar is making his fortune, the Burmese royal family is slowly losing theirs. Exiled by the British, the royal family moves to India, first to Madras, then to Ratnagiri. They live in Outram House, a shabby bungalow inside a walled garden above the town. Mildewed walls, flaking plaster—it is a residence far removed from the glittering palace they left behind. It haunts the king that his reign ended the golden age of Burma. Throughout his exile he does not quite seem to grasp that the British will not let him return to Burma, that they will do everything in their power to make the world forget him. Because the queen has killed off any other potential claimants to the throne, if the British keep the king exiled, the opportunity for revolt is minimized.

The queen wears their poverty as a badge of honor; she is anxious for others to see how the British have treated them. “Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are now reduced to this. . . . In our golden Burma, where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and

read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair.” She is not too far from the truth; Rajkumar had noted while beginning his work for Saya John, “Courtly Mandalay was now a bustling commercial hub; resources were being exploited with an energy and efficiency hitherto undreamt of.”

As one of the few remaining servants of the royal family, Dolly takes on greater responsibilities in Outram House. Through her service to the queen she meets Uma Dey, the wife of Collector Dey of Ratnagiri. The collector is an Indian holding a British post, and dealing with the Burmese queen he asks himself, “But what could they possibly know of love, of any of the finer sentiments, these bloodthirsty aristocrats, these semi-illiterates who had never read a book in all their lives, never looked with pleasure upon a painting?”

Besides rejecting universalism in literature (that all great literature has a timeless and universal appeal), the post-colonial critics and authors try to reclaim the nation’s past which has been devalued by the colonizer so much so that the natives see history, culture and progress as beginning with the arrival of Europeans.

Amitav Ghosh is prominently a writer of histories and indulges in an introspective exploration of self and society. primarily a post-colonial trait. He celebrates and explores diversity, hybridity and difference apart from diminishing all divisions, physical or psychological.

Nation formation is a major tool in the process of colonization, as in journeying from an amorphous nation less state to that of conscious nationhood, the new nation people feel privileged and subsequently relegate their apparently disorganised past to the realms of history. This nation-formation involves a poignant dispersal and scattering of people across man-made borders. The wide movement of people in the recent history of human race in the wake of imperialist and expansionist programmes across Africa and eastward in Asia bear adequate testimony to this. *The Glass Palace* records and indites the experiences of first such races inhabiting British occupied territories in South East Asia, who are dying to make their own nation.

*The Glass Place* is the author’s attempt to remap the history of three South Asian countries, Myanmar, India and Malaysia all sites of the British Empire through the late 19th and 20th centuries. The turbulent cultural crossovers, conflicts, histories and nations as a metaphor of loss

make up the central concern of Ghosh. Rajkumar, the chief protagonist of the novel, epitomizes the lost, exiled and homeless native whose family is further scattered in the course of the novel through post imperialist dislocation in various parts of the Asian continent. The dramatic conflation of cultures and nationalities is evident at the very outset when the eleven year old Rajkumar witnesses the booming of English cannons and British invasion of Burmese Royal Palace in Mandalay.

“English soldiers were marching towards the city... Panic struck the market. People began to run and jostle. Rajkumar managed to push his way through the crowd... He could not see far: a cloud of dust hung over the road, drummed up by thousands of racing feet... Rajkumar was swept along in the direction of the river. As he ran, he became aware of a ripple in the ground beneath him, a kind of drumbeat in the earth, a rhythmic tremor that travelled up his spine through the soles of his feet. The people in front of him scattered and parted... Suddenly he was in the front rank of the crowd, looking directly at two English soldiers mounted on horses.”

It's not just the marches and the scared mobs but the fact that most of the British invading forces involve Indian soldiers, which is a surprising presence in the novel. Even the royal proclamation before the surprise invasion of Burma bears testimony to this:

“To all royal subjects and inhabitants of the royal empire those heretics, the Barbarian English – *Kalaas* having most harshly made demands calculated to bring about the impairment and destruction of our religion... the degradation of our race, are making a show and preparation as if about to wage war, have been replied with the usages of great nations and in words which are just and regular” (15-16).

True to an Amitav Ghosh novel, *The Glass Palace* contains a proliferation of characters which include the privileged as well as the subaltern. The royal family-Thebaw, Queen Supayalat and the Burmese princesses; and commoners like Dolly, Rajkumar, Saya John and Uma are united ironically by the gales of colonial displacement. These protagonists forced by the rough historical winds are displaced from Burma to India, Malaya, Singapore and back again, each time involving a pattern of panic, crowded mobs and soldiers on the march as already illustrated in the very opening of the novel.

Rajkumar, initially a subaltern comes out as a true transnational post-colonial subject firstly by being a *Kalaa*, a foreigner in an alien territory, then by being subjected to colonization of a more severe kind in participating in the great national upheaval that the British occupation of Burma entails, followed by another turbulent experience in imperial India and his foray into the Malayan forest resources. He inhabits a truly borderless post-colonial space beyond the interstices of race, class and nation in which his life is enmeshed. The hybrid nature of the colonized-subaltern who evolves himself into an affluent businessman and comes to resemble the colonizer is revealed through the character of Rajkumar, who graduates from a petty immigrant lad, through his apprenticeship as a *luga lei* under Saya John, to a merchant who is revered in the timber trading circles of Burma. Saya John, his mentor, is another transnational from China who evolves himself into a semblance of Europeans in his garb and manner. Saya John instructs Rajkumar in the life of young Europeans who taught them how “to bend the work of nature to your will” (TGP, p.75). Saya John’s conception that the whole enterprise of logging timber from the forests could not have been possible without the Europeans’ ingenuity; Saya’s knowledge of this and his imitation of the white Sahib’s lifestyle, involves a compromise between the complete separation from the empire and complete dependence upon the empire for its existence.

Mimicry of the colonizer’s language, mannerism and mode of dressing is another marked trait of a postcolonial protagonist. Saya John’s deliberate attempts at anglicizing, by his way of dressing and the author’s description of Beni Prasad Dey, the ICS officer appointed in Ratnagiri where the Burmese royals are held captive are worth a mention here.

“It was a ritual with Saya John, a kind of superstition, always to start these journeys in European clothes: a sola topee, leather boots, khaki trousers” ( p.67).

“Collector Dey was slim and aquiline with a nose that extended in a sharp beak – like point. He dressed in finely cut Savile Row suits and wore gold-rimmed eyeglasses” (104).

Ghosh’s allusion to Dey’s behaviour, his defence of imperial power before the Burmese King, and his tongue-in-cheek reference to the British as *amader gurujon* (our teacher) brings out the sense of compromise with which such acts of complicity and mimicry are attended in the colonized space.

The colonized subject's empathy with the fellow colonized, though of separate nationality is apparent when Rajkumar expresses surprise at his own involvement with the general mourning at the sudden occupation of Burma and the loss of the king.

"Rajkumar was at a loss to understand his greed. He was in a way, a feral creature, unaware that there exists invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth these ties had been sundered by a century of conquests and no longer existed even as a memory but that, there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs, this was very nearly incomprehensible"(47).

The royal maid Dolly too shares her predicament with Rajkumar. She feels the same incomprehensible loyalty to the royal family's deportment to India. She began to notice odd little changes around her, of the servants' impudence, their refusal to *shiko* and her own ambivalent position. She was free, she was told for she was a slave not a prisoner, but in her heart she knew she was bound with the princesses, who she had been enslaved to look after. Dolly represents the twice colonized victim of the breaking of a nation. She embodies the quiet and subliminal aggression of dislocated subjects. Dolly's most haunting concern is that Burma the place of her birth is lost to her forever. Her displacement from her roots and her discomfort with her changed identity is clear when she confides her predicament to Uma, the collector's wife:

"If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me a *Kalaa* like they do Indians – a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea. I'd find that very hard I think. I'd never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I knew what it was like when we left"(113)

The colonial subjects suffer from a sense of imaginary homeland having to suffer most of their lives in displaced locations. Dolly and Rajkumar both ironically have an allegiance to the nation of their exile or displacement which they have appropriated as home. For Dolly, her life in Outram House is the only life she knows and surprisingly she is the most assertive, in her place of exile. She asks Uma, "where would I go, this is home" (119).

Both Dolly and Uma are victims of the same colonial force and share a deep understanding and respect for each other's predicament. Dolly however, bears the burden of slavery also at the hands of the Burmese royalty. However, both are very quick to acknowledge their respective status and any colonial prejudices, either may harbour. Ghosh provides a conversation full of typical post-colonial disillusionment:

"One night, plucking up her courage, Uma remarked: 'One hears some awful things about Queen Supayalat.'

'What?'

'That she had a lot of people killed... in Mandalay...'

Dolly was quiet for a moment and Uma began to worry that she had offended her. Then Dolly spoke up. 'You know Uma' she said in her softest voice. 'Every time I come to your house, I notice that picture you have hanging by your front door...'

'Of Queen Victoria, you mean'

'Yes'

Uma was puzzled. 'What about it?'

'Don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria's name? It must be millions wouldn't you say? I think I'd be frightened to live with one of those pictures.'

A few days later Uma put the picture down and sent it to the Cutchery, to be hung in the Collector's office" (114).

This prompt retort by Dolly shows her emotional affinity to the only home and family she knows and loves before her marriage. Her love for the royal family is evident when before leaving with Rajkumar, she takes a "last glimpse of the lane, the leaning coconut palms, the Union Jack, flapping above the gaol on its crooked pole..." (TGP, p.171).

The experience of these exiled victims of the breaking of nations is peculiar in the sense that they slide easily into alien cultures, at the same time triggering off the spirit of alienation, national longing and transnationalism in their divided identities. Ghosh's characterization of Rajkumar, the petty *luga lei* turned timber tycoon is a way of voicing the problematics of settling and resettling of communities and individuals amid the confluence of nations and nationalities. He is a true multicultural, a reinvented migrant, who, by dint of his enterprise, carves a niche for himself and escapes, landing in underclass ethnic ghettos. Uma, like most of Ghosh's other

characters is a citizen of the world away from delimiting boundaries. Her sojourns to Europe and America after her husband's demise lead her to the Indian Nationalist movement and she subsequently brings her struggle to the subcontinent. The hybridity and adaptability of characters like Rajkumar and Uma robs exile of its derogatory connotations like oppression and significantly mellows the colonized-colonizer binary.

Another theme which forms an inseparable part of a post-colonial narrative is the resistance to and struggle against imperialism. Apart from depiction of nationalism through the character of Uma, is the evocative presentation of another more difficult and more consequential struggle of the Indian officers and soldiers serving in the British army. Uma's nephew Arjun is immensely proud to be among the privileged few who are able to enter the class of the rulers. It is Hardayal Singh, his peer and a third generation army officer, who makes Arjun conscious about the Britishers' prejudice, distrust and suspicion of Indian officers as well as soldiers. When their long awaited mobilisation orders came, Hardayal remembered the inscription in Chetwode Hall at the Military Academy in Dehradun and expresses scepticism at the idea of 'country':

"Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country, so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time?" (TGP, p.330).

Though Hardayal had realized this ironical situation quite early in life; Arjun is shocked into admitting it after a few setbacks. When Arjun's battalion arrives in Singapore on its way up the Malay peninsula, he has the sort of experience that another of his fellow officers had predicted: "...it was as though they were examining their own circumstances for the first time in retrospect; as though the shock of travel had displaced an indifference that had been inculcated in them since their earliest childhood"( TGP,p.346).

They are suddenly acknowledging the fact that they have never been accepted as equals by the British. Subsequently Arjun starts heeding to Hardayal's complaints:

"It's strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself; who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself? ... This is what I ask myself

Arjun: In what way do I become human again? How do I connect what I do with what I want in my heart?" (406) .

During the battle of Jitra, Amreek Singh of Indian National Army airdrops pamphlets to awaken the soldiers to the national cause. They say,

“Brothers ask yourselves what you are fighting for and why you are there: do you really wish to sacrifice your lives for an empire that has kept you country in slavery for two hundred years?”  
(.391)

When Arjun sees Kishan Singh and other soldiers of his company reading the pamphlet, he asks them to be disposed off and warns the soldiers of dire consequences if any of them is found with a pamphlet. Contrary to the firm resolve of Hardayal, Arjun is torn between sympathy revulsion and fear.

The wider growing concern amongst the Indians fighting under the imperial army is intricately woven with the other intimate concerns of the protagonists. Arjun’s emotional attachment with his subordinate Kishan Singh is the only lasting bond in the otherwise emotionless mercenary exercise of war. Dinu and Alison both of mixed parentage fall in love, defying divergent geographies and races. This relation of love destined to flower, between Rajkumar’s son and Saya John’s granddaughter is curiously symbolic of a shared compulsion across disputed and dispossessed territories. Ghosh, in the midst of wartime despair and disillusion seems to reiterate here the quiet and unchallenged faith that only such love and desire can sustain. In contrast to Uma’s and Hardayal’s aggressive rebellion is Dinu’s suppressed protest against imperialism. Dinu’s compassionate concern for Burma is not fired by rebellion and he leads a subdued life in post-coup Rangoon under the stern shadow of the *junta*. But while the rest of the characters, either aggressively or submissively, have found and followed their calling, Arjun comes out as an emotionally distraught, confounded individual who is caught between two worlds belonging to neither.

This quest for identity and origin, a predicament peculiar to colonized individuals is discussed by Ghosh to bring out the alienation and loss of a sense of belonging of the natives. Rajkumar lives the life of a near destitute in Uma’s Calcutta home and for all his wanderings, dies with the conviction that the “Ganges could never be the same as the Irrawaddy” (544). While barriers and boundaries seem to define the psyches that attend the making of nations and nationalities in *The Glass Place*, the author seems to collapse these margins and is metaphorically at home, everywhere. Menakshi Mukherjee in her essay on *The Anxiety of Indianness* comments:



“For Ghosh as in some of the best Indian language writers, words like ‘Marginality’ and ‘hybridity’ seem quite irrelevant and segmenting the worlds into third and first regions is a rather absurd activity.”<sup>6</sup>

The post colonial by virtue of his displaced and mobile location is free of gender, class and political affiliations as he moves unhindered in his journey across the spaces of worlds and cultures. Ghosh in spite of the vast peregrinations, writes with a sense of personal connect with India’s colonial history. The work is considerably enriched by autobiographical elements like his class family affiliations with the Indian freedom struggle and his participation in General Slim’s Burmese expeditions. Even his imagined characters show an acute consciousness of colonial history and genealogy. Rakhee Morol throws light on this aspect of Ghosh’s work:

“If *The Glass Palace* is a rather loose, sprawling *Bildungsroman* constructed around the life of Rajkumar Raha in Burma, Malaysia and India, it is also on a more subterranean level the acknowledgement of those changing parameters from the history of colonial India through the post independent nationhood that determines the personal and psychological identities of the author himself.”<sup>7</sup>

Ghosh comes out as an amalgam of a post-colonial whose sense of time and history is inseparable from the long years of dominion and the multi-national, multicultural hybrid who identifies effortlessly with the world of the colonizer. Ghosh here gives in to the desire to yield to the world and address it without a consciousness of the burden of the past hundred years.

The freedom to express and indicate that fiction affords, makes it the first choice as genre by any post colonial writer. A writer of histories, Ghosh finds addresses for his protagonists lost in history, through the metier of fiction.

Fiction as a genre essentially involves a plot and a story, which makes history more comprehensible. The genre of novel is especially suited to bring substance to the empty frames of colonial subjects. Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments on the proliferation of characters in *The Glass Palace*:

“That is why I cannot think of a clutch of sentences which better describe this massive 547-page book than these: ‘He has a small photo studio. Does wedding – pictures, group photographs - that sort of thing’”(502).

Ghosh's subject of concern in this novel is Burma, but we can easily imagine or rather see him portraying refugees from any nation or culture in the same manner. All his works of fiction especially *The Shadow Lines* and *In an Antique Land* bear testimony to this. Ghosh's melding of fiction with other genres like travelogue, anthropological research thesis and the historians'

books, is a prominent characteristic of the postcolonial novel today. Post-colonial works especially those of Amitav Ghosh are marked by a mobility, an ability to shift perspective and move between genres and cultures crossing over boundaries. Rukmini Bhaya Nair goes to the extent of making it the reason of their feeling at home in the world:

"For the only way to make one's presence felt on a world stage, be visible and at home in the world, ironically, is to hark back, preferably in English, to a forgotten history in which the colonizer participated as vigorously as the colonized.

Ghosh's main protagonist in *The Glass Palace* is suffering from the same dilemma. He is a boundary crosser who goes beyond well defined lines of nations and family history to find a home for himself in an alien land. He confesses to Dolly:

"My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you're here too. There are people who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. But this is not something that is owed to us"(TGP,p.310).

The post colonial dilemma of exile is evident when the king ponders over his fate on his way to exile in India:

"The king raised his eyes and spotted several Indian faces along the waterfront. What vast, what incomprehensible power to move people in such numbers from one place to another: emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another to pull rickshaws, to sit behind in exile?" (50).

This displacement and movement on an epic scale leads us to another major concern of Ghosh in most of his fictional and even non-fictional works, which is the blurring and a subsequent obliteration of borders whether geographical, cultural, racial or even psychological.

Colonialism in itself inculcates movement and displacement: troops marching, administration changing, large scale transfer of masses and redefining of political boundaries. Any attempt at depiction of colonialism involves a delineation of what Rukmini Bhaya Nair terms as the existential dilemma – where the turmoiled individual is partitioned not just physically but psychologically as well.

Rajkumar manifests these transitions across frontiers in his life having been left homeless and destitute in childhood. He is a survivor of the circumstances created by colonialism where a weaker individual would have succumbed. As has already been discussed Hardayal and other Indians in the British army, begin to question borders that no one had dared question, which during Japanese invasion seem arbitrary and inconsequential.

The insignificance of these divisions is seen when the narrator informs us;

“...when Singapore fell, there were some fifty five thousand Indian troops on the island. Of these more than half joined the Indian National Army” (TGP, p.520).

The interior evolution of Dolly is quite significant in the novel. When her son Dinu was recovering in the hospital, Dolly became introspective and grieved with other mothers keening over their dead children.

“... She’d found herself listening to voices that were inaudible during the day: the murmurs of anxious relatives; distant screams of pain, women keening in bereavement. It was as though the walls turned porous in the stillness of the night, flooding her room with an unseen tide of defeat and suffering... She’d begun to cry – it was as though her voice had merged with that of the unknown woman: as though an invisible link had arisen between all of them – her, Dinu, the dead child, his mother” (210).

Her empathy dissolves all mental barriers and joins her with the other women in grief. The genre of fiction being the most flexible and eloquent is perfectly suited for the expression of displacement and rootlessness. Amitav Ghosh himself opines:

“This then is the peculiar paradox of the novel, those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a ‘sense of place’ that makes their fictional representation possible.”<sup>12</sup>

Ghosh essentially a writer of histories chose the metier of fiction over history. He defends the use of fiction in an interview:

“I think fiction has always played that part. If you look at Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*... I think the difference between the history historians write and the history fiction writers write is that fiction writers write about the human history. It’s about finding the human predicament; it’s about finding what happens to individuals, characters. I mean that’s what fiction is... exploring both dimensions, whereas history, the kind of history, exploring causes, causality is of no interest to me.”

If, as implied by Ghosh, we accept the genre of fiction as a humane history, we would find in all of Ghosh’s work just such a humane historian whose sole idea is to present history as it really was, but mellowed down by feelings and emotions

The notions of migrancy, hybridity and diaspora, are mingled in a cyclical pattern of history. This peculiar historical style was introduced by Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* and with *The Glass Palace* he once again reverts to it. But this time it is on a larger canvas, the stories are intimate, personal and yet bear a larger significance. The fictional lives of Rajkumar and Dolly, Saya John, Ma Cho, Uma, Dinu, Neel and Manju, Arjun and Kishan Singh are merged with historical and political figures like the last of the Burmese royalty and Aung San Suu Kyi. Rajkumar’s grand daughter Jaya is an art historian who ties up the loose ends of the novel. Although the royal family provides the backdrop for the novel still it is a story of common man and even subalterns. The diasporic condition is portrayed by Ghosh through the central dilemma of the novel which is the conflict in loyalty that the Indian soldier in the British Indian Army suffers. It’s a very painful dilemma that pits unequal forces together and makes one choose.

A shared historical predicament goes a long way to bridge the gap between people of diverse national and cultural backgrounds and *The Glass Palace* is a perfect embodiment of first such historical citation. To quote Rakhee Moral:

“This crisscross of history with narrative fuelled by the author’s own remembered images and fabulations of people trapped in the machinations of time serve to bridge the widening psychological gap between nations and geographies. Ghosh’s account of colonial conflict and his rendering of time past allow sufficient distance, as it were, in which to reconsider some of the issues that racked South Asian history more objectively.”

The novel is a unique amalgam of history, fiction and travelogue which blends personal and historical elements into a perfect literary accompaniment. Ghosh himself says. “It’s coming together of many themes of my earlier novels. Writing this novel was like fighting a war.” He further says that he attempts “to humanise history to make it a part of the existential grammar of the living.

The middle part of the novel incorporates too much of history especially the parts where the British Indian army fighting against the Japanese in Malaysia during the Second World War is shown. The clash of loyalties is brought forward through Uma Dey’s nephew Arjun Roy, his batman Kishan Singh and, Hardayal Singh – his fellow officer in 1/1 Jat Light Infantry. Some students and congress leaders ask Arjun:

“From whom are you defending us? From ourselves? From other Indians? It’s your masters from whom the country needs to be defended” (288).

Like Beni Prasad Dey, Arjun Roy was also proud of the empire. He was proud to be associated with a regiment that had received medals such as the Victoria Cross from the Somme, two military crosses for putting down the Arab rebellion in Mesopotamia. The inclusion of these details shows Ghosh the historian researcher at work. Arjun writes to his twin sister Manju

“...what makes me prouder still is the thought that Hardy and I are going to be the first Indian Officers in the 1/1 Jat: It seems like such a huge responsibility – as though we’re representing the whole of the country!” (262)

The subsequent resistance to imperialism can be seen as a separate theme or a part of the research work of Ghosh the historian. Ghosh confesses in *The Anglophone Empire* (2003):

“I am Indian and my history has been shaped as much by the institutions of this empire as a long tradition of struggle against them.”<sup>20</sup>

Besides India, Ghosh also portrays the resistance to military dictatorial rule in the post-colonial Burma, through some student activities, arguments about the atrocities of dictators like Hitler and Mussolini in Dinu’s photo studio called ‘The Glass Palace’ in Rangoon. Apart from this the focus is on the experience of Indian Diaspora in South East Asia. But the blurring of lines is visible not just through colonial displacements but even the colonized – colonizer binary is under scanner. Rajkumar is a struggling victim of colonization from Bengal, but he becomes a colonizer in Burma by transporting indentured labourers from South India to other parts of the

colonial world. He becomes a victimiser when he sexually exploits woman workers on his plantations. Rajkumar, Saya John and Matthew are engaged in the task of colonizing land and people for the sake of money.

Rajkumar's personal history is entwined with the colonial history in order to destroy and create new histories in many South Asian cities. In the end he takes refuge in Calcutta away from Burma and not identifying with India. To quote Meenakshi Mukherjee: "Human lives spill over national boundaries, refusing to stay contained in neat compartments. A person is remembered not as Burmese, Indian, Chinese, Malaya or American."<sup>22</sup> But far from celebrating this multicultural identity, Ghosh expresses despair over the diasporic condition of the characters. Throughout the novel, the empire expands and then retreats, fortunes are won and lost. Namrata Mahanta opines, "the novel sees Amitav Ghosh's recurrent concern with nationalism: boundaries and statehood transform into multi-levelled dilemmas."

The novel is a cultural fair in that it delves deep into history and crosses all borders of nation, races, cultures in his portrayal of characters. He describes the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of people in India, Burma, China, Malaysia and America such as King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, Saya John, Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, Alison, Dinu, Neel, Arjun, Hardayal, Kishan Singh, Jaya and Bongo. But though in exile the various characters and their families strewn around the world are; some naturally and some painstakingly brought together. *The Glass Palace* is "...symbolic of exiles coming together, as it were of families meeting out of a shared compulsion across disputed and dispossessed territories.

*The Glass Palace* based on diligent research work and an erudite creative mind behind it, comes out as a lovable piece of historical fiction. It naturally invites comparison with established historical romances, even though Ghosh's thematic concerns are much wider in scope. Rukmini Bhaya Nair compares the novel to Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and comments on the phrases where Ghosh describes Dolly's and Aung San Suu Kyi's beauty as being 'beyond belief', 'beyond imagination'. According to her it is, "tackling history within the boundaries of contemporary fiction, that duty to create an imaginative grace out of the relatively recent memories of an embittered history of disgrace which I have suggested marks the teleology of the post-colonial

novel.”<sup>26</sup> But it would be unjust to make comparisons based on a bird’s eye view of the two works. While *Ivanhoe* was first a representation of Europe’s popular history; Ghosh according to Rukmini Bhaya Nair, painstakingly does research work himself and his historical research is combined with the spirit of postcolonialism and even his anthropological training.

Ghosh’s immense scholarship and talent combined with the maturity attained by contemporary novel result in a work rich in historical detail, and entertaining at the same time. Rukmini Bhaya Nair gives due credit to Ghosh’s scholarly and effortless approach: “Some post-colonial authors achieve this through exuberant wordplay or fantasy – one need hardly mention Marquez or Rushdie’s ‘magic’ approach to ‘real’ history. But Ghosh cannot be accused of stylistic excess or of pandering to a sheer love of language; he is one of the few authors I know who does not balk at using words like ‘governance’ in a novel!”<sup>28</sup> Ghosh is committed to researching and presenting stark faces of history and displacement therein... so he needs to balance the resultant starkness with some sublime aspects and these he seeks in the perfect human beauty of Dolly and Suu Kyi; the new and fresh beginnings after great upheavals like the resettlement of Burmese royal family in Ratnagiri, Saya John and Matthew’s creation of the beautiful ‘Morningside’ plantation in Malaysia and numerous coincidences which we come across during the course of this epic.

Coincidence is the *deus ex-machina* sometimes reverted to, by Ghosh the historical researcher, not just to tie loose ends together, but also to add a little pulchritude to an apparently drab historical research treatise. When Ghosh makes Neel, Rajkumar’s son meet Manju, Uma’s niece, there is a dire need in the novel to bring together the vast networks of families strewn across the South Asian countries under scanner. So Neel and Manju meet by chance in a small studio, fall in love and marriage follows bringing the families of two best friends, Dolly and Uma together. Another coincidence comes up when Arjun’s unit is posted in Malaysia very close to Morningside plantation and he encounters not just Alison but even Dolly and Rajkumar’s younger son Dinu. Their lives come together with Arjun and Alison’s brief affair in contrast to Dinu and Alison’s more lasting relationship. Subsequently, when after Arjun had joined the rebels of the Indian National Army and has been wandering in forests for days in a pathetically emaciated condition, he comes across Dinu who has been asked by the villagers to talk to Indian soldiers because of his Indian connections. Although the coincidences are too unexpected and voluntary, yet Ghosh’s dexterous approach to history and weaving an epic story into it, makes

the reader forget his doubts or voluntarily make a 'willing suspension of disbelief' for a wholesome, entertaining work.

*The Glass Palace* can be listed among wonderful epic family sagas which bear the tag of post-colonial historical treatise involving a lot of travel across boundaries, but which differs vastly from travelogues written by authors of other countries. The traveller here is one among the sufferers, belonging to the place, and empathetic with them.

When we peruse Ghosh's rich literary harvest we realize the various literary genres he melds to create a fictional work. *In An Antique Land* (part fiction, part autobiography, anthropological research work and sociological history of Egypt) and travelogues like *Dancing in Cambodia At Large in Burma* are perfect illustrations besides other significant works. This melding of genres for a work that defies nomenclature is another way of expressing his major concern which is the obliteration of all concrete and abstract divisions.

Ghosh carries his love for forging connections a little too far when he brings together Uma – Rajkumar in a quite anaesthetic manner at the end of the novel. But despite these stray discordant incidents, the novel is a wholesome treat for those who seek scholarship as well as those who seek melodramatic family sagas. Despite the comprehensive themes, bulk of research matter and a proliferation of characters, the novel is quite well conceived and well plotted. Neatly divided into seven parts, each named after the place or event of highest significance, the novel renders order to a project of epic proportions. The parts or chapters are entitled as follows in sequence 'Mandalay', 'Ratnagiri', 'The Money Tree', 'The Wedding', 'Morningside', 'The Front' and 'The Glass Palace'. The novel is well rounded with its beginning and end, both involving 'the glass palace' although of different implications. It begins with an allusion to the hall full of mirrors in the Royal Palace in Mandalay and culminates in a small photo-studio of the same name run by an aged Dinu, in Rangoon, where revolutionary ideas take birth every day.

Ghosh is a worthy writer not a scintillating one, and his *The Glass Palace* is important not because it opens new stylistic or thematic doors, but because it reopens old ones so effectively. Burma at the present time, is near inaccessible territory; yet Ghosh's book manages to hold up before a global community of readers a historically authentic "golden" Burma as it was and could be again. At a time of millennial doom, when we are having to radically reconfigure our



dimly remembered pasts in order to understand their effects on our chaotically disturbed present, that is, the novel's signal post-colonial virtue-elephants, teak, pagodas and all.

In the novel, *The Glass Palace*, one can examine the truths of individuals in history more completely in fiction than one can through mere knowledge of historical facts. While the *Shadow Lines* is set up against the backdrop of historical events like Swadeshi movement, Second World War, Partition of India and Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta, *The Glass Palace* is set in Burma, India, and Malay, spanning through a century, from the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, through the Second World War to modern times.

#### **4 Summary of the Novel:**

*The Glass Palace* is a Brilliant and impassioned, masterly novel by Amitav Ghosh, the gifted novelist Peter Matthiessen has called "*an exceptional writer*". This superb story of love and war begins with the shattering of the kingdom of Burma and the igniting of a great and passionate love, and it goes on to tell the story of a people, a fortune, and a family and its fate.

*The Glass Palace* tells of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. During the British invasion of 1885, when soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, the woman whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her. *The Glass Palace* tells of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. During the British invasion of 1885, when soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, the woman whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her. In *The Shadow Lines*, it is the grandmother's (or Thamma's) quest to find her Jethamoshay which takes her to Dhaka, post which follows the chaos of 1963-64 Bangladesh riots and the tale of 'final redemptive mystery'. Both the books, exploit the theme of travel and discovery in a background of social and political violence.

Memory could almost be considered a character unto itself in both of Ghosh's novel. For instance, Rajkumar's life is utterly driven and shaped by his one, striking, boyhood memory of Dolly in the plundered Glass Palace during the invasion of Burma. Similarly, the can-be-called

hero of *The Shadow Lines* named Tridib gives the narrator 'worlds to travel in' so much so that he is well-versed in the geographical detail of places that he had never visited before. To him, Colombo, Cuzco, Cairo or Madrid are familiar and household names of places that had, through Tridib's stories, come to be invested with a rare, uncontroversial reality, only through the space of memory.

Ghosh constructs several unique, remarkable, and strong female characters in *The Glass Palace*: Dolly, Uma, Queen Supayalat, even the First Princess, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Each of these women tells us something different and important about the time and place in which she was living. eg. Uma is a particularly interesting character, as she illuminates one of the ideas central to Ghosh's novel. When we first encounter her, she is constantly worried about being the proper memsahib, following traditional domestic etiquette, and living up to the standards of her husband, the Collector. She soon realized, however, that her husband's dream was not in accordance with the rules of Indian custom, he longed "to live with a woman as an equal in spirit and intellect," and she could never, according to custom, fulfil those expectations. We see a monumental change in her disposition when she returns to India from New York.

The backdrop of the novel is set in Burma during the British invasion of 1885, this masterly novel by Amitav Ghosh tells the story of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who goes on to create an empire in the Burmese teak forest.

When soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, a young woman in the court of the Burmese Queen, whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her.

The struggles that have made Burma, India, and Malaya the places they are today are illuminated in this wonderful novel by the writer Chitra Divakaruni calls "a master storyteller."

## **5 Characters in the novel:**

### **Rajkumar:**

Rajkumar, initially a subaltern comes out as a true transnational post-colonial subject firstly by being a *Kalaa*, a foreigner in an alien territory, then by being subjected to colonization of a more severe kind in participating in the great national upheaval that the British occupation of Burma entails, followed by another turbulent experience in imperial India and his foray into the Malayan forest resources. He inhabits a truly borderless post-colonial space beyond the interstices of race, class and nation in which his life is enmeshed. The hybrid nature of the colonized-subaltern who evolves himself into an affluent businessman and comes to resemble the colonizer is revealed through the character of Rajkumar, who graduates from a petty immigrant lad, through his apprenticeship as a *luga lei* under Saya John, to a merchant who is revered in the timber trading circles of Burma. Saya John, his mentor, is another transnational from China who evolves himself into a semblance of Europeans in his garb and manner. Saya John instructs Rajkumar in the life of young Europeans who taught them how “to bend the work of nature to your will” (TGP, p.75). Saya John’s conception that the whole enterprise of logging timber from the forests could not have been possible without the Europeans’ ingenuity; Saya’s knowledge of this and his imitation of the white Sahib’s lifestyle, involves a compromise between the complete separation from the empire and complete dependence upon the empire for its existence. It was Rajkumar who had witnessed the booming of English cannons and British invasion of Burmese Royal Palace in Mandalay which is described in the following way:

“English soldiers were marching towards the city... Panic struck the market. People began to run and jostle. Rajkumar managed to push his way through the crowd... He could not see far: a cloud of dust hung over the road, drummed up by thousands of racing feet... Rajkumar was swept along in the direction of the river. As he ran, he became aware of a ripple in the ground beneath him, a kind of drumbeat in the earth, a rhythmic tremor that travelled up his spine through the soles of his feet. The people in front of him scattered and parted... Suddenly he was in the front rank of the crowd, looking directly at two English soldiers mounted on horses (27).

### **Beni Prasad De:**

Beni Prasad Dey is the ICS officer appointed in Ratnagiri where the Burmese royals are held captive are worth a mention here. “It was a ritual with Saya John, a kind of superstition, always to start these journeys in European clothes: a sola topee, leather boots, khaki trousers” (67).

Collector Dey was slim and aquiline with a nose that extended in a sharp beak – like point. He dressed in finely cut Savile Row suits and wore gold-rimmed eyeglasses. Ghosh's allusion to Dey's behaviour, his defence of imperial power before the Burmese King, and his tongue-in-cheek reference to the British as *amader gurujon* (our teacher) brings out the sense of compromise with which such acts of complicity and mimicry are attended in the colonized space.

Dolly:

The royal maid Dolly too shares her predicament with Rajkumar. She feels the same incomprehensible loyalty to the royal family's deportment to India. She began to notice odd little changes around her, of the servants' impudence, their refusal to *shiko* and her own ambivalent position. She was free, she was told for she was a slave not a prisoner, but in her heart she knew she was bound with the princesses, who she had been enslaved to look after. Dolly represents the twice colonized victim of the breaking of a nation. She embodies the quiet and subliminal aggression of dislocated subjects. Dolly's most haunting concern is that Burma the place of her birth is lost to her forever. Her displacement from her roots and her discomfort with her changed identity is clear when she confides her predicament to Uma, the collector's wife

"If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me a *Kalaa* like they do Indians – a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea. I'd find that very hard I think. I'd never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I knew what it was like when we left"(113).

Dolly however, bears the burden of slavery also at the hands of the Burmese royalty. However, both are very quick to acknowledge their respective status and any colonial prejudices, either may harbour.

The interior evolution of Dolly is quite significant in the novel. When her son Dinu was recovering in the hospital, Dolly became introspective and grieved with other mothers keening over their dead children.

“... She’d found herself listening to voices that were inaudible during the day: the murmurs of anxious relatives; distant screams of pain, women keening in bereavement. It was as though the walls turned porous in the stillness of the night, flooding her room with an unseen tide of defeat and suffering... She’d begun to cry – it was as though her voice had merged with that of the unknown woman: as though an invisible link had arisen between all of them – her, Dinu, the dead child, his mother” (210)

She is the only one character whose entire generation is mentioned in the novel. She strives hard to live up to her family to maintain the good name the family has earned in the community. Dolly is the heroine of the novel. In this novel she is introduced from childhood. Dolly a nine-year-old girl who looks after the younger princess. Gradually from a child she grows into an attractive young girl. A local man named Sawant takes charge of the servants. Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant. Then she attains mental and physical maturity. Uma her friend coaxes her to marry Rajkumar.

Dolly gives birth to Neel and Dinu. Dolly nurses Dinu perceiving her role as a mother more important than that of a wife. But the suffering changed her attitude and she feels, “I couldn’t go back to the life I’d led before” (239). A feeling of emptiness spreads. When her elder son Neel dies. But she gracefully accepts the pain and suffering. A visit to the Buddhist nunnery reveals her strong desire for renunciation. She proves her indomitable spirit and strength of convictions in entering the monastery and withdrawing from the world. Her weakness is her source of strength. She stands for courage, honour, hope, compassion and sacrifice. Her spirit lifts other characters. Dolly, as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother shows that women can fulfill herself in a loving relationship with others. Her way of life reveals her affection towards her family.

Uma:

Uma, like most of Ghosh’s other characters is a citizen of the world away from delimiting boundaries. Her sojourns to Europe and America after her husband’s demise lead her to the Indian Nationalist movement and she subsequently brings her struggle to the subcontinent. The hybridity and adaptability of characters like Rajkumar and Uma robs exile of its derogatory connotations like oppression and significantly mellows the colonized-colonizer binary. Another

theme which forms an inseparable part of a post-colonial narrative is the resistance to and struggle against imperialism. Apart from depiction of nationalism through the character of Uma, is the evocative presentation of another more difficult and more consequential struggle of the Indian officers and soldiers serving in the British army. Uma's nephew Arjun is immensely proud to be among the privileged few who are able to enter the class of the rulers.

She is a woman with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs, patterns and religious conditions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to realize their true beauty and power. After her husband's death, she becomes a leader of the movement to free India. Uma Dey is the first truly modern individual in Ghosh's narrative. Uma Dey's character can be interpreted by socialist feminism. She seeks to change social structures by redefining how women's work is rewarded and valued. She attempts to transform relationships between women and men and among workers.

Amitav Ghosh introduced Uma Dey from the second part of the novel. She plays a vital role in giving shape to the novel. Her original name was Uma Debi but after her marriage it changed to Uma Dey. Uma's family home is in Calcutta. Her house was named as Lankasuka. One of her aunts introduces Beni Prasad Dey to her family. Uma's marriage to him was as unlike as any other. The Governor and many English civil servants and army officers attended her marriage. In 1905, the nineteenth year of the King's exile, a new District Collector arrived in Ratnagiri. The Collector's name was Beni Prasad Dey. His wife was Uma Dey. She was fifteen years junior to him. She is very attractive and charming. She was a tall and vigorous looking woman with thick, curly hair. Uma Dey wears sari in a new way with odds and ends borrowed from European costume. Here it clearly depicts how Uma Dey differs from other women in Ratnagiri. Because of this she got comments from Queen Supalayati:

The Queen had seen many Collectors come and go, Indian and English; she thought of them as her enemies and gaolers, upstarts to be held in scant regard. But in this instance she was intrigued. „I hope „ll bring his wife when he comes to call. It'll be interesting to see how this kind of sari is worn“ (105).

Arjun:

Arjun is nephew of immensely proud to be among the privileged few who are able to enter the class of the rulers. It is Hardayal Singh, his peer and a third generation army officer, who makes Arjun conscious about the Britishers' prejudice, distrust and suspicion of Indian officers as well as soldiers. When their long awaited mobilisation orders came, Hardayal remembered the inscription in Chetwode Hall at the Military Academy in Dehradun and expresses scepticism at the idea of 'country':

"Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country, so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time?" (330).

Though Hardayal had realized this ironical situation quite early in life; Arjun is shocked into admitting it after a few setbacks. When Arjun's battalion arrives in Singapore on its way up the Malay peninsula, he has the sort of experience that another of his fellow officers had predicted:

"It's strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself; who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself ? ... This is what I ask myself Arjun: In what way do I become human again? How do I connect what I do with what I want in my heart?" (406)

When Arjun sees Kishan Singh and other soldiers of his company reading the pamphlet, he asks them to be disposed off and warns the soldiers of dire consequences if any of them is found with a pamphlet. Contrary to the firm resolve of Hardayal, Arjun is torn between sympathy revulsion and fear.

Arjun Roy was also proud of the empire. He was proud to be associated with a regiment that had received medals such as the Victoria Cross from the Somme, two military crosses for putting down the Arab rebellion in Mesopotamia. The inclusion of these details shows Ghosh the historian researcher at work. Arjun writes to his twin sister Manju,

"...what makes me prouder still is the thought that Hardy and I are going to be the first Indian Officers in the 1/1 Jat: It seems like such a huge responsibility – as though we're representing the whole of the country!" (262)

## **Queen Supalayay**

Queen Supalayay was attracted by Uma Dey's way of dressing. The Queen had seen many Collectors in Ratnagiri. But she was never disturbed like this before. She was very eager to invite Beni Prasad Dey to her Outram House. So that she can once again see the way of dressing of Uma Dey. Here importance is given more to Uma Dey than her husband. This depicts the power of woman in the novel.

## **Analysis of the Novel:**

This is a novel where there was only one person in the food-stall who knew exactly what that sound was that was rolling in across the plain, along the silver curve of the Irrawaddy, to the western wall of Mandalay's fort. His name was Rajkumar and he was an Indian, a boy of eleven — not an authority to be relied upon.

The noise was unfamiliar and unsettling, a distant booming followed by low, stuttering growls. At times it was like the snapping of dry twigs, sudden and unexpected. And then, abruptly, it would change to a deep rumble, shaking the food-stall and rattling its steaming pot of soup. The stall had only two benches, and they were both packed with people, sitting pressed up against each other. It was cold, the start of central Burma's brief but chilly winter, and the sun had not risen high enough yet to burn off the damp mist that had drifted in at dawn from the river. When the first booms reached the stall there was a silence, followed by a flurry of questions and whispered answers. People looked around in bewilderment: What is it? Ba le? What can it be? And then Rajkumar's sharp, excited voice cut through the buzz of speculation. "English cannon," he said in his fluent but heavily accented Burmese. "They're shooting somewhere up the river. Heading in this direction."

Frowns appeared on some customers' faces as they noted that it was the serving-boy who had spoken and that he was a kalaa from across the sea — an Indian, with teeth as white as his eyes and skin the color of polished hardwood. He was standing in the center of the stall, holding a pile of chipped ceramic bowls. He was grinning a little sheepishly, as though embarrassed to parade his precocious knowingness.



His name meant Prince, but he was anything but princely in appearance, with his oil-splashed vest, his untidily knotted longyi and his bare feet with their thick slippers of callused skin. When people asked how old he was he said fifteen, or sometimes eighteen or nineteen, for it gave him a sense of strength and power to be able to exaggerate so wildly, to pass himself off as grown and strong, in body and judgment, when he was, in fact, not much more than a child. But he could have said he was twenty and people would still have believed him, for he was a big, burly boy, taller and broader in the shoulder than many men. And because he was very dark it was hard to tell that his chin was as smooth as the palms of his hands, innocent of all but the faintest trace of fuzz.

It was chance alone that was responsible for Rajkumar's presence in Mandalay that November morning. His boat — the sampan on which he worked as a helper and errand-boy — had been found to need repairs after sailing up the Irrawaddy from the Bay of Bengal. The boatowner had taken fright on being told that the work might take as long as a month, possibly even longer. He couldn't afford to feed his crew that long, he'd decided: some of them would have to find other jobs. Rajkumar was told to walk to the city, a couple of miles inland. At a bazaar, opposite the west wall of the fort, he was to ask for a woman called Ma Cho. She was half-Indian and she ran a small food-stall; she might have some work for him.

And so it happened that at the age of eleven, walking into the city of Mandalay, Rajkumar saw, for the first time, a straight road. By the sides of the road there were bamboo-walled shacks and palm-thatched shanties, pats of dung and piles of refuse. But the straight course of the road's journey was unsmudged by the clutter that flanked it: it was like a causeway cutting across a choppy sea. Its lines led the eye right through the city, past the bright red walls of the fort to the distant pagodas of Mandalay Hill, shining like a string of white bells upon the slope.

For his age, Rajkumar was well travelled. The boat he worked on was a coastal craft that generally kept to open waters, plying the long length of shore that joined Burma to Bengal. Rajkumar had been to Chittagong and Bassein and any number of towns and villages in between. But in all his travels he had never come across thoroughfares like those in Mandalay. He was

accustomed to lanes and alleys that curled endlessly around themselves so that you could never see beyond the next curve. Here was something new: a road that followed a straight, unvarying course, bringing the horizon right into the middle of habitation.

When the fort's full immensity revealed itself, Rajkumar came to a halt in the middle of the road. The citadel was a miracle to behold, with its mile-long walls and its immense moat. The crenellated ramparts were almost three storeys high, but of a soaring lightness, red in color, and topped by ornamented gateways with seven-tiered roofs. Long straight roads radiated outwards from the walls, forming a neat geometrical grid. So intriguing was the ordered pattern of these streets that Rajkumar wandered far afield, exploring. It was almost dark by the time he remembered why he'd been sent to the city. He made his way back to the fort's western wall and asked for Ma Cho. "Ma Cho?" "She has a stall where she sells food — baya-gyaw and other things. She's half Indian." "Ah, Ma Cho." It made sense that this ragged-looking Indian boy was looking for Ma Cho: she often had Indian strays working at her stall. "There she is, the thin one."

Ma Cho was small and harried-looking, with spirals of wiry hair hanging over her forehead, like a fringed awning. She was in her mid-thirties, more Burmese than Indian in appearance. She was busy frying vegetables, squinting at the smoking oil from the shelter of an upthrust arm. She glared at Rajkumar suspiciously. "What do you want?"

He had just begun to explain about the boat and the repairs and wanting a job for a few weeks when she interrupted him. She began to shout at the top of her voice, with her eyes closed: "What do you think — I have jobs under my armpits, to pluck out and hand to you? Last week a boy ran away with two of my pots. Who's to tell me you won't do the same?" And so on. Rajkumar understood that this outburst was not aimed directly at him: that it had more to do with the dust, the splattering oil, and the price of vegetables than with his own presence or with anything he had said. He lowered his eyes and stood there stoically, kicking the dust until she was done.

She paused, panting, and looked him over. "Who are your parents?" she said at last, wiping her streaming forehead on the sleeve of her sweat-stained aingyi. "I don't have any. They died."

The Glass Palace is an important book. Its importance begins with the subject matter - a 100 year span of history that unfolds in India, Malaya (now Malaysia) and Burma (now Myanmar), all countries that most Americans, myself included, know precious little about. The book addresses the circumstances of colonialism in the region across 3 generations, originating with four people whose lives are bound together as much by politics as by dint of love or geographic proximity.

The story is manipulated to provide the reader with a lesson in political history that, regardless of agreement or lack thereof, is not easily forgotten. The characters are often under-developed, functioning more as symbols and historical levers than as representations of whole people. Their role as symbols is made most evident by the fact that, were it not for British rule in India, starting in 1858, the British take-over of Burma 27 years later, and the subsequent exile of the Burmese royal family, these characters would never, in fact would never have been allowed to, have met under intimate circumstances.

The plot unfolds to the beat of history, carrying the reader through two world wars, and the independence movement that eventually forces the British out of the region. It ends in contemporary Myanmar amidst the struggle between a growing pro-democracy movement and the notoriously repressive military government that has ruled the country since the military coup in 1962.

The sweep of history is breathtaking. In fact, history really is, by far, the leading character of the book. The story starts as feudalism falls, and takes us into the modern age as capitalism asserts itself and the region industrializes. The emergence of a critical perspective among the generations, and of a post-modern worldview as the book comes to a close, is intriguing. Each generation shifts in its understanding of its relationship to history and to the structures of inequality that rule their lives, asking ever evolving questions, either in word or deed, that beg profoundly different answers. And then, the final lesson, about the futility of revolutionary struggle as we've understood it from this historical period and the need for a more humane politic; about the failures and dangers of modernism and its obsession with structuralism and the reductive answers to complex problems of culture to which this obsession tends to lead, was, I

think, the most profound.

One doesn't often read contemporary fiction that addresses such lofty ideas. On the other hand, this was no literary stick in the mud. It was a very entertaining novel, but it read like an epic movie - more cinematic than literary. I found it a little like reading *Gone with the Wind* in Asia. At every turn one is presented with world-beating beauties in spectacularly beautiful settings rife with love, intrigue, betrayal, sex and the suggestion of it, and why not? If we all looked like the characters in Amitav Ghosh's *South Asia*, living as they do in settings of awe-inspiring beauty, we'd be hard pressed not to hang the political struggles in the closet along with our fashionable costumes and just roll around naked with each other all the time.

Suffice to say, the cinematic aspects of the novel are a bit gratuitous and distracting, not unlike most guilty pleasures. To have left out those details in favor of creating a more earthbound cast of characters might have led to greater artistic street cred. But then, one needs a bit of relief from all of the political science and philosophy in these pages, not to mention highly detailed accounts of elephant diseases and the teak trade (I write, I yawn).

What's between the pages is worthy of reading, but just as worthy of attention is the existence of the novel itself which is, I believe, a fascinating political and cultural artifact. Ghosh is a leader among a new generation of Indian writers who are products of a western-educated Indian middle class, indeed the new *sahibs* of India, that would not have existed under the British, but who would not be likely to exist today if not for the British. What must it mean to be an Indian writer in English criticizing the British colonization of India? Is the writer struggling with his status as one who is among those defining what the world regards as the first authentically Indian literary voice while speaking in a language acquired through a very English education?

Contemplating this question puts the novel in a whole new light. It is as much an expression of the (post) post-modern historical moment as it is an examination of the history leading to it. But then, to address a western audience, one must speak in terms the west understands. In a world defined as much by power inequality as by any other condition, this ability is often the product of privilege, always bestowed by the powerful to serve their own purposes. Making the concession

of speaking in the voice of the ruling class is presented to us as a necessary evil. Without it, how are problems created by the rulers to be resolved? Yet, when we concede, we cast a very western light upon ourselves, one whose glow tends to blind those who live in the shadows created on its periphery just as it distorts all that it illuminates but does not understand

## **6 Theme of the novel:**

Amitav Ghosh is one among the postmodernists. He is immensely influenced by the political and cultural milieu of post independent India. Being a social anthropologist and having the opportunity of visiting alien lands, he comments on the contemporary issues through in his novels. Cultural fragmentation, colonial and neo-colonial power structures, cultural degeneration, the materialistic offshoots of modern civilization, dying of human relationships, blending of facts and fantasy, search for love and security, diasporas, etc... are the major preoccupations in the writings of Amitav Ghosh.

### **Global Rather Than National**

The post-modernism elements are abundantly present in Amitav Ghosh's novels. As per postmodernists, national boundaries restrict human communication and Nationalism leads to wars. So, post-modernists speak in favour of globalization. Amitav Ghosh's novels focus on multiracial and multiethnic issues; as a wandering cosmopolitan he roves around and weaves them with his narrative beauty.

In *The Glass Palace*, the story of half-bred Raj-kumar revolves around Burma, Myanmar and India. He travels to many places freely and gains profit from his travels. Unexpectedly, his happiness ends when his son is killed by Japanese bomb blast. The reason for this calamity is fighting for national boundaries

### **Magical Realism – Weaving Fact and Fiction with Magical Realism**

Amitav Ghosh has successfully mastered over the genre called 'magical realism' which was largely developed in India by Salman Rushdie and in South America by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Ghosh belongs to, *"This international school of writing which successfully deals with the post-colonial ethos of the modern world without sacrificing the ancient histories of separate*

lands.” (Anita Desai, 1986:149) Like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh perfectly weaves fact and fiction with magical realism where he re-conceptualizes society and history. Amitav Ghosh is so scientific in the collection of data, semiotical in its organization and creative in the formation of fictionalized history.

### **Themes Dealing with Insecurity, Disorientation and Fragmentation**

Amitav Ghosh weaves his magical realistic plot with postmodern themes. Self-reflexes and confessions characterize the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh. Displacement is the central process in his fictional writings where departure and arrivals have a permanent symbolic relevance in his narrative structures. Post-modernism gives voice to insecurities, disorientation and fragmentation. Most of his novels deal with the insecurities in the existence of humanity, one of the postmodern traits.

### **Rejection of Western Values, Beliefs:**

Postmodernism rejects western values, beliefs, ideas, beliefs, culture and norms of the life. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh routes the debate on eco-environment and cultural issues through the intrusion of the West into East. *The Circle of Reason* is an allegorical novel about the destruction of traditional village life by the modernizing influx of western culture and the subsequent displacement of non-European people by imperialism. In *An Antique Land*, contemporary political tensions and communal rifts were portrayed artistically.

### **Postcolonial Migration**

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh uses nonlinear timeline through the memory that links the past to the present and many of the characters. The *Temporal distortion* helps to recreate a magical world.

## Critical Reception

*The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and *The Glass Palace* all received sharply mixed assessments from reviewers. Some critics argued that the narratives—particularly in Ghosh's first two novels—lacked unity and suffered from the presence of too many characters and distracting digressions. Nevertheless, Ghosh has received overwhelmingly positive reviews for his arresting language and original prose style. Several critics have commented on the similarities between Ghosh's narrative style and traditional Indian and Arabic folk tales. Ghosh's work has also been favorably compared to the work of fellow Indian expatriate writer Salman Rushdie. The critical response to his nonfiction work *In an Antique Land* has been largely positive. Commentators have found his anthropologic comparisons between twelfth- and twentieth-century Egyptians to be interesting, well-researched, and thought provoking. His descriptions of his social interactions with the Egyptian villagers have also been commended for their insight and wit. Critics have noted Ghosh's strong affinity for the people and places he writes about and have argued that his empathy adds a warm, almost protective personality to his work.

## 7 Questions and Answers:

### 7.1 Long questions and answers

q) Make an analysis of the post colonialism in the novel.

Ans. **The Glass Palace** is a saga about three generations of two closely linked families in Burma, India and Malaya from 1885 to 1956. It is also a historical novel about the British colonization of Burma. When imperialism divides and partitions set limits to freedom, the characters in the novel spill so easily over national and family boundaries through friendship and marriage that it becomes difficult to pinpoint a character's affiliation an exclusively Indian or Burmese or Chinese or Malay. This novel is more than merely a revisionary rewriting of a portion of the history of the British empire from the perspective of the colonized subaltern.

The novel opens with the Anglo-Burmese war of 1865. Two senior ministers of Burma, Kinwun Mingyi and Taingda Mingyi are too eager to keep the Royal family under guard because

they expected to get rich rewards from the English for handing over the royal couple king Thebaw and Queen Supayalat, along with their family. As the royal family prepares to surrender the looters, the Burmese public who earlier stood in fear now quickly move into the palace. Similarly, the British soldiers in charge of shifting the king's precious jewels and ornaments from the palace to the ship that was waiting to take the royal family into exile, also pilfer these things. Ghosh here strips the veils off human nature to reveal the crude and brutal greed that drives people at various levels.

In a single remarkable scene, unscrupulous greed is shown to be the animating force cutting across the financial status, racial differences, caste, creed individuals, groups and nations. The plunder of the opening scene transcends its literal significance to become a metaphor for the raw and naked greed of the colonizer and sets the tone of the novel.

The novel reveals how tactfully the British conquered countries and subjugated whole population exiling kings to erase them completely from public memory at home. The last of the Mughal King, Bahadur Shah Zafar, deportation to Rangoon, a generation ago, after killing the two princes right in front of the public, and the Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat's exile to Ratnagiri in India were such astute moves by the conquering Britain. Having forced the rulers into a life of obscurity, they freely plundered the Burmese natural resource, like the teak, ivory and petroleum.

At one extreme we have individuals like collector Beni Prasad Dey and at the other extreme, people like Uma. In between, there are individuals belonging to different degrees. The problem for these individuals is to come out of the shell of British influence and set through the hypocrisy of their master's intentions towards the colonized people.

Rajkumar's life-story is a story of the struggle for survival in the colonial turmoil. As a colonized subject from Bengal, he becomes a colonizer in Burma transporting indentured labourers from South India to other parts of the colonial world. He has even sexually exploited a woman worker on his plantations. His post colonial consciousness represents a conflict. Rajkumar, Saya John and Matthew are engaged in the task of colonizing land and people for the sake of wealth.



Ghosh writes about families and nations to highlight of sense of dislocation. He asks questions of national identity-cultural and political in right contexts.

2) What is the basic theme presented in The Glass Palace?

Ans. *The Glass Palace* can be listed among wonderful epic family sagas which bear the tag of post-colonial historical treatise involving a lot of travel across boundaries, but which differs vastly from travelogues written by authors of other countries. The traveller here is one among the sufferers, belonging to the place, and empathetic with them.

The post-modernism elements are abundantly present in Amitav Ghosh's novels. As per postmodernists, national boundaries restrict human communication and Nationalism leads to wars. So, post-modernists speak in favour of globalization. Amitav Ghosh's novels focus on multiracial and multiethnic issues; as a wandering cosmopolitan he roves around and weaves them with his narrative beauty

Amitav Ghosh has successfully mastered over the genre called 'magical realism' which was largely developed in India by Salman Rushdie and in South America by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Ghosh belongs to, "*This international school of writing which successfully deals with the post-colonial ethos of the modern world without sacrificing the ancient histories of separate lands.*" (Anita Desai, 1986:149) Like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh perfectly weaves fact and fiction with magical realism where he re-conceptualizes society and history. Amitav Ghosh is so scientific in the collection of data, semiotical in its organization and creative in the formation of fictionalized history.

Q) How has the writer examined the truths of individuals in the novel The Glass Palace?

Ans. Focusing mainly on the early 20th Century, it explores a broad range of issues, ranging from the changing economic landscape of Burma and India, to pertinent questions about what constitutes a nation and how these change as society is swept along by the tide of modernity. The first chunk of this large book has a number of strands, but the author tries to hold the reader's interest easily with the exotic locales and swift changes forced on them and the characters. History is part of the problem. Ghosh feels compelled to explain the events not just from the characters' point of view but also to provide a gloss for readers who are unlikely to know the

details. He tries a variety of approaches in providing this information, but they rarely fit smoothly in the rest of the story.

There is a similarity, vague, if not striking in the turning points of both the novels. It appears as a reader that both the books revolve around the theme of search.

*The Glass Palace* tells of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who creates an empire in the Burmese teak forest. During the British invasion of 1885, when soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, the woman whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her, and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her. In *The Shadow Lines*, it is the grandmother's (or Thamma's) quest to find her Jethamoshay which takes her to Dhaka, post which follows the chaos of 1963-64 Bangladesh riots and the tale of 'final redemptive mystery'. Both the books, exploit the theme of travel and discovery in a background of social and political violence.

Memory could almost be considered a character unto itself in both of Ghosh's novel. For instance, Rajkumar's life is utterly driven and shaped by his one, striking, boyhood memory of Dolly in the plundered Glass Palace during the invasion of Burma. Similarly, the can-be-called hero of *The Shadow Lines* named Tridib gives the narrator 'worlds to travel in' so much so that he is well-versed in the geographical detail of places that he had never visited before. To him, Colombo, Cuzco, Cairo or Madrid are familiar and household names of places that had, through Tridib's stories, come to be invested with a rare, uncontroversial reality, only through the space of memory.

Ghosh constructs several unique, remarkable, and strong female characters in *The Glass Palace*: Dolly, Uma, Queen Supayalat, even the First Princess, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Each of these women tells us something different and important about the time and place in which she was living. eg. Uma is a particularly interesting character, as she illuminates one of the ideas central to Ghosh's novel. When we first encounter her, she is constantly worried about being the proper memsahib, following traditional domestic etiquette, and living up to the standards of her husband, the Collector. She soon realized, however, that her husband's dream was not in accordance with the rules of Indian custom, he longed "to live with a woman as an

equal in spirit and intellect," and she could never, according to custom, fulfil those expectations. We see a monumental change in her disposition when she returns to India from New York. Similarly in *The Shadow Lines*, a brilliant fusion of contrasting women characters such as Thamma and Ila, or May Price (to name a few) exists and offer different opinions on the subject of freedom, travel, work, lifestyle etc.

Lastly, to leave something untouched, try and figure out the following - a) If you're in a mood for some literary criticism, it is a good idea to come to the exploration of both the books being 'post-colonial' in nature. b) Just for fun? Try and see how is the theme of photography used in both the books.

The books are slightly lengthy, but once Ghosh being a Social Anthropologist manifests detail and description that will make you want to travel to some of the mentioned places. Be rest assured that Ghosh's writings are circular in nature, which is to say that you may not see a typical linear pattern of telling a tale from the beginning till the end in terms of time, memory or space. There is a constant back and forth pattern scene, especially in an interview, Amitav Ghosh said of his work, *The Glass Palace*, "one can examine the truths of individuals in history definitely more completely in fiction than one can in history."

Make an analysis of the women characters in the novel

Amitav Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* explains how the three generations of women show their uniqueness among the men. The first generation women are Ma Cho, Dolly and Uma Dey. These women characters in the beginning are dependent upon men. But later they realized the type of life they are leading. Then these three characters began to depend upon their own strength. At last they prove that they are not inferior to men. These women show progress in both the family and the society. Through their achievement, subsequent two generations are able to rely on their own strength.

The women in the novel seek their liberation in several ways.

**As Life Givers**

Amitav Ghosh's fictions portray women as a life-giver. Both Dolly and Uma Dey contributed to the welfare of others in their lives.

An important incident that occurs early in the novel sets the tone of the women characters. The first female character introduced in the novel is Ma Cho. She stands as a preserver of cultural and spiritual essence. Her character gives the woman strength of leading life alone without a family.

### **Struggle Faced by Single Women**

The character of Ma Cho reveals the struggle of a single woman who suffers to maintain a status in life. Amitav Ghosh mentions the details of Ma Cho only in the first part of *The Glass Palace* novel. Moreover, Ma Cho being a woman shows that her strength is superior to men in the novel. Ma Cho is a half-Indian. She has no family, so she leads her life alone. She has her own small food-stall. The power of woman is depicted by her character in the novel. She was in her mid-thirties, more Burmese than Indian in appearance. Ma Cho leads her life very independently without depending on others. Even though she suffers from society's manacles, she never underestimates herself and leads an independent life.

Ma Cho's stall consisted of a couple of benches, sheltered beneath the stilts of a bamboowalled hut. She did her cooking sitting by an open fire, perched on a small stool (6).

This explains her gratitude towards her customers who visit her stall regularly. It mentions that she is very sincere towards her work. Here her strength is revealed. Even though she is alone, she is very strong in her attitude. In such conditions also she gives a job to Rajkumar. Rajkumar is an orphaned eleven year old boy. Here the feminism in her is shown towards Rajkumar as a caretaker.

### **Dolly in *The Glass Palace***

The central character in *The Glass Palace* novel is Dolly. She is the only one character whose entire generation is mentioned in the novel. She strives hard to live up to her family to maintain the good name the family has earned in the community.

Dolly is the heroine of the novel. In this novel she is introduced from childhood. Dolly a nine year

old girl who look after the younger princess. Gradually from a child she grows into an attractive young girl. A local man named Sawant takes charge of the servants. Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant. Then she attains mental and physical maturity. Uma her friend coaxes her to marry Rajkumar.

Dolly gives birth to Neel and Dinu. Dolly nurses Dinu perceiving her role as a mother more important than that of a wife. But the suffering changed her attitude and she feels, "I couldn't go back to the life I'd led before" (239). A feeling of emptiness spreads. When her elder son Neel dies. But she gracefully accepts the pain and suffering. A visit to the Buddhist nunnery reveals her strong desire for renunciation. She proves her indomitable spirit and strength of convictions in entering the monastery and withdrawing from the world. Her weakness is her source of strength. She stands for courage, honour, hope compassion and sacrifice. Her spirit lifts other characters. Dolly, as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother shows that women can fulfill herself in a loving relationship with others. Her way of life reveals her affection towards her family.

### **Uma Dey – A Truly Modern Individual**

Then, there is the case of Uma Dey, wife of Beni Prasad Dey. She is a woman with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs, patterns and religious conditions that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to realize their true beauty and power. After her husband's death, she becomes a leader of the movement to free India.

Uma Dey is the first truly modern individual in Ghosh's narrative. Uma Dey's character can be interpreted by socialist feminism. She seeks to change social structures by redefining how women's work is rewarded and valued. She attempts to transform relationships between women and men and among workers.

Amitav Ghosh introduced Uma Dey from the second part of the novel. She plays a vital role in giving shape to the novel. Her original name was Uma Debi but after her marriage it changed to Uma Dey. Uma's family home is in Calcutta. Her house was named as Lankasuka. One of her aunts introduces Beni Prasad Dey to her family. Uma's marriage to him was as unlike as any other. The Governor and many English civil servants and army officers attended her marriage. In 1905, the nineteenth year of the King's exile, a new District Collector arrived in Ratnagiri. The Collector's name was Beni Prasad Dey. His wife was Uma Dey. She was fifteen years junior to

him. She is very attractive and charming. She was a tall and vigorous looking woman with thick, curly hair. Uma Dey wears sari in a new way with odds and ends borrowed from European costume. Here it clearly depicts how Uma Dey differs from other women in Ratnagiri. Because of this she got comments from Queen Supalayat:

The Queen had seen many Collectors come and go, Indian and English; she thought of them as her enemies and gaolers, upstarts to be held in scant regard.

But in this instance she was intrigued. „I hope „ll bring his wife when he comes to call. It“ll be interesting to see how this kind of sari is worn“ (105).

### **Queen Supalayat and Uma Dey**

Queen Supalayat was attracted by Uma Dey“s way of dressing. The Queen had seen many Collectors in Ratnagiri. But she was never disturbed like this before. She was very eager to invite Beni Prasad Dey to her Outram House. So that she can once again see the way of dressing of Uma Dey. Here importance is given more to Uma Dey than her husband. This depicts the power of woman in the novel.

### **Women and Self-realization:**

Amitav Ghosh“s *The Glass Palace* from the beginning to the end revolves around the role played by women characters. Throughout this novel women continued their journey of self-realization.

Hence Amitav Ghosh successfully populates strong women in *The Glass Palace*.

Thus we can prove that women play central role in the novel.

Memory could almost be considered a character unto itself in Ghosh's novel. For instance, Rajkumar's life is utterly driven and shaped by his one, striking, boyhood memory of Dolly in the plundered Glass Palace during the invasion of Burma. How does memory play into the lives of Ghosh's other characters? Can you think of examples where memory compelled a character to action, or impeded him from recognizing a particular truth? To what extent does Ghosh suggest the existence of collective memory?

Ghosh raises several debates over the course of the novel, one central to the political subtext being that of Imperialism vs. Fascism. Why does society not look upon Imperial soldiers with the

same scorn it holds for those soldiers committing atrocities under fascist regimes? Should these Imperial mercenaries be considered willing and conscious henchmen, or were they merely following orders? What stance does Ghosh take on this issue, if any? What other debates were you able to extract from the book? What techniques does Ghosh use to bring these issues and their various arguments to light?

Ghosh constructs several unique, remarkable, and strong female characters: Dolly, Uma, Queen Supayalat, even the First Princess, who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. Each of these women tells us something different and important about the time and place in which she was living. What strengths do these women express, and at what points are they identified and illuminated in the novel? In examining the range and evolution of Ghosh's female characters, what could we conclude about the relationship between feminine domesticity and empire? Where and how do the two intersect? What role do women play under colonialism, and how do Ghosh's characters either reflect or reject it?

Uma is a particularly interesting character, as she illuminates one of the ideas central to Ghosh's novel. When we first encounter her, she is constantly worried about being the proper *memsahib*, following traditional domestic etiquette, and living up to the standards of her husband, the Collector. She soon realized, however, that her husband's dream was not in accordance with the rules of Indian custom, he longed "to live with a woman as an equal in spirit and intellect," and she could never, according to custom, fulfill those expectations. We see a monumental change in her disposition when she returns to India from New York. How has she transformed, and by what force? What does Uma's character tell us about the nature of history and the power of social forces as factors in everyday life?

Over the course of the novel, the division between conquerors and conquered becomes increasingly hard to distinguish. The inevitable ethical dilemma faced by Indian soldiers in the British army comes to the foreground of the novel, as one member of the INA challenges Indian soldiers in the British army, "Do you really wish to sacrifice your lives for an Empire that has kept your country in slavery for two hundred years?" Can you think of any other episodes in

which Ghosh highlights this argument? How does this debate affect the course and scope of the story?

In several episodes, Ghosh asks the question, both of his readers and of his characters; can submission to an oppressor, in certain instances, be a sign of strength, rather than weakness? For example, at the very outset of the novel, Rajkumar is heartbroken when he sees Dolly marching out of Burma in the royal procession, offering the sweets he gave her as a token of his affection to one of the British guards. Was this a sign of strength on Dolly's part? How does this foreshadow other events in the novel? What do such episodes tell us about the effect of colonialism, both on the individual and the collective?

In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh examines the individual, psychological dilemmas posed by colonialism. At one point, an Indian officer in the British army during World War II exclaims, "What are we? We've learned to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the color of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognize us as Indians." This quest for and recognition of personal identity, both lost and found, figures prominently in the novel. Where do we see this pursuit played out? How does Ghosh reconcile the notions of personal identity and national identity? Is one derivative of the other?

Exile and return are themes that lie at the core of *The Glass Palace*. We see King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat living out their exiles in Ratnagiri, we also experience Dolly's flight from and return to Burma. Even Rajkumar appears in a constant state of escape and return, from his early abandonment at age 11. What other stories of exile and return play out over the course of the book? How do these individual cycles contribute to the overall structure of the novel?

At various points in the book, Ghosh invokes the art of photography. We encounter photographers throughout the novel, and find ourselves in a photography shop at the story's close. Where else does photography enter the story, and how does it serve as a thematic thread? How does Ghosh weave the theme of photography into the overarching ideas about history and memory that permeate his novel? How does the photographer's art relate to Ghosh's conception of the human heart and mind?



The style of *The Glass Palace* is elliptical, and at times, uneven. Ghosh dedicates an entire paragraph to describing the camera with which Mrs. Khambatta photographed Dolly and Rajkumar's wedding, yet the actual ceremony takes place, elliptically, when Ghosh writes, "At the end of the civil ceremony, in the Collector's 'camp office', Dolly and Rajkumar garlanded each other, smiling like children." Other such major life events occur in only sentences, the births of children, the deaths of loved ones, wars, and other national catastrophes. Do you think this was an intentional literary choice on Ghosh's part? What effect does it have on the book as a whole, on your perception of the characters and their stories?

As much defeat as there is present in *The Glass Palace*, there are also extraordinary tales of survival and hope. Can you think of some examples by which devastating defeat is countered by enormous hope? What claims does Ghosh make about the human spirit in this novel?

If we take a close look at the characters whom Ghosh envisions in the most detail, Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, Arjun, to name a few. They become extraordinary in our minds of the reader, as we travel with them through a century of social upheaval and political turmoil. But according to the social structure, they are all, or once were, relatively ordinary individuals. What is the effect of focusing a novel of such grand, epic sweep, on members of common society? How does this very subtle choice affect the story's shape? What does it tell us about history, and how we have always been taught to remember it?

## **7.2 Short answer questions:**

1) What is the novel all about?

Ans. his novel is about many places, war and displacement, exile and rootlessness, depicting human helplessness. All that a human being can do is to try to adjust, compromise, live and about everything else form relationships. This forming of new bonds, mixing of races and castes is something that does not stop.

2) How does the novel presents Amitav Ghosh's concern with nationalism?

Ans. The novel presents Amitav Ghosh's concern with nationalism. Ghosh presents multiple points of view of the dispersed people of different nationalities and makes a plea for internationalism. He intends to show how the context of imperialism has changed in globalization. Ghosh believes that empires imprison their rulers as well as their subjects. In his hands, the novel becomes a cultural instrument for hopes of social betterment.

3) What does the novel reveal?

Ans. The novel reveals how tactfully the British conquered countries and subjugated whole population exiling kings to erase them completely from public memory at home. The last of the Mughal King, Bahadur Shah Zafar, deportation to Rangoon, a generation ago, after killing the two princes right in front of the public, and the Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat's exile to Ratnagiri in India were such astute moves by the conquering Britain.