

BLOCK: IV

Unit 1 : U. R. Ananthamurty: *Samskara* (Introducing the Author)

Unit 2 : U.R. Ananthamurty: *Samskara* (Introducing the Novel)

Unit 3 : U.R. Ananthamurty: *Samskara* (Themes and Techniques)

Unit 4 : Amitabh Ghosh: *In an Antique Land* (Introducing the Author)

Unit 5 : Amitabh Ghosh: *In an Antique Land* (Introducing the Novel)

Unit 6 : Amitabh Ghosh: *In an Antique Land* (Themes and Techniques)

UNIT- 1

U. R. Ananthamurthy: Samskara (Introducing the Author)

Unit Structure:

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 About the Author
- 1.4 Significant Works
- 1.5 Summing Up
- 1.6 References and Suggested Readings

1.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *introduce* U. R. Ananthamurthy and his literary corpus,
- *develop* a better understanding of the background of the text,
- *introduce* key issues and themes of U. R. Ananthamurthy major works,
- *assess* U. R. Ananthamurthy in the Indian literary context.

1.2 Introduction:

U. R. Ananthamurthy (1932-2014) was a major figure of contemporary Kannada literature. He made significant contributions to the corpus of Kannada literature through his novels, plays, stories, poems and literary criticism. Ananthamurthy was a pioneer of the Navya Movement in Kannada literature that emerged in the second half of the 20th century.

Stop to Consider:

Kannada Literature:

Kannada is one of the major languages of India. It is primarily spoken in the state of Karnataka with the presence of significant speakers in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Goa. Kannada literature

has a rich history with many acclaimed authors and creations. “Kavirajamarga ”, written in 850 C.E is considered as the earliest available work of Kannada literature. Since then, it has flourished under the patronages of successive royal dynasties that ruled present day Karnataka such as Rashtrakuta, Hoysala, Chalukya, Vijayanagara etc. “Vaddaradhane" by Shivakotiacharya is considered as the earliest instance of prose written in Kannada. Pampa, Ponna, Ranna etc. are some prominent poets of ancient Kannada literature. To its credit, Kannada literature developed novelistic literature in a quite early era. The 14th century work, “Lilavati”, is a fine telling of a love story. In the modern era, many prominent poets, novelists, playwrights, essayists etc. have produced renowned works in Kannada language. B. M Srikanthayya, K V Puttappa or Kuvempu, Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, Masti Venkatatesha Iyenger, Sivarama Karanta, U R Ananthamurthy, V M Inamdar, S L Bhyrappa etc. are some of the prominent figures of modern Kannada literary scene.

1.3 About the Author:

Udupi Rajagopalacharya Ananthamurthy was born on 21st December, 1932 into an upper caste orthodox Brahmin family in Shimoga district of Karnataka. Krishnamurthy grew up in the traditional caste ridden society of rural Karnataka. As a son of an orthodox Brahmin family, he started his early education in Sanskrit in his village. Ananthamurthy later received his schooling in Kannada vernacular medium. A brilliant student, Ananthamurthy further earned a Master of Arts in English from the University of Mysore and a PhD in English from the University of Birmingham in the year 1966. Ananthamurthy worked as a professor at the English department of University of Mysore, his alma mater. Ananthamurthy was a renowned academic of Karnataka. He later served as the vice chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala and as the chairpersons of National Book Trust of India, Sahitya Academy.

Ananthamurthy grew up witnessing the conservative structure of Indian society since his childhood. The archaism and stagnancy of the system pushed him to question the norms and dogmas held by the society. Ananthamurthy's work often displayed a progressive perspective which questions the relevance of all medievalist ideologies. The clash between social change and stagnation, men caught in difficult circumstances, fatalism vis a vis action, human perseverance against all odds, decadence and corruption of an immoral milieu etc. were the major themes of his literary output. Ananthamurthy portrayed the lives of the common men and women of Karnataka, with all its colours, dimensions and sensibilities. His picture of the society was a realistic portrait showing both the sublimities and darker sides without bias. These were serious social documents instead of just being works of fiction. His works enlivened the true essence of the agrarian society of Karnataka and India at large. Caste, prejudice, inequality, hypocrisy of the society in which he lived were trenchantly highlighted in his works. Ananthamurthy authored primarily in his native Kannada language. Many of these works are also translated into English. Due to their complex engagement with the subject matter, his works have found critical appreciation amidst English language readers as well. As a testament of his literary genius beyond Kannada readers, Ananthamurthy was shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2013. He was also shortlisted for DSC Prize for South Asian literature in 2012 for his novel Bharatipura, originally written in Kannada. Ananthamurthy was also awarded with the prestigious Jnanpith Award; the highest literary honour of India for his contribution towards Indian literature.

Stop to Consider:

Jnanpith Award:

Jnanpith Award is considered as the highest literary award in India. Authors from any of the 22 scheduled languages of India may receive the prestigious award for their remarkable contribution to literature. In a recent addition, works in English written by Indian author are also included for the award. The award was instituted by a literary

organization called Bhartiya Jnanpith in the year 1961. The first recipient of the award was G Sankara Kurup, a major poet of Malayalam language. Till 1982, Jnanpith was presented to an author for a prominent work. Since 1982, authors receive the honour for his/her lifelong contribution to literature. Jnanpith is awarded annually, although, two authors may also receive the same occasionally. Prominent authors from many Indian languages have been presented with this award in its long trajectory. Awardees are considered as doyens of modern Indian literature. Some of the major recipients of the award are Tarashankar Bandopadhyay of Bengali, Umashankar Joshi of Gujarati, Kuvempu of Kannada, Firaq Gorakhpuri of Urdu, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya of Assamese etc.

1.4 Significant Works:

Ananthamurthy's literary corpus spanned across genres. With the publication of the novel *Samskara* in 1965, Ananthamurthy made his remarkable entry into the Kannada literary scene. The novel was a daring critique of conservative Brahminism produced at a time when many authors were mindful of not taking up such a sensitive topic. The work had left a profound impact on the modern Kannada literature for its trenchant realism and subtle social criticism co-mingled with literary aesthetics. This remarkable craftsmanship was the rich legacy of Ananthamurthy which could be traced in all of his major works. They were true social pictures, and also literature of high quality simultaneously. His ideological underpinning didn't undermine the aesthetic value of the works at no instance. The complexity of plot, characterization and other literary devices subtly mix with the social purpose of the work, without compromising the quality of one for the other. What readers experience is a fine taste of the art along with an awareness of the society. Following this trajectory, Ananthamurthy produced novels such as *Bharatipura*, *Avasthe*, *Bhava*, *Divya*, *Preeti Mrithyu Bhaya* etc. *Bharatipura*, *Avasthe* and *Samskara* are considered major classics of modern Kannada literature. His major collections of stories were, *Prashne*, *Mouni*, *Aakaasha Mattu Bekku*, *Sooryana Kundure* etc.

Ananthamurthy also produced a huge corpus of poems through more than five poetry collections like *Mithuna*, *Ajjana Hegala Sukkugalu*, *Abhava* etc. Besides these, Ananthamurthy penned many volumes of essays and criticism which preserve his moorings as a prominent public intellectual of the post-independence Indian nation. Ananthamurthy's autobiography, *Suragi*, appeared in the year 2012.

The Modernist phase of Kannada literature came with the rise of Navya Movement. Navya, meaning new, is the exposition of new ideas, themes, techniques in the Kannada literary scene. It is Kannada authors' reaction to the modernist movement of the early twentieth century English literature. The navya movement of Kannada literature arose in the 1950s at the hand of the poet Gopalkrishna Adiga. The Navya movement in Kannada literature emerged as a break from the previous Novadaya period; an era of nationalist literary sentiments resulting from the colonial experience and interaction with the west. Navodaya was an essentially romantic movement predicated on hope, and the premise of an upright society. However, the Navya Movement is a more critical engagement with the brute social realities which were palpable after independence. It emerged out of despair, disillusionment with the contradictions of the newly independent nation of India. Piercing criticism of the existing dogmas, prejudices and socio-cultural ills, a push for freshness are the major characteristics of the Navya Movement. Confusion, complexities experienced by the confluence of the rural and urban, east and the west, tradition and modernity in all aspects of life are some of the recurrent motifs of the Navya Movement. The experience of modernity by the common Indian man; who belongs to a culture marked by rural ethos, is minutely depicted by the authors of the Navya Movement. An agrarian, ancient culture with its perennial ethos encountering the dynamics of a changing time drew the attention of the litterateur of the movement. The resultant chaos, confusion and moral conundrum are captured in various novels, short stories, plays that carried the traces of this movement. As the underlying themes veered towards complexity, the techniques and style also attained a more nuanced form, moving away from the sentimentalism of the preceding era. This trait can frequently be found

in the works of Ananthamurthy and A K Ramanujan; two masters of the movement. They adopted a detached, mature and precise handling of the crucial theme, not giving away to melodrama and sentimentality.

U. R. Ananthamurthy was a major figure of the Navya Movement. His works presented a radical examination of traditional values, social norms in the context of new trends of the era. His works outlined the quintessential Indian personas; the very Kannad native's encounter with the changing currents of the time. His literary oeuvre is a landscape of complexity and predicament; a picture of the age-old medievalist culture, society, thoughts in the face of a modernising force. The rural and the urban, change and continuity, hope and hopelessness are the various aspects of this problematic landscape. He pierced into the minutest realities of the society of the nation with the eye of a detached observer. The often seen romanticising of rustic innocence in various Indian literary works is replaced by a more critical understanding of the Indian reality in Ananthamurthy's pen. What we find in his works that emerge from this engagement is a picture of the society and culture as it is, neither being an unrealistic paradise of innocence nor an abyss of darkness.

U. R. Ananthamurthy's first significant entry into the literary scene was his novel *Samskara* (1966). The novel underlined a bold questioning of the traditional Indian society and its ethos, highlighting how it was fraught by inner contradictions. Chandri, the lower caste woman and Praneshacharya, the high caste Brahmin were the figures representing two worldviews. Bold action in opposition to hollow ritualistic stagnation came face to face in the novel. In its depiction of the high caste Brahmin community, with its inner divisions itself, the novel presented a picture of the dogmatic irrelevancy of a society crept into superstition. Such a society inevitably moved towards an ultimate collapse. In *Samskara*, Ananthamurthy aesthetically showed the perilous state of the Indian society at large, encrusted by immobility, and prejudices.

His novel *Bharatipura* (1973) was another effort towards social commentary fine-tuned with literary aesthetics. This novel focused on the ills of the traditional conservative society through its scathing criticism of

the prejudiced practice of untouchability. Caste discrimination, perpetuated through a culture of normalisation across ages, forms the basic premise of the novel. Ananthamurthy presented the modern Indian social scene in which the lofty ideals of abolishing discrimination were itself predicated on hollowness and hypocrisy. Jagannath, the protagonist of the novel's effort to break caste taboo related to temple entry was influenced by his own ulterior motive of winning over his girlfriend. The inner divisions within the lower castes; that come up with economic prosperity, was another major Indian reality brought out in the work. Bharathipura was predicated on the criss-crossing of the tradition and emerging economic modernity and urbanisation that defines India as a nation.

Another significant novel of the author, *Avasthe* (1978) was a riddle mixing life, politics, society, tradition and idealism into a singular compound. It picturised the very Indian socio-political life of the modern era in its depiction of a rural Karnataka politician. In narrating the story of Krishnappa Gowda, Ananthamurthy, moreover, looked into the enigmas of life, apart from the novel's ostensible social cause. He engaged with certain minutest layers of life and basic human sensibilities. Love, ageing, memory, companionship, family were some of those core under layers whose pith was evaluated by the author in this novel. Gowda; the prominent politician, leader of peasants, mused about his past life from childhood to adulthood in politics from his own bedridden state or "avasthe". The people's leader had grown up as the upright hero in his journey from humble low caste beginnings to prominence, walking through the maze of University hostel, jail, struggle, Bangalore politics etc. A man of conviction, yet Gowda was surrounded by typical corrupt politicians, power games, political intrigues of the state. He lived with these dilemmas of idealism and reality, morality and self-interests etc. Thus, the novel was a prominent evocation of a society in dilemma, in transition between progress and decadence.

Another major novel, *Bhava* (1994) was a philosophical musing into the nature of being and identity. It was about the essence of life, purpose and existence from the Indian philosophical contexts. The novel narrated

the story of missing parentage, intertwining different times, different generations into one another. Vishwanatha Shastri and Dinkar were two poles of the enigmatic tale bound by questions of identity and illusion. The two strangers came across each other in a pilgrimage to Lord Ayappa, unfolding hidden personal knots of distant past. Shastri's sudden realisation of his false guilt held for years and consequent unnecessary penance and Dinkar's similar realisations of illusions instantly overshadowed their so long held belief systems. In concurrence with the concept of "Maya", ascribed by Indian philosophical traditions, illusion or "Maya" unfolded over one's perception of reality in the novel. The real meaning of the pilgrimage of the novel lay in the journey of the self to knowledge, the soul to the true understanding of existence. Ananthamurthy enshrined the true state of life in accepting the reality as it unfolds and in adapting the self to it.

Bara (1976) is a novel dealing with the mind and inner tumults of a man caught in a situation opposed to his natural bend of thoughts. Ananthamurthy often explored the inner dilemmas between high conviction and its breaching in day to day life, ethics and pragmatism, contemplation and instant action in challenging times. The same might be traced in his earlier novel *Samskara*. In *Bara*, the protagonist Satisha, the collector of a drought hit district went through such inner contradictions created by the inner urge for ethics and an immediate reality hostile to it. Ananthamurthy's distinguished ability could be seen in his terse portrayal of the uncomfortable truth; which might exist even under the perceived "ideal" or "innocent" side. While depicting the common, rustic folks of the district as opposed to the snobbish upper classes, bureaucrats, Ananthamurthy didn't present an idyllic scene. He highlighted the vulgarity of that side as well, moving aside from the binary paradigm of haughty aristocrats versus innocent common life. His was the projection of the crudity and hollowness in both sides, which captured the reality as it existed in his works. The word "Bara" could be translated as drought. The bureaucrat Satisha was in charge of a drought hit district

where his bookish ideological leanings prejudiced his perception of the realities. The naive idealism of satisha and his wife Rekha dangerously mixed with the machinations of wily politicians, hollow activists etc., consequently influencing the crucial actions of a bureaucrat. The novel became a tragic comedy of the consequences of hollow idealism barren of real life actions. Ananthamurthy succinctly depicted the petty political class, bureaucratic squabbles and social barrenness of the region and the country as a whole. Bhimoji, the petty politician, Govindappa, the cow protectionist were sardonic sketches of the rotten and dysfunctional system that plagues the decision making of the nation after independence.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. Assess U. R. Ananthamurthy's contribution to modern Indian literature. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. Comment on U. R. Ananthamurthy's depiction of Indian social reality with reference to his major works. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.3. Comment on U. R. Ananthamurthy's works as a call for change. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.4. Comment on various characters created by U. R. Ananthamurthy across his novels. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

Analyse U. R. Ananthamurthy as a radical thinker with reference to his various novels. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

1.5 Summing Up:

As seen in this brief introduction, Ananthamurthy made significant contributions towards Kannada and Indian literature. His works were a living reflection of the Indian society and nation touching all of its major aspects. He was a preeminent advocate of humanism, progress and modernity. Sympathy for the downtrodden run through his works. People exploited in the names of caste, creed, beliefs, men and women living on the margins of the society could be seen playing impactful roles in his works. These works envisioned a future nation based on equality and justice. Ananthamurthy's grip over his era and its creed is visible in his novels and stories. Characters of his works appear as sharp experiments on the ethos of the corresponding era. Their actions, thoughts, musings etc. present fresh questions and perspectives to the reader regarding the era in which he lived. Like an experienced juggler, Ananthamurthy plays with his characters and plots to capture the essence of the world depicted in the works. They are profound inquiries about the myriad layers of the human mind, sensibilities and personalities. Fragility of human beings; faced with a harsh, unrelenting world, finds manifestation in his works. In this engagement, morality, beliefs, and various values of human life become open to a re-evaluation. Readers are left with an urge to contemplate over the contours of the surrounding society and the time. Thus, Ananthamurthy leaves behind a subtle call for action and change at the end of each work. Despite its radical nature, Ananthamurthy's output never loses its literariness. His plots, characters, actions, language etc. all displayed refinement and grace. Characters lived up to their own life, instead of just being pale imitations of someone outside the text. Plots were marked by poise and grace, which didn't turn loose due to the author's social mission. They were developed with traces of

skilled literary finesse. No action took place in his works without the sublime touch of reality. He frequently used irony, paradox, intertextuality, complex narrative techniques etc. adding grandeur and magnificence to his creations. Combining all these features, In U. R. Ananthamurthy, we see a true genius of modern Indian literature.

1.6 References and Suggested Readings:

Chenni, Rajendra. "U.R. Ananthamurthy." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 35–40. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753940>. Accessed 12 Mar. 2024.

Prabhakara, M. S. "U. R. Ananthamurthy: Writer, Iconoclast, Public Intellectual." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 49, no. 36, 2014, pp. 26–27. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480641>. Accessed 12 Mar. 2024.

Sreenivasarao, K. "Ananthamurthy—The Humanist Who Bridged Tradition and Modernity." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 23–25. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753937>. Accessed 13 Mar. 2024.

Thomas, A. J. "U.R. Ananthamurthy." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 41–48. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753941>. Accessed 13 Mar. 2024.

UNIT - 2

U.R. Ananthamurthy: Samskara (Introducing the Novel)

Unit Structure:

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Reading the Novel
- 2.4 Summing Up
- 2.5 References and Suggested Readings

2.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- *give* a brief overview of the novel,
- *introduce* the key events,
- *explain* the meanings, connotations and background of the events,
- *place* the novel in the context of the contemporaneous society.

2.2 Introduction:

U. R. Ananthamurthy's novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* is the piquant account of the complexities of traditional Indian society. The novel is an assortment of the agrarian Indian life and society. It flies back to the past; to a period at the crossroad of the influx of modernity and the entrenched tradition cutting each other.

The novel talks about a period at the intersection of tradition and modernity. It is the story of a village in the south Indian region of Karnataka, during the British era. The period it enlivens is an era of volatile social change. Set in that era, the traditional Indian village life saw the coming of modernity; western influence, new political movements, new ways of life. On the one side, we had the traditional

way of life; having its roots seeped in the past, deep entrenched in the everyday life of the populace. On the other side, the wave of change was reaching the doorstep of medieval village life. It was a period of crisis and conflict. Values and ideas from two worlds were clashing into each other. Long persisting traditions and systems were under constant clash with the emerging currents of modernity. A society, without change and inner reforms, inevitably falls into stagnation and downsides. Rules and conducts turn into mere formal shells without any essence. Such a society becomes a suffocating experience for its population. In such a state of existence, the plot of the novel is situated by the author. The agrarian society it delineates, is marred by the same process of stasis. Social practices like caste discrimination, gender bias, superstitions etc. were rooted in the society and the time presented in the novel.

Stop to Consider:

Modernity in India:

Modernity refers to a period and an attitude of change. It ensures the transformation of a society from backwardness to progress through new ideas, inventions and discoveries. Europe saw the advent of modernity in the late 16th and the 17th centuries with rapid progress in all spheres of life. During the late 19th and early 20th century, ideas of modernity as we understand it today made its impact on Indian society. In simple terms, we can define modernity as a force of new changes and novelty over the existing system. The colonial encounter with the west during this period saw the spread of new ideas and systems such as western education, western medicine, railway etc. in the existing Indian society. The advent of modernity ensured a tremendous upheaval in the traditional structure of the society. Existing ideas, beliefs, customs etc. were gradually giving way to new ones. However, the idea of modernity as a Western construct is often questioned by postcolonial thinkers. Questions such as, did the ancient Indian society have its own spirit of modernity in its long continuance since ancient ages?

In our national history, reform movements like Buddhism, bhakti movements etc. also signify the instinct of progress and change against stagnation. Can these be part of an Indian modernity which predates the one ushered in by the west under colonialism? Think about it.

2.3 Reading the Novel:

The novel begins in the Brahmin agrahara of Durvasapura. An agrahara was a piece of land donated to Brahmins by kings in ancient and mediaeval India. These areas were inhabited by the Brahmin community. The Brahmin agrahara was inhabited by the Madhva subsect of Brahmins. As we see here, these separated settlements indicate the hierarchical nature existed in the traditional Indian society, based on caste. Ananthamurthy puts light to it in his clever depiction of the localities in the novel. The Durvasapura Brahmin agrahara is surrounded by the Parijatapura Brahmin agrahara; another settlement for Brahmins from the Smarta sect; who were traditionally considered as a rank lower to the Madhava's within the larger Brahmin caste. In some distance from Durvasapura, there is the settlement of lay people like farmers, tradesmen etc. Soon, we are acquainted with another settlement of people positioned outside the traditional caste hierarchy on the outskirts of Durvasapura; they were prejudiced as untouchables in the discriminatory caste practices of ancient and medieval times. This curious locale of the plot highlights the positioning of the story in the historical context of a dark social era marred by discrimination and superstitions beliefs.

Stop to Consider:

Caste Hierarchy:

Caste is one of the major aspects of Indian Society. It is a division of labour based on birth in the traditional Indian society. It is said that originally caste was based on quality and work. However, it has long been deviated into becoming a birth based system. The traditional caste system primarily divides society into four groups; Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Their duties are defined

by assigning them hierarchical roles in society. The Brahmins, with their duty of priesthood are assigned the topmost position, followed by Kshatriyas with the duties of warriors, Vaishya; assigned the duties of trade and commerce and the Shudra who are to provide services to the above mentioned three. This system has generated considerable controversy in society due to its discriminatory nature. It perpetuates inequality against those in the lower rung of the ladder. Anyone outside this caste hierarchy is defined as the untouchables. The untouchables have been on the margins of the society. They were historically denied opportunities in various fields. The caste hierarchy, as created from this system, has divided the society into many sections. Those in the edge of the system face severe restrictions in terms of occupations, access to land and resources, housings, marital relationship, religious rights etc. in society. Despite several attempts at reforming the system of caste, it is still present in Indian society. How do you see the marks of caste hierarchy in current society? And how can we look forward to removing these discrimination? Think.

The Durvasapura agrahara, with its resident Brahmin community, is the locale of the novel. Two inhabitants of the agrahara; Praneshacharya and Naranappa are the two prominent figures of the novel, around whom the story revolves. The two Brahmin characters are depicted as polar opposites to each other. Praneshacharya is presented as the wise, scholarly head of the agrahara. He is the "crest Jewel" of Vedantic philosophy. Praneshacharya, who learnt scriptures in Kashi, is apparently the "saintly" Brahmin of the community. He has dedicated his life to continue the glorious traditions of Brahmanism. Praneshacharya, in his pursuit for a sober, celibate and spiritual life, had married an invalid, which is the penance of his life as a Brahmin. He has suppressed all human desires for carnal pleasure in the pursuit of spirituality and Brahminical duties. Female beauty, material bliss doesn't entice him. The other Brahmin, Naranappa, on the other hand, is the foil to everything that defines Praneshacharya. Naranappa, born as a Brahmin, has renounced his Brahminism. He is an

outcast to the agrahara's other Brahmins. Naranappa, is presented as vowing to end the Brahminism of the other Brahmins of the agrahara. Naranappa indulged in all forms of carnal pleasures like drinking, going to prostitutes, deserting his wife for his mistress Chandri and other similar acts detested by the Brahmins of the agrahara. While, the agrahara's Brahmins follow their destined duties of daily rituals, conducting pujas, worshipping god's, yagna's etc., Naranappa had thrown away his Saligram stone; the symbol of Brahminhood to the river. He had engaged in apostasy by denouncing God and polluting the temple tank by fishing on it with his Muslim friends. Naranappa freely mixed with the people from all castes, something contrary to the traditional restrictions of caste prevalent in the agrahara. He had brought Chandri, his low caste mistress, to his house in the agraha after leaving his Brahmin wife to death. When the agrahara's Brahmin followed a sense of community among them by sharing their home produce with each other, Naranappa didn't allow anyone to taste the fruits of his orchard. While the flowers of the gardens of the other Brahmins were meant for the worshipping of god, Naranappa had, instead, used the flowers in his house to adorn the bun of Chandri. The Brahmins of the agrahara and the region revered Praneshacharya as the wise head of the community, Naranappa openly mocked and humiliated him. However, Praneshacharya, as a testament of his virtue and Brahminical piety, had made it his life's determination to influence Naranappa to goodness and to bring him back to the practice of Brahminism. This was one of the central points of the clash between Naranappa and Praneshacharya. It is, metaphorically, the fight between the traditional orthodoxy of Brahminism and the external challenges to it.

Stop to Consider:

Community:

Community or the sense of community has been a major feature of Indian society and tradition. Community, in simple terms, is the identification of a person with a particular group of people. This identification is developed by common interests, language, occupation, beliefs, customs etc. There are no defined markers of a

community. Just as identifications such as Indian, Tamil, Punjabi, Assamese etc. may form communities, even the people living in a particular area, belonging to a caste, neighborhood may also form a community. In Indian society, Community bonds its members with a culture of common duties and a sense of fraternity. We share our customs, festivals, beliefs, ceremonies, duties with the community in which we are members. How does community shape Indian society? Think about it.

As we look into the first chapter of the novel, we find Naranappa as already dead. Naranappa had visited Kundapura, a town in the vicinity of Durvasapura, a few days back and returned home with a high fever. Although unknown to any of the Brahmin characters of the novel, the author lets the reader know that the disease is a plague related fever; a much feared epidemic that ravaged India during the reign of the British. This mentioning of the disease enables the readers to understand the placing of the novel during the British era in India. The novel begins with Chandri bringing the information of Naranappa's death to Praneshacharya. The death of Naranappa created a theological predicament for the traditional customs of the Brahmins of the agrahara regarding the method of cremation of a fellow Brahmin. The deep entrenched tentacles of Brahmin orthodoxy, which is in turn a reflection of the pitfalls of orthodoxy, create a peculiar problem for the agrahara. According to the prevalent traditional beliefs, any person born as Brahmin would be required to be cremated only by a Brahmin, otherwise it would amount to a sin. Here we see the perils of unchallenged views ossifying into superstition. The orthodox system of Brahminism, that flourished in the agrahara without encouraging any question to it, had ensured the growth of such a view within the community. Now, even if Naranappa had denounced Brahminism, as a person born within the Brahmin caste, he was supposed to be cremated according to the Brahmin rituals by a Brahmin. This had created a problem because no Brahmin of the agrahara was willing to do the act due to Naranappa activities in his life. At the same time, as Brahmins of the Madhva community, they didn't want to

violate the prescribed rule for cremation. The Brahmins of the agrahara, faced with this difficult situation, looked up to Praneshacharya for an answer to this question.

Stop to Consider:

Plague:

According to the World Health Organization, the disease Plague is caused by a bacteria called *Yersinia Pestis*. There are two types of disease; bubonic and pneumonic. Bubonic plague is the most common variant. Plague is caused by the bites of infected fleas, animals or inhaling of droplets or bodily fluids of infected persons. It is a severe disease that has ravaged various parts of the world across centuries. In the 14th century, England underwent a huge spread of the disease earning it the name black death. In India, Plague took the shape of pandemics during British rule. In September, 1896, an epidemic of plague was seen in Bombay killing over 20,000 people. In 1897 and 1898, bubonic plague ravaged Hubballi, Bengaluru, Mysore etc. which form the present day Karanataka. Over two million people were killed by plague in India between 1897 to 1904. Lack of awareness about the disease along with unhygienic conditions contributed toward the massive spread of the disease in India. As seen in the novel, rodents were commonly associated with the disease as its carriers. However, it can be spread by other animals infected with the bacterium.

Praneshacharya had his own reasons to be perplexed by this peculiar problem around the cremation ceremony of Naranappa. As a devout upholder of the doctrine of the orthodox Brahminism, he believed that Naranappa might have left Brahminism, but Brahminism didn't leave him. It is an identity Which can't be erased or changed under any human effort. Here we see the stranglehold of the entrenched caste prejudice as based on birth in the traditional Indian society. Praneshacharya took it upon himself to find a solution to this predicament. Accordingly, he

consulted the Puranas, Manu and other religions texts while leaving the corpse to be left for the time being. However, the answer to the question of the proper way to cremate the body was not at sight. While, the decomposing corpse of Naranappa was polluting the air and environment of the agrahara. Besides, according to the traditional belief, the Brahmins of the agraha had to abstain from any food as long as the body was not given the cremation. The agrahara and its fasting residents were in disarray. The next day, an alternative means was sought by inviting some Brahmins of the Smarta agrahara to complete the cremation, as the Madhva Brahminis of the agrahara considered them lower in the hierarchy and as well as they being close friends of Naranappa. Meanwhile, Chandri had offered her gold and diamond jewels to anyone who would cremate the body. This single act exposed the moral bankruptcy and corruption of the Brahmins of the agrahara as Brahmins like Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya etc. were coveting for the treasures even if it violated their self-professed doctrine of orthodoxy. This act highlights the utter depravity that became prevalent among the community. It also brings forward the irrelevance and hollowness of the orthodox superstitions about the inviolable principles of orthodox caste supremacy. On the other hand, the Smarta Brahmins of Parijatapura were themselves worried that the cremation given by their sect to a Madhva Brahmin would draw curses to them. Thus, we see how discrimination and superstitions bar a group of people to see the injustice meted out to them. Hence, this alternative arrangement didn't materialise and the question of cremation remained the same. It became more complex as Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya of the Durvasapura agrahara were also willing to lay hands over the expensive gold jewelleries for themselves, at the same time, were fearful of violating their Brahminism by cremating a person who had apparently committed numerous sins. Sticking to the traditional mindset of an orthodox religious scholar, Praneshacharya, then, decides to rely on God and to ask for the answer to God Maruti himself. Accordingly, he went to the Maruti temple situated in the middle of the forest, away from human presence and sat there in prayers until god Maruti showed him the way out of the question. As it

appears here, the expectation of a miracle by which God would provide the answer is an impossibility from a rational point of view. However, the author, by this action of Praneshacharya, brings forward the traditional society of a time when belief in miracles was normal. It was a period when the light of modern education and science was yet to reach the society. Hence, we may interpret Praneshacharya's expectation as something quite normal in the society and culture of the time described. Praneshacharya had taken the act as a test of his own religiosity and penance. He had determined to continue his prayers so long as God Maruti gave him the answer. Anything Contrary would mean a defeat to his own long devotion to the god, which he had been undertaking for so many years. However, as it becomes apparent to the readers, the unrealistic possibility of God miraculously appearing and giving him the answer didn't happen. Subsequently, a disappointed Praneshacharya, in the middle of night, broke his prayers and walked out of the temple to seek the answer himself.

The novel takes a major turn at this point. Praneshacharya, confused and perplexed, while proceeding through the thick forest, met Chandri in the middle of it. Chandri's piety rose up at seeing Praneshacharya's desolate appearance. All for the sake of finding an answer to the question that had appeared from her husband's death. She walked to Praneshacharya in her piety and affection and bowed down to take his blessings. Praneshacharya had repressed his sexuality so far in his devotion to God. He had subsumed his bodily urges through his determination to celibacy and his nursing of his invalid wife. Woman beauty, in the process, no longer tempted him. However, in the middle of the forest, at the point, Praneshacharya's repressed desires woke up at the sight of Chandri's Charming physical beauty. For the first time, he found himself in desire. He was tempted by the allurements of physical pleasure. In a crucial moment of temptation, Praneshacharya gave up his years of penance and doctrinal devotion to the suppressed lure of bodily pleasure. He engaged in sexual acts with Chandri in the forest. Chandri, raised by her piety for the man, along with her long held sense of being an outcast in the orthodox society, reciprocated Praneshacharya

with open arms. Chandri had not been able to bear a child with Naranappa since their conjugal life. In a traditional caste ridden society, after being a woman belonging to the lower category, not being able to bear a child is an added baggage to heighten the discrimination. Psychologically, Chandri hoped that the blessed touch of Praneshacharya on her body would enable her to bear an offspring to free her from the daily discrimination she had faced all her life. On a deeper level, Chandri's urge to have an offspring was linked to her desire towards salvation. The baby born in her womb by a Brahmin was a symbolic protest against the discriminatory caste system of the time. Despite being labelled as a prostitute, Chandri appeared superior in her conduct than the other characters of the novel. She was clear headed and determined to make a way out of the muddle around the death of Naranappa. She already showed the path to determinate action by offering her jewellery in exchange for her husband's cremation when all other Brahmins were oscillating in indecisiveness. Now, she unconsciously marked the defiance and resistance against the discrimination and hypocrisy of the orthodox society by defying it in this act of engaging in a sexual act with Praneshacharya.

As Praneshacharya woke up in the middle of night on the lap of Chandri, his outer consciousness of Brahmanism came back to his mind. He was dumbfounded on seeing the evaporation of two decades of penance at the blink of an eye. His repressed human desires, so long carefully subdued, had finally shaken itself to life, defying his self-created boundaries and limits. It was a moment of reckoning. The action of the moment had questioned the reality of his long held orthodoxy and the concept of purity. In the act, his own self had brought out the hollowness of his own beliefs. Praneshacharya was instantly lost in the middle of this terrible realisation. In order to maintain some portions of his supposed "holiness", Praneshacharya decided he would reveal all to the agrahara Brahmins the next day from the mouth of Chandri herself. He intended to regain his sense of "purity" through the confession the next day. However, in the opportune moment he failed to hold onto his own decision. His inability to confess the truth on the subsequent day brings

into fore the author's subtle exposure of the concept of penance and purity in the traditional orthodox system of religion. The saintly persona of Praneshacharya, astutely studied in religion, scriptures feared leaving his social image of being a revered figure. Had he confessed, he would lose all the respect and devotion shown to him by the agrahara. He feared losing his commanding position in the agrahara. Hence, on the following day of the act, he again fell for the allurements of flattery and social power in not confessing his digression. Here, we see the vanity hidden in Praneshacharya's own doctrine. He is unknowingly attached to the social position of a leader and a devout scholar, without which, his identity doesn't exist. The Hindu Concept of "Maya" or attachment is visible in Praneshacharya. He is attached to his own external image of being a "Saint". His penance and long practice in religion are not motivated by a genuine search for salvation and spirituality, but for positions and praise in society. Such a penance, even if long held, is meaningless. This is the reason behind the falling of Praneshacharya for physical pleasure within a moment despite having practiced celibacy for years. Because, he has not embraced celibacy for the real inner purpose of spirituality, but for the vanity of attaining sainthood. The Hindu scriptures suggest the attainment of sainthood or Sanyas at the true inner call for spirituality. It is not something to be seen as a vanity project, or an escape from the difficulties of daily life. It is significant to recall that Praneshacharya had the ambition of becoming a saint and to attain salvation as his life's goal from his childhood. The very aim of becoming a saint is a travesty of the concept in its real sense. In the truer sense of the idea, one can't embrace "sanyas" or saintliness, but it would come naturally to the one perfectly suited for it. Hence, Praneshacharya's apparent sainthood itself was a duplicity since its beginning. He didn't tone down his physical urge for the inner call of spirituality, but for fulfilling his vanity of becoming a Saint. Accordingly, it had remained only subdued in him which woke up at the slightest enticement of physical pleasure. It becomes clear that Praneshacharya was aware of his half-baked celibacy, due to which he married an invalid to ensure that no temptation could awaken his innate desires. The act itself was an admission of the fact

that the presence of a vivacious, beautiful female could lead him to lose control over his own instincts. So, he loses his facade of sainthood and penance with Chandri on the fateful night. In this act, the duplicity and corruption of the original spiritual idea in the immobile orthodox society is pressed through by Ananthamurthy. Praneshacharya's inability to confess is linked to his attachment to his social position. This attachment is the consequence of the immobile orthodox society where adherence to outward norms and hollow showiness without questioning is accepted as the rule. In the society described by Ananthamurthy, any scrutiny of long held positions, status and traditions; even if irrelevant, is seen as questioning the very correctness of the religion. In such a society, saints, high castes, discrimination etc. are accepted as unquestionable truths; which are to be blindly accepted by all. This hostility to question creates the unquestioned, unaccountable high social positions and rules for which many covet. Praneshacharya is attached to the same high authority and luxury of an unquestionable, revered saintly figure.

Stop to Consider:

Salvation and Redemption:

Salvation and redemption are closely related concepts found in various religions. These are connected to the concept of sin. In simple words, Salvation and redemption are means to save a person or soul from sins. It refers to the deliverance from sin or evil in human life. In western religions, salvation and redemption are achieved by a clearly prescribed system often involving the coming of a messenger. However, in Hindu belief, Salvation and redemption are not to be attained via only one means. The Vedic literature to religious texts like Upanishads and Brahmanas, methods of freeing the person from earthly sins are diverse and complex. However, most scholars agree on the point that salvation and redemption in Hinduism look toward freeing the immortal soul from the bondage of the samsara and karma; related to the former. In Hinduism, the soul is immortal, it travels through various births and rebirths according to its karma. Karma is the deeds a person does in his/ her life. In Hindu theology,

redemption is related to freeing the soul from samsara. The liberated soul is one not touched by earthly pains or pleasures. It finds its salvation or “moksha” with its union with the supreme being. How do you see the replication of the Hindu idea of redemption in the novel? Think.

In the novel, what follows is the search for a stable anchor of existence for Praneshacharya. His subsequent conduct was a journey towards true salvation. The journey motif comes into play at this intersection of the novel. Praneshacharya, bewildered and lost, undertook a journey destined to wherever his feet led him. Like this journey without a goal into the jungles, he desperately looked to the outside for stability and identity. It is an obvious reaction due to the fact that the very core of his own self had been defined for so long by the validation of the outside world. So far, his image of the self, his goal of life; all were defined by others, not by his own intentions and desires. So, after losing the identity, he again looked toward the outer world to find stability, instead of looking into his inner self. Praneshacharya's wanderings across the jungle led him to a host of confusing encounters contravening everything he had believed till the point. It was a puzzling journey that unsettled the soul into numbness. The centre point of his life was already lost. What followed was chaos all around. In the journey, Praneshacharya met a person named Putta who almost forcibly took him first to the Smarta Brahmin festival in Melige town, then to a prostitute. Praneshacharya, left to the devices of destiny, violated all the taboos and restrictions he had followed all life. He mixed with the crowd of the fair without maintaining the caste based restrictions. He drank tea in a tea stall, which was a taboo according to the food prohibition followed by high caste Brahmins and above all, he entered the sacred matha and partook in the traditional feast of the Smartha community, despite having been polluted by the corpse of Naranappa. The traditional belief of the orthodox priesthood in purity was turned upside down by

Praneshacharya's own act here. He polluted the matha by feasting there while a corpse was lying uncremated at his own agrahara. Praneshacharya, in his surrender to fate, violated every principle of Brahminhood; he had vouched for and fiercely protected during his life. As the cloak of shame and society was removed in this act of traveling by hiding identity, the restrictions imposed on the inner self fell apart. This only brings up the hollow reality of orthodox taboos that suffocates the self by repressing its true desires and longings. Hence, in this final journey through the jungle, Praneshacharya metaphorically freed himself from the shackles of orthodoxy that had imprisoned him by violating every principle of the system. It was a journey towards self-awakening. The final moment of self-awakening came into the fore when Praneshacharya faced the question of accepting the reality of his life. It occurred at the final moment of taking a decision, whether to return to the agraha to cremate the body of Naranappa by himself or to live a life of fugitive by evading responsibility for one's own life and actions. It is important to note that Praneshacharya came to this true salvation of the self at the moment of violating the orthodox beliefs, after "polluting" the matha by his feasting there. When he symbolically unshackled himself during this journey from the taboos that had captured his own persona for so long, he reached the point of realisation. The newly liberated self was better disposed to see for itself, to take charge of its own acts and life without looking towards the outer world. The redemption of the self lies in accepting responsibility for own acts and in embracing the true self. It can't be found in the outside world of moral doctrines, external adulation and respect, vainglorious rituals etc. Hence, Praneshacharya realised that his own redemption lay in providing the cremation to Naranappa's body by himself. As the head of the agrahara, it was his primary duty to act as the true leader of the community in difficult circumstances, in place of evading own responsibility to outside forces. His own salvation could be found in the act. It also symbolises the confession and acceptance of his own errors. It is an act of humbleness and repentance.

Stop to Consider:

Penance:

The concept of penance is also connected to the idea of sin in various religions. In simple terms, penance refers to repentance for any act which is considered bad or evil. One of the ways to free the self from sin is to express repentance and take corrective measures in religious theology. It calls for confession, asking for forgiveness and readiness to accept a penalty or other measures to compensate for the sin. The religious idea of penance is more about true realisation of the wrong done by the person than inflicting a punishment. In Hinduism, the concept of “Prayascitta” is found. Hindu religious texts like Vedas, Puranas, Aranyakas, epics etc. contain extensive reference to penance. In Hinduism, penance is central to “moksha” or salvation of the soul. The soul is to be liberated from all the misdeeds, errors it has committed knowingly or unknowingly. Ceremonies of yagna, vrat or fasting, pilgrimage, bath in holy rivers like Ganges, offerings to temples and gods etc. are necessary part of penance or “prayaschitta” for wrong acts or bad karma as recommended by Hindu theology. It is important to note that the Hindu concept of penance is not simply limited to intentional acts of a person. Bad karma or wrong deeds may be attained by the person even without his/her explicit knowledge. Negligence, failure to perform the duty one should do in direct or indirect events, bad karma of ancestors etc. too could result in sin for a person. In order to free the soul from the cycle of samsara, penance is to be observed in the Hindu worldviews.

In Indian philosophy, fire is considered as a purifying element. Through its flame, it extinguishes the corruption and decadence of the corporal body. The Hindu cremation by fire is the symbolic purgation of the soul from all traces of mortal sins. Thus, the soul is set free to its celestial journey towards the supreme spirit through cycles of birth. The author employs this symbolic value of fire and cremation in relation to the redemption of Praneshacharya from the corruption of his soul caused

by vanity. The cremation of Naranappa, to be given by Praneshacharya would free him too from his own inner corruption. It would purge him off his own self-deception and vanity in the name of doctrines. Naranappa, ironically, throughout his life, was not susceptible to vanity. He never denied his own inner desires, ills and sinful tendencies. In admitting and accepting his own shortcomings, Naranappa, despite all his sins, was not living a life of hypocrisy and irresponsibility. Unlike Praneshacharya having two lives; one that of an inner man of desire and the other of an outside life of an ascetic, Naranappa embraced his inner identity as a man of carnal desires. In this curious way, Naranappa was upholding the responsibility for his own actions. So, Praneshacharya's redemption was intrinsically linked to providing the cremation Samskara to Naranappa; the man of carnal desires. Thus, the death rituals or Samskara of Naranappa became the redemptive ceremony for both the persons. And in Praneshacharya's own redemption and realisation lay the redemption for the society to which he belongs; the decadent, orthodox social system. Praneshacharya's fall is a crushing judgement of that society as well. He symbolises the failed and innerly dying system of traditional Indian society. Through Praneshacharya's realisation and repentance, the author exhorts the traditional society to look into its own decomposing soul. Like Praneshacharya, the traditional orthodoxy's absolution is located only in accepting its inner corrosion and taking responsibility for it.

The author ingeniously designs the novel to its conclusions through his creative craftsmanship. As Praneshacharya was on the hidden journey towards self realisation, removed from the eyes of all the world, Naranappa's cremation had already taken place under the foresight of Chandri, with the help of Ahmed Badi. In the novel, Chandri's characteristic strength is placed in contrast to the feeble nature of the other high caste characters. The damp, forsaken scene of the agrahara during the days of Praneshacharya's long ordeal becomes apparent to the readers. It is the metaphorical scene of the inner corruption of the society of the time. As the agrahara was caught in a limbo about the corpse of Naranappa, the fate of the stagnant orthodox society was similar to it. Like the decomposing corpse of Naranappa

deteriorating every passing day, the society marred by superstition and conservative ideas, was also caught in a state of inevitable death. No progress and fresh ideas were visible in the society depicted here. Like Naranappa's house; forlorn, immersed in complete darkness, with vultures perched on the surrounding, the social structure ailed by superstition, ancient ideas, cruelty, exploitation was surrounded by a similar scenario of darkness. Naranappa's decaying body becomes the metaphor for the deterioration of religion, beliefs, customs etc. caused by the disease of blind orthodoxy. The plague due to which Naranappa had died, and which subsequently set into the agrahara was the final peril of such a state of existence. Evils of casteism, corruption, immorality, vanity, superstitions etc. had plagued the society of the time. The refusal to accept new ideas and shun corruption of social, religious doctrines had given birth to the worst of the tendencies in the traditional society described in the novel. The hollow characters of the novel are the symbolic creation of such a society. Durvasapura agrahara is a symbolic representation of the same decaying society marked by rigidity of belief. In such a state of existence, change and reforms are the utmost necessities for the survival of its inhabitants. And Chandri appears as that breadth of fresh air to the ailing, dying system. The characteristic strength of Chandri bears with it the same air. She is the agent of a new dawn in the middle of the stagnation portrayed. Though, at the end, Praneshacharya decided to give the cremation to Naranappa by himself, unbeknownst to him, Chandri had already cremated the body with the help of a poor muslim man, Ahmed Badi; another outcast to the supposedly "high" caste dominated society. He lived far away from the abode of the high caste Brahmins. In the traditional caste based society; the people outside the caste hierarchy are banished to the margins, away from the high castes. Like Chandri, Badi too lived an obscure life at his impoverished village on the outskirts of Durvasapura. However, when all the high caste Brahmins of the agrahara were clamouring for a decision, it was Ahmed Badi who unhesitatingly agreed to carry the body of Naranappa to the cremation ground in the middle of the night. His reasonings for doing the same is noteworthy. Badi agreed to do the most feared work for Chandri because Naranappa had helped him in the past. This brings forward the humanity and high morality of the outcasts

in contrast to the immoral squabbling of the Brahmins of the agrahara. While the premise of the caste based social discrimination is based on a belief that the higher ups of the echelon are people of higher quality and the lower classes are tainted by immorality, but, the author, in figures like Ahmed Badi, underlines the irrationality of such dogmatic beliefs. Humanity is often found in those who have been shunned as untouchables, lowly, "impure" etc. by the dogmatic society. In this context; the idea of "purity" is placed under scathing criticism in the novel. The gist of the caste structure of the traditional society hinges on the dichotomy of purity and impurity. The segregated nature of the various caste groups of the novel is reflective of the caste based social hierarchy and segregation which were prevalent in the Indian agrarian society for a long period. The higher castes; the higher Brahmins of Durvasapura's identity was crucially entangled with the preservation of its supposed "purity" of caste. In this system, the likes of Chandri, Ahmad Badi etc. were "impure" by birth. Hence, they were seen to be tattering on the margins of society. However, the author exposes the fallacies of this notion of "purity" by birth of the higher castes by his depiction of the utterly immoral, corrupt acts of the Brahmins of Durvasapura. In contrast, courage, leadership and morality can be seen in the actions of the supposedly "impure" low caste, untouchables such as Chandri, Ahmed Badi etc. Here, the underlying stress is on the idea that goodness and morality is not dependent upon the birth or social status of a person, but on a sense of inner compassion of the soul. A high birth, or a higher social rank won't ensure a morally upright character. Leadership, thoughtful action and morality can be found in the supposedly marginal sections of the society too. Any society that relies on irrationality, dogmatic beliefs and practices discrimination paves the way for its own inner ruination, as evident in the Madhva Brahmin society of the Durvasapura agrahara.

The Hindu death rites, known as "Antima Samskara", "Antya- Kriya" are part of the 16 major "Samskaras" or sacraments followed in Hindu tradition. In its basic connotation, samskara is a ceremonial process by which a person is made ready to move through different phases of life. In Hindu belief, it is a purifying ritual by which a person is cleansed from his bad karma or sins before embarking on his journey to different stages

of life. It is the rite for smooth passage to various stages of life. Samskaras are meant to perfect the essence of a person throughout his life and after his death. The death samskara or antima samskara are the Hindu Vedic rituals which are believed to be necessary to ensure the smooth sailing of the soul to its journey from the mortal body to the next phase. The soul of the departed person is cleansed from the sins and bad karmas of the mortal body in the sacred flames of the crematory pyre. It is a process of regeneration for the soul.

Check your Progress:

Q.1. Compare and contrast the characters of Naranappa and Praneshacharya. Do they represent two different streams of thoughts? If yes, how? (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.2. Critically evaluate the role of Chandri in the events of the novel. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.3. “Chandri represents a sense of protest against her marginalisation.” Explain. (about 450 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.4. The novel incorporates many concepts from Hindu theology and scriptures. Critically analyse those concepts with reference to events/ characters as mentioned in the novel. (about 450 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.5. “Praneshacharya's life is a life of contradiction and confusion.” Critically evaluate the statement. (about 450 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.6. How is caste reflected in the novel? Give a detailed answer with reference to the events of the novel. (about 450 words)

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q.7. How are modernity and traditional social systems intersecting into each other in the novel? Analyse. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.8. Assess the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* as a social document. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.9. Critically evaluate the representation of the social life of the agrahara of Durvasapura in the novel. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.10. Do you agree with the statement “U. R. Ananthamurthy gives a clarion call for reform in a superstitious society in *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*”? Substantiate your arguments in terms of the given statement. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.4 Summing Up:

In the novel, Ananthamurthy uses the Samskara of Naranappa as a call for regeneration of the society as a whole. In this way, Naranappa's body is not the mere corpse of an individual sinner, but an emblem of a society, a populace in decline and ruin. Just as the rites of passage of Naranappa would signify the purgation of his soul from all its sins, similarly, on a metaphorical level, the dogmatic and superstitious society needs to purge itself from its inner corruption, immorality and superstitions. Ananthamurthy gives a clarion call for the regeneration of Indian traditional society from its evils, superstitions and discrimination towards a better future.

2.5 References and Suggested Readings:

Gupta, R. K., and Priyalakshmi Gupta. "Towards a Concept of Indian Literature." *Indian Literature*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1982, pp. 28–55. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23331111>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Krishnaswami, Mallika, and U. R. Ananthamurthy. "U.R Ananthamurthy — A Man More Sinned Against Than Sinning?" *Indian Literature*, vol. 59, no. 6 (290), 2015, pp. 138–47. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44478645>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Kulkarni, Poornaprajna. "References of Epidemics in Twentieth Century Kannada Literature: Depictions of Bubonic Plague." *Indian Literature*, vol. 66, no. 1 (327), 2022, pp. 111–23. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27277199>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Satchidanandan, K. "The Critical Insider of U.R. Ananthamurthy's Many Battles." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 31–34. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753939>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Vaidyanathan, T. G. "Authority and Identity in India." *Daedalus*, vol. 118, no. 4, 1989, pp. 147–69. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20025268>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

UNIT - 3

U. R. Ananthamurthy: Samskara (Themes and Techniques)

Unit Structure:

- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Major Themes of the Novel
 - 3.3.1 Identity and Kinship
 - 3.3.2 Individualism
 - 3.3.3 Cremation
 - 3.3.4 The Role of the Women
- 3.4 Summing Up
- 3.5 References and Suggested Readings

3.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to–

- *enunciate* important themes and ideas of the novel,
- *highlight* the narrative techniques used in depicting the key themes,
- *analyse* the key themes of the novel in the context of Indian society,
- *develop* a nuanced understanding of U.R. Ananthamurthy's literary and social perspectives.

3.2 Introduction:

U. R. Ananthamurthy's novel, *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* is a multi-layered narrative. The novel dissects many complex issues of a rural agrarian Indian demography of the early 20th century; the days before attaining national freedom. It was the period of British raj in India. The wheels of modernity and education were yet to be turned.

The novel is centred around a typical rural region of Karnataka, inhabited by the traditional rural folks with their inherent social structure, beliefs, attitudes, superstitions etc. As the novel unravels the lives and society of a kannada speaking community of Karnataka living in the early twentieth century, it also portrays the life of the larger Indian nation of the time. Through the story of that particular region of Karnataka, we get a peep into the Indian society of the corresponding period. The author Ananthamurthy produced a social document in the novel; tersely portraying the society of the time and its state of existence without indulging in exaggeration or suppression of reality.

3.3 Major Themes of the Novel:

Some of the prominent themes of the novel can be highlighted as follows:

3.3.1 Identity and Kinship:

Identity and kinship are fundamental blocks of human society. Identity, in simple terms, refers to a sense of belonging of oneself to a particular group, region, belief etc. which one can call as one's 'own'. Some examples of identity are; Indian, British, Hindu, Muslim etc. The idea of kinship is related to the idea of identity. Kinship is the process or system in which a member of the group sees other members of the group as belonging to the same origin. It is a sense of bonding among the members of the same group.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. How do we identify ourselves as members of a particular group or culture in our daily lives?

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. How do the members of the agrahara in the novella are bound by a common identity?

.....
.....
.....

Stop to Consider

Agrarian society:

The term refers to societies based on agriculture as its primary means of livelihood. In a broader sense, these are pre- industrial rural settlements. Traditional norms, systems dominate such societies. The society described in the novel is an example of agrarian society.

Identity plays a complex role in the unfolding of the novel. The central focus of the novel is on the question of preservation and protection of a deep seated social identity of a group in the face of its interaction with external forces of modernity and social change. The traditional Indian Society is structured around certain strong identity groups in the forms of caste, religion, beliefs etc. The Brahmin agrahara of the novel, in which the plot develops, is a significant marker of identity of its inhabitants; all the Brahmin characters of the novel. The existence of the agrahara, as a piece of land given for the residence of the Brahmins; or a particular group of people is the earmarking of its inhabitants as a defined group with its own inner structure, ethos and by laws. It is a self-contained republic having its own system of governance and code of conduct. The members of the agrahara share certain common practices and contribute toward the agrahara or the community. In the novel, we see that each Brahmin follows the ritual fasting on the eleventh day of the moon or Ekdashi, and undergoes the daily ritual worship apart from the other pre-decided duties of the Madhva Brahmin community. The agrahara functions through the contribution of the individual members to the community. It is symbolised in the act of the Brahmins sharing the produce of their individual orchards with one another. Praneshacharya fills into the role of a patriarch or the community head of the agrahara. A fully functional system of an identity group is evident in this structure of the Brahmin agrahara of Durvasapura. In the Indian social system, identity structures are wide and complex. The Brahmin agrahara of Durvasapura is just one such instance of a micro identity.

Stop to Consider

Micro identity:

Micro identities are small identities or groups within a larger identity. A particular identity group includes a significant number of members under it. Within this larger pool of members, affinities among some form micro or smaller identities. These are closed groups within the larger unit. Sub castes of a caste reflect such micro identities. In the novel, if we consider Brahmin as a larger identity group, the Madhva or Smarta groups would form two distinct micro identities of the larger identity of Brahmin. How do you see the workings of such micro identities in the Durvasapura agrahara? Think.

The Indian traditional society is decentralised into thousands of such identities, one stems from a previous one. The Durvasapura agrahara is part of the Madhva branch of the larger Brahmin community. The character of Durgabhatta; a Smarta Brahmin residing in the Madhva dominated agrahara of Durvasapura is an "outsider" to the community despite his being only a fellow Brahmin. The novel minutely presents the demarcation of the Madhva and Smarta Brahmins. Durgabhatta identifies himself with the ethos of Smarta Brahmins. His ideas and viewpoints lean toward preserving and reflecting the superiority of his sect in the face of the Madhvas. Ananthamurthy's depiction highlights the hidden tension that exists between Durgabhatta and the Madhva residents of the agrahara. Parijatapura, the agrahara of the Smarta Brahmins, are seen as different or "other" or inferior by the Madhvas of Durvasapura. Thus, the society of the novel is fraught by the clashes of multiple identities; each fighting for the honour of his group. It is ironic that all these micro differences belong to the same larger identity; which is the identity of Brahmin.

Stop to Consider:

Outsider- insider narratives:

Outsider and insider narratives are two major markers of any narratives or viewpoints. Outsider is a person or narrator who is not a member of the society or group described or narrated. His views are based on observance as a third person, not having attributes of the group of people discussed. On the other hand, an insider is a person or narrator who is a member of the group or society he is narrating. So, his experience and observations are based on his own role as a participant in the events. Does Chandri's role in the context of the Brahmin agrahara fit as an Outsider's experience? Think.

This multi-layered nature of identity has its own boundaries and tensions; on every layer. On the top, the characters have the common identity marker such as being Brahmins. The ethos, culture, rules, rituals and ideology of this broad idea of Brahmin could be placed under the term Brahminism. The crisis of the novel arises from the attempts to preserve Brahminism; to maintain the purity of the Brahmins as a distinct group by not letting it be "contaminated" by external influences. Naranappa's corpse, despite all his supposedly "Unbrahminical" acts, was to be cremated only by a Brahmin as otherwise it would mean polluting the culture to which he belonged. This situation refers to the orthodox viewpoint that one can't free oneself from the identity to which one was born into. This idea was elucidated by Praneshacharya's belief that one can leave Brahminism, but Brahminism won't leave the person. It talks about the impossibility of erasing one's identity. Identity and culture are inalienable markers of an individual in human social existence. This is more prominent in traditional societies like India in which the sense of community is strong. The group identity; as belonging to a particular caste, culture, system etc. controls, directs the behaviour of the individual. The personal is superseded by the group identity. Hence, Naranappa, as an individual who defied all the mores of Brahminism is still considered as a Brahmin in his death. His cremation becomes a test of the identity of the community of the Madhva Brahmins of Durvasapura.

There were other groups vying for providing the cremation to Naranappa such as the Smarta Brahmins of Parijatapura, the farmers living in the vicinity of Durvasapura. However, the community identity's primacy over all the individual's vagaries of Naranappa, led to the unwillingness of the Madhvas to let others cremate the body. In this turning of the events, what we see is the preeminence of the collective identity over the individual preferences in the traditional Indian social system.

3.3.2 Individualism:

The theme of individualism is thoroughly examined in the novel. The individual in relation to the society and the community is a major focale of the novel. Naranappa, Praneshacharya, Chandri are the crucial figures in the intersection of society, tradition and change. Let's consider the individuality of Naranappa. The author provides some important references regarding Naranappa's Personality. From the outward view, Naranappa was the outcast of the society, the polluter of rituals, who defied morality, indulged in unabashed sexual pleasures, went to prostitutes, engaged in all forms of wickedness etc. He created a nuisance for the entire neighborhood. However, every human is a product of the environment and culture. As mentioned above, the community is an inalienable part of an individual in the traditional society. Naranappa was the creation of this social system. Ananthamurthy portrayed a society in decay. It was rotting from inside. Naranappa, in his drunken encounter with Praneshacharya listed the role of the agrahara, the society itself in corrupting his persona. Dasacharya's father had usurped the property of Naranappa's father. Later, Lakshmanacharya tied Naranappa to his wife's sister with ulterior motives. These instances lead us to the prior injustices that exist in the society, in the system in which one was born. Naranappa was born with a baggage of inequality and injustice. The community had already been deeply immersed in a state of decay and corruption. Brahmins had veered away from their original path of righteousness and solemn religious obligations. Peculiar was the lusts for property in Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya since Brahmins were liturgically seen as living a sober life. All the Brahmins of the agraha

had deviated from righteousness, truth and spirituality. In such a society; persona of Naranappa; already born with baggage, finds himself in quandary. The orthodoxy of the community hinders the means of self-expression for the individual. This state of psychological oppression is tersely depicted by Ananthamurthy in the description of the female by Praneshacharya in his Katha's. While Praneshacharya's religious recitals exhorted the beauty and sexuality of the mythical characters like Matsyagandha, Shakuntala etc., his listeners; the ordinary Brahmins were forced to adopt austerity in life. This orthodox and illogical suppression of self-expression is symbolic of the suppression of individuality. Naranappa was the rebel against this oppressive system of orthodoxy. He wished for the fullest manifestation of the individual self, the autonomy of the personal will, the free spirit of a persona; unfettered by all the dictums of an archaic social structure. We can look into some crucial hints provided by the author in this regard. Contrary to the dominant narration of Naranappa as aiming to destroy Brahminism in the agrahara using his polluting means, outside the agrahara, he was known as the patron of the theatre troupe. At one point, he was described as the person who introduced the Congress party to the villagers. Now, it is important to look into the implications of these two assertions. In the pre-independence period of Indian history, the Congress was playing the role of the agent of modernity and rising political consciousness in Indian society. Naranappa, in his act of bringing the Congress party to the villagers of Parijatapura, could be considered as the agent of a new awakening in society; struggling against the fundamentally feudalistic society of the time. His rebellious acts in defying the orthodoxy of caste were also a mark of defiance against the discriminatory social system. We may note that he was probably the only Brahmin character in the novel who didn't follow the normalised system of caste discrimination, untouchability and other social ills. He freely mixed with the Smarta Brahmins and the lower castes alike. Although his act of leaving the legitimate wife in favour of Chandri; the low caste prostitute, highlighted the patriarchal nature of the traditional society, his treatment of Chandri, at the same time, presents a different perspective. It displayed an

individual; even if faulty, who had pushed aside the prejudices of caste in living with a woman from the untouchable caste. In fact, the depiction of Chandri as a prostitute, and Naranappa accepting the outcast was a radical act within the conservative society to which he belonged. From such a radical Perspective, we may find Naranappa as the fullest individual; unfettered by the burden of tradition and community. The novel presents the clash between individuality and the collective in the forms of tradition, rules, faith etc.

Stop to Consider:

Individualism:

In simple terms, individualism is the belief in the uniqueness and independence of the individual person over other societal or cultural priorities. It recognises the importance of personhood against collective norms and necessities. Individualism is not necessarily an antithesis to collectivism and society. Rather, it stresses on the primacy of the autonomy of the individual against external norms, customs that stifle the personal. Individualism celebrates freedom, agency of a human being in taking his self-conscious decisions. How does individualism clash with social customs in the novel? Think.

If we look at Naranappa as the independent individual, living his personhood to the fullest, the persona of Praneshacharya gives the impression of a limbo or paradox. The normal, day to day personality caught in between the two. Praneshacharya's life was perplexed by the urges of the two sides; the inner self and the shackles of tradition or society. In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet's indecisiveness is the pinnacle of individual assertion and the burden of the outer world clashing with each other. Prince Hamlet hankered for the flowering of the individual persona. But, the tradition, society, rules, codes of conduct etc. are the double edge swords that are to be crossed to reach a full growth of the self. Individuality is moulded and controlled by the interests of the society. Tradition, religion, faiths, belief systems etc. which are

parts and parcels of life, are defined by the larger social interests. The frequent indoctrination of these interests to a person could produce a two-way impact on the manifestation of the individual agency. While, these traditions and systems, on one hand, maintain the equilibrium in society for the time being, and curtail the excesses of individual life, but, at different times, the excessive restrictions give birth to the loss of the individual being.

Praneshacharya's predicament was situated in the same context. The orthodoxy of the Madhva Brahminical priesthood reduced his personal agency to nothingness. He was caught in a limbo of rituals and elaborate theocratic system and the individual personhood facing one another. The central flaw of his personality was his indecisiveness. He suffered from a lack of grasp over his own mind, while appearing to be the "crest Jewel" of Vedanta in the Brahmin community of the agrahara. If we attempt to search for the origins of this inadequate self-understanding in Praneshacharya, it leads us to a deeper problem of religious and social practices. The social or community system in which a person participates, feeds him with doctrines and codes of social conduct. His personality is adapted towards the larger needs of the system. The community system must support itself by subsuming aspects of individuality to its own survival necessities. The individual is weakened, domiciled and subdued by the operation of the social system. In Praneshacharya, the same operation might be traced. Throughout the novel, we see him as the backbone of the agrahara. He carried the responsibility of the existence and purity of the agrahara with him. He was the conscience keeper of the Brahminism of the agrahara; maintenance of Brahminism's sanctity being a major concern of the problem of the cremation of the corpse. The readers are told that other Brahmins of Durvasapura had silently left their destined duties to the solemn personality of Praneshacharya and gradually sank into scandalous, corrupt, "non brahmanical" acts and pleasures. It gives us the impression that if not for Praneshacharya's penance and religiosity, the Brahminism of the agrahara had already been non-existent for a long time. The lives of Garudacharya, Lakshmanacharya, Dasacharya,

Durga Bhatta etc. were instances of digression from the duties and roles given to them by the social system in which they had been born. Here, as Praneshacharya took his role as the head of the agrahara, the existence of the letter was fully dependent on him. In the process, the agrahara and its puritanical priesthood system subsumed the individuality of Praneshacharya for its own existence. From his early childhood desire to become a “sanyasi” in future to his marrying an invalid as a form of penance, his life was nothing but that of a dummy for the maintenance of the system of the priesthood. We can go into the implication of the concept of “Sanyash” and renunciation in this context. In the traditional Indian theology, “Sanyash” or renunciation is the surrendering of all personal attachments and ambitions. It is, in a way, the dismantling of the individual self for a greater purpose of spirituality. In the Hindu religious thought, “Sanyash” is recommended in isolation, in jungles or caves as it is not to be co-mingled with the responsibilities of homely life and society. However, in Praneshacharya's childhood yearning for renunciation and yet his later act of marriage and heading the agrahara indicate toward a fateful juxtaposition of “sanyash” and the attachment. He was attached to the system of priesthood. At the same time, he didn't renunciate his individuality to the fullest extent. He attempted to be free of sexuality but he craved the glory and fame of scholarship, which was nothing but just another form of addiction. The ironic use of the term "crest Jewel of Vedanta" is indicative in this respect. As evident, this situation of living in the middle, without completely leaving one realm for the other, led to his indecisive nature. It created the lack of fully developed individuality in his nature. Hence, with the slightest enticement of bodily pleasure; his forced subduing of the impulses burst open in the act of love making with Chandri.

However, the digression of Praneshacharya doesn't require it to be seen as a negative act. We may critically look into the background that finally resulted in the precarious moment in the forests with Chandri. A long suppressed individuality or the inner urge by the demands of the orthodox system of priesthood found its ability to come out of the shackles on its weakest moment. The surrounding environment preceding

the act is important in this regard. Praneshacharya meditating in the isolated temple, amidst the jungle, away from the agrahara and all natural human settlements, was symbolic of the distance from the controlled system of the community. He was away from the clutches of priestly burdens and requirements in those moments. In the jungle, in the Maruti temple, he stood closest to his inner persona, far away from the requirements and duties of the outward cloak of a religious scholar. That was the moment of self-expression, that was the lowest ebb for the system which had castigated and subdued him since his childhood. At such a critical point of individual agency, it was natural to see him surrendering to the urges of his sexuality. In the act of falling for Chandri, he unconsciously resurrected his individual freedom. It was the subtle manifestation of the rebellious self against its subduing by the externally imposed system of society and community. By the act, Praneshacharya, even for the moment, asserted his personhood. Here, Praneshacharya and Naranappa became one in their assertion of individual self against the mechanism of a giant system symbolised by the Priesthood. Naranappa, too rebelled against the orthodox repression forced on individuality by the collective requirements of Brahminism through his lifelong deviation from it. At this point, we can see that all the Brahmins of the agrahara unconsciously rebelled against the orthodox system by their acts of indulgence. If Naranappa represented the extremes of this rebellion, leading himself astray on a path of self-destruction, other Brahmins of the agrahara were awe struck beings, unable to foster a balanced way out of this limbo of existence. Praneshacharya's dazed ramblings after the act in the jungle at first and then at the Melige matha's festival are suggestive of this inability to liberate the self, which was caught in the middle. This is the very essence of liberation or passage of the soul searched in the novel.

3.3.3 Cremation:

The cremation is metaphorical and symbolic in nature. The title *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man* presents a layered connotation about its subject matter. In the Hindu spiritual tradition, Samskara or

rites of passage conducted for a dead person is necessary for the liberation of the soul. Hindu theology believes in the immortality of the soul, the body may collapse, but the soul can neither be created nor destroyed. It is eternal. The soul of any living being, travels through a cycle of birth and rebirth before its final union with the “Brahman” or the Godhead. Vedantic philosophy stresses on this principle of transmigration of the soul through times and phases before the final liberation. The final liberation of the soul is achieved when it passes beyond this cycle of births to its ultimate union with the godhead or the supreme consciousness or the “Brahman”. The Hindu ceremonies surrounding the cremation of the dead are essential to attain the liberation of the soul of the departed. These are the rites of passage to the realm of liberation in Hindu theology. The novelist employs the theme of liberation in depth. At the level of the plot, liberation or the passage of the carnal soul of Naranappa to redemption is the central concern of the novel. Naranappa indulged in multiple affronts to the religious doctrine in his lifetime. He humiliated seers, religious principles, tradition etc. His act of fishing in the temple pond, against its revered status as the abode of lord Ganesh, was representative of his defiance of the scriptures and gods. The agrahara community, however atrocious were his acts, was still in favour of providing the traditional rites of passage to the soul of Naranappa. Here, we may look into the reasoning of this act of benevolence shown by the Madhva sect. This act is rooted in the Indian philosophical view of associating the liberation of the soul with forgiveness; a belief ingrained in the socio-cultural tradition of Indian society. The Hindu spirituality talks about the incorruptibility of the soul; the body may get corrupted, indulge in carnal acts, injustice, lusts, but the soul is pure in its eternal essence. Hence, the god fearing traditional community of the agrahara and its surrounding area of Parijatapura were perplexed by the prospect of not providing the cremation samskara to the soul of Naranappa. The living persona of Naranappa and the captured soul of his corpse were differentiated from one another by the community. Despite his sins, not providing the rituals of liberation to the soul of Naranappa would amount to a violation of the philosophical doctrine of

the Hindu religious traditions. This ordeal reflects the Indian philosophical views on the liberation of the soul and its relation to the mortal body.

The liberation of the soul is not simply limited to the religious connotations in the novel. The idea of redemption of Naranappa's soul was closely linked to the social existence of the agrahara community. In the novel, the idea of redemption or liberation is depicted as a socially transformative power against an unjust, decadent society. For author Ananthamurthy, personal liberation shapes into a collective effort towards progress and justice in society. Any social or political system would find itself in a stage of stagnation and immobility if it falls into the pits of orthodoxy. The guiding light of a progressive society is its mobility. Mobility is the willingness to change oneself according to the varying requirements of time. Any refusal to adapt according to the changing and evolving demands of time results in corruption and inner ruin of a society or a culture. The state of the society reflected in the novel was plunged by similar crises. It was submerged by a stage of stagnation and immobility owing to the hollow orthodoxy of rules and beliefs lacking any true essence. While Naranappa was deep into moral corruption, other characters were also equally corrupted from within. What Narappa did in open view, was done by other god fearing members of the agrahara in secrecy. Early in the novel, we see references of Durgabhatta lasciviously looking at the just widowed wife of Naranappa. Garudacharya and Lakshmanacharya's unprincipled attempts to grab the properties of Naranappa were plain instances of inner hideousness of the society; that took roots due to the clutches of the archaic system of orthodox priesthood. In this context, such a system; weakened from within, would inevitably collapse in the face of an extraordinary point of crisis. Naranappa's death and the following predicament here filled the role of the extraordinary pressure point for reform to the archaic system of society. It shook the core of the dying society of the agrahara and reminded it of its inner decadence, its deviations from justice and righteousness. The death of Naranappa forced the members of the rotting society to look into itself. Naranappa, in his death became the conscience keeper of the agrahara unknowingly. The descriptions of the vultures

perched on the rooftop and the plague disease take a symbolic proportion at this point. As vultures gather to scavenge on dying carcasses, the system of orthodoxy, closed to all possibilities of change and reforms, had turned the society into a state similar to death. The plague that had killed Naranappa and others was not simply a physical disease. It was also the plague of socio- cultural evils, superstitions, discrimination, hypocrisy etc. that had weakened the contemporary Indian society. The redemption or liberation from this system could be found only by looking within, into the inner mechanism of the society, individuality alike and the collective readiness to reform the two spheres from inside. Praneshacharya's final decision to walk back to the agrahara to publicly admit his corruption was the recognition of the system's decadence and willingness to reform it from within. In that spirit of admitting and subsequent willingness to reform the inner core, the redemption of the society as a whole could be found. Naranappa's death and the way it pans out provided the anchor for the liberation of the self and the society described in the novel. The self and the society's liberation from stagnation, orthodoxy and consequent depravity could be achieved by the means of taking responsibility for the past wrongs and reforming it afterwards. This is the view of social redemption we find in the novel.

Stop to Consider:

Orthodox belief:

Orthodoxy, in simple terms, refers to conformist adherence to a religion, culture, philosophy etc. It is the acceptance of traditional views according to the set doctrine. Orthodox beliefs follow a hardline espousal of the doctrine as set by its core texts and culture. Orthodox views are opposed to any reformation or change to the set notions. It stresses on strict continuance of the tradition. Orthodox belief rejects emerging circumstances, change of times, new realities etc. in following the set doctrine. In the novel, the strict caste norms of the agrahara are instances of such orthodoxy. What are some other instances of orthodox customs shown in the novel?

3.3.4 The Role of the Women:

The role of the female in the traditional Indian society of the time is another prominent aspect of the novel. Ananthamurthy explores femininity in a vivid manner across the novel. Femininity recurs in the thematic and philosophical underpinnings of the novel. On the thematic and technical level, we see the position of women in the society of the time unfolding in the novel. The traditional Indian agrarian society, we see in the novel, is a patriarchal set up in its nature. Women figures are excluded from the decision making roles in the society illustrated in the novel. The agrahara and the other surrounding societies described in the novel are predominantly man's world, in congruence with the corresponding era of Indian society. There is a silencing of much of the female voices by the patriarchs of the agrahara in the major events of the novel. In the very beginning, one can see the subservient positioning of the females in the huddles over the death of Naranappa. Garudacharya cursed his wife for participating in the conversation going on between the males about the course to be taken. The high caste's Brahmin women were mostly confined to their homes across the novel. In the first discussion in the agrahara, just after the death of Naranappa, the males were on the courtyard talking to each other, while we see the females standing on their doorsteps only as the inactive listeners to the talks. The confinement to the walls of the home here we see is metaphorical of the position of the female in the orthodox rural society of the time as well. A significant aspect here to be noted is the discarded wife of Naranappa. She is the symbol of commodification of the female in the patriarchal social structure. On one hand, Naranappa discarded her for Chandri; a blatant display of the denial of equality to the female. On the other hand, the prior act of Lakshmanacharya to marry her off to Naranappa in order to subjugate the letter also tells of the commodification of the female. Her personhood was denied; she was merely used as a prop for one or other purposes. This objectification of the female gender was glaring in Praneshacharya's act of marrying an invalid. Praneshacharya married her not out of real compassion and love, but as a penance to be obtained for his own spiritual growth. She was a mere tool for Praneshacharya in the process of his

own religious journey. There was no love in the relationship between the two; for Praneshacharya, it was his ego that prompted his uninterrupted care for his ailing wife. Praneshacharya, enamoured by his own charm, found himself in the midst of a battle with his own self. It was to deny the existence of his own passion, instinct and desires in his persona. If he let himself to recognise his own inner self as a mortal being with human desires, his self-image and artificial identity of a devout scholar would crash into nothingness. Here, Bhagirathi, his ailing wife was used by him as a shield to nurture his own self-image of an ascetic. Hence, we see that once his own self-image had been broken down with the love making in the forest, Praneshacharya's care and dedication to his wife vanished and she died shortly. Praneshacharya's treatment of his wife is an account of the objectification of the female for the whims of doctrinal purity, something often seen in societies marred by religious dogma and superstitions.

Stop to Consider:

Objectification:

Objectification is the act of using a human being as a mere object or tool without an independent personhood. It is the denial of human subjectivity to a person. The objectified person loses his uniqueness as a free being. Instead, he is used as an object to fulfill some other purposes. In the novel, Bhagirathi, Praneshacharya's invalid wife is an instance of objectification of a female. Here, her personhood is denied because Praneshacharya used her as a mere tool to fulfill his own motif. In traditional societies, such objectification of females, lower classes are commonly seen across the world. Females, in a patriarchal society are objectified to fulfill male's desires and power. Against such objectification of women, feminist movements have developed in various corners of the world. The objectified person loses his/ her respect, equality and ability to make their own decisions. Instead, their individual rights are suppressed by the dominant sections. Their freedom as a human being is lost in the process. How does the objectification of women in traditional Indian society is reflected in the novel? Think.

Here we see the thematic positioning of the female as marginalised being in the novel and the social structure it documents. It is the representation of a time dominated by patriarchal social culture. The contours of the conservative society of the novel is inherently patriarchal. The author, through this portrayal of the female figures in the novel, is able to highlight the social structure of the traditional Indian agrarian society marked by patriarchal thinking. In the philosophical core of the novel, the author puts forth his criticism of this state of the society. Chandri's figure stands out as a major anchor of the feminine agency and strength in the novel. The name Chandri is related to the Sanskrit noun "Chandra"; the moon, or the light. As a name; "Chandra" in most Indian languages refers to light, brightness etc. Chandri is the feminine version of "Chandra" or the light, brightness. Hence, we may consider the name Chandri as a metaphor for one who brings brightness, distills light. An analysis of the role of Chandri over the scheme of things depicted in the novel is essential to understand the feminist perspective of the author. The author strikingly refers to a prominent female character of Indian mythology; Matsyagandha or Satyavati. Matsyagandha or Satyavati, is a strong female character in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Born to a fisherman; perceived as a lower caste in the caste hierarchy, she, by turn of events, mothered the progeny who would become the major figures of the Mahabharata epic later. Matsyagandha asserts the strength and power of femininity in transforming society forever. In the novel's events, the same feminine principles and strength leads to a regeneration of the society depicted. Chandri's two acts are of high importance; the first is the offering of her jewellery for the cremation of Naranappa's corpse. This act can be seen as the tipping point for the subsequent events. Till this offering of her jewels, the male assembly was strutting across uncertainties and lack of decision regarding what to do with the corpse. Against the backdrop of the visible indecision of the males, her action provided a central arch around which their thoughts proceeded afterwards. Similar to Matsyagandha's exchange of a promise from king Shantanu in Mahabharata to make her offspring his inheritors, here too, Chandri's act set off the debate and events of the novel. In contrast to

the indecisive male figures, Chandri ushered in swift action to the aghara. The other act of feminine power was her conscious decision of engaging in physical love with Praneshacharya, of enticing him consciously, on her own will. This act, if we note her own willingness to seduce Praneshacharya in the jungle, carried with it multiple significance. In a society where the female was silenced, she asserted her personhood through this act. It was the assertion of femininity; it was regenerative power in the sense that the act had shattered the long held male ego of Praneshacharya. The single act exposed the capricious nature of Praneshacharya's long held prejudiced male identity, his vanity of penance. In this breakdown of Praneshacharya's vanity, the associated hollowness of the system or society of his compatriots also came into light. The feminine principle acted as the force of change upon the inert, passive and closed society of the time. The author takes a liberal position of celebrating the feminine principle and power that transcends from the mythological characters of Matsyagandha to Chandri. While the traditional outlook is to castigate any instance of females transgressing their gender assigned role as immoral or debauched, the novelist doesn't do so. Instead, Chandri, the outcast, is celebrated and elevated as the precursor of change and regeneration to the stagnant traditional society. In a noteworthy manner, the author presents Chandri, right after the act in the jungle; that she is Matsyagandha, one with fragrance, one who can't be subdued. Sexuality and regeneration become connected to one another here. The act of physical pleasure is not necessarily immoral in its nature. It is, in fact, the energy of creation or regeneration. Through the act of Chandri in the jungle, Praneshacharya was regenerated from his self-created prison of pride and vanity. The feminine principle arises victorious and with full glory in the process. To bear witness to this emanation of the feminine power, we see Chandri as the final resolver of the crisis. Despite all long stretched mediations, visits, arrangements; it is Chandri who ultimately cremated Naranappa in the middle of night, with a show of her decisiveness and grit. As she set forth the movements with the earlier act of offering her jewels, she herself put an end to the dizzy inertia of the male characters by cremating Naranappa. From the

beginning to end, she was the manifestation of strength and movements and action. She was the crystallization of feminine force and guts that loom large over the happenings of the novel. The female energy is the redemptive force which pervades across the novel.

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. Discuss the major themes of the novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. How kinship, identity and casteism blend together in the social lives of various characters of the novel? Give a detailed answer. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.3. Critically evaluate the theme of identity in various aspects of the novel *Samskara*.

Give your assessment of the society described in the novel. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.4. Discuss the representation of the theme of redemption in the novel. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.5. Critically analyse the theme of liberation in the novel. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.6. Critically assess the position of the female in the society described in the novel. Give reference to various female characters of the novel. (about 400 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.7. "Samskara is a portrayal of individuals and society in a complex relationship." Give your views on this statement. (about 350 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.8. Compare and contrast the characters of Chandri and Praneshacharya. (about 350 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.9. Give your assessment of Ananthamurthy's use of various symbols in the novel. (about 400 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.10. Analyse "Samskara" or cremation as metaphor with reference to the novel. (about 350 words)

.....
.....
.....

3.4 Summing Up:

As seen here, the novel brings out a varied number of themes relevant to Indian society. These are pertinent issues of the present India too. The representation of these crucial ideas through the deft characterisation, plotting and use of various inventive literary devices are markers of Ananthamurthy's mastery. It is often seen, while producing a social novel, the literary finesse is often lost to the socio- political angle, which turns

the work into a mere treatise on society. However, in *Samskara*, the refinement and sublimity of literature are prevalent all along. Ananthamurthy represented the social undertone through adept use of literary techniques and devices. The major instance of this was his use of scriptures, myths, legends, gods of Hinduism in shaping the story. Characters of the Mahabharata like; Matshyagandha, God Maruti, Puranas, Upanishads etc. were subtly utilised to delineate the plot subtly. Use of metaphors, symbols, anecdotes, psychological depiction of the characters are some major features of Ananthamurthy's narrative technique. Characters like Praneshacharya, Chandri were developed with an eye towards their inner minds. They were good studies of human minds in diverse circumstances. Use of irony and humour enhances the literariness of the work to a great extent. In summation, all characters, events and actions were fine manifestations of a society and its myriad ways and manners. Ananthamurthy turned the novel into a grand metaphor of a specific period of Indian society with all of its inner nuances.

3.5 References and Suggested Readings:

Aithal, S. Krishnamoorthy. "Of Culture And Cadaver: Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*." *Journal Of South Asian Literature*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1981, pp. 83–88. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40873687>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Guru, Gopal. "Archaeology of Untouchability." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 44, no. 37, 2009, pp. 49–56. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663543>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Misra, Nirja, et al. "Sanskara: Three Critics on Anantha Murthy's Novel." *Indian Literature*, vol. 25, no. 5, 1982, pp. 98–122. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23331116>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Mishra, Yashodhara. "[Editorial]." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 6–7. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753927>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Rao, Ajay. "Allegorical Features of Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' and Ananthamurthy's Samskara." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1/2, 1995, pp. 194–211. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40873585>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Satchidanandan, K. "The Critical Insider of U.R. Ananthamurthy's Many Battles." *Indian Literature*, vol. 58, no. 5 (283), 2014, pp. 31–34. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44753939>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Pandya, Indubala. "Anantha Murthy's 'Samskara': A Novel of Complex Structure and Narrative Technique." *Indian Literature*, vol. 30, no. 3 (119), 1987, pp. 135–46. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23337934>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024.

Willford, Andrew C. "The Kannada Movement and Tamil Revival." *The Future of Bangalore's Cosmopolitan Pasts: Civility and Difference in a Global City*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2018, pp. 45–67. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvsrhfj.7>. Accessed 24 Mar. 2024

UNIT - 4

Amitav Ghosh: In an Antique Land (Introducing the Author)

Unit Structure:

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 About the Author
- 4.4 Some Significant Works by Ghosh: An Overview
- 4.5 Summing Up
- 4.6 References and Suggested Readings

4.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to–

- *learn* about the author,
- *understand* the basic features of his works,
- *know* the literary contributions of the author,
- *analyse* the content and style of Ghosh’s works.

4.2 Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most renowned and celebrated Indian writers whose pioneering works have been an immense contribution in the field of Indian academia and literature. His literary works, both fiction and non-fiction, uses complex narrative strategies to explore and highlight certain intricate subject-matters from personal to global concerns. A wide range of his literary work deals with historical places and settings, with references to actual events that occurred in the contemporary time described in it or some past occurrences. His works also often revolves around areas that geologically encompasses or includes water bodies such as the periphery of the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the connecting regions. His writings discuss multifarious themes of travel, diaspora, identity, history, memory, love, relationship, political

conflicts, communal violence, and many more. He also meticulously explores the Bengali and South Asian culture in his works while frequently referring to places in and around Calcutta, his birth place, encompassing the rural, suburbs and mainland Bengal. Amitav Ghosh also did significant work towards spreading awareness regarding the environmental degradation and climate crisis through his literary endeavours.

4.3 About the Author:

Amitav Ghosh was born on 11th July, 1956 in Calcutta, India. His father was a diplomat and thus, Ghosh's growing years span across different places in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He received formal education in Doon School in Dehradun where he met his contemporaries like Vikram Seth and Ram Guha. His literary venture began early during his school days. He regularly wrote fiction and poetry in *The Doon School Weekly*. He also co-founded the magazine, *History Times*, along with Ram Guha. He received honorary degrees from St Stephen's College, Delhi University, and also Delhi School of Economics. He pursued D. Phil in Social Anthropology at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford University, under the supervision of Peter Lienhardt, a British anthropologist. His thesis, entitled *Kinship in relation to economic and social organization in an Egyptian village community* was completed in 1982.

Amitav Ghosh was honoured with the Padma Shri Award by the Government of India in 2007 for his contribution to art and literature. He was also elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2009. Ghosh was denominated a Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellow in 2015. He was a coherent member of the academia while he taught in the various institutions including Delhi University, the American University, Columbia University, Queens College, among others. Ghosh was the first Indian writer in English to be honoured with the Jnanpith Award, India's most prestigious literary award, in 2018.

SAQ:

Q.1. In which year was Amitav Ghosh awarded the Padma Shri Award and by whom?

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. When was Amitav Ghosh awarded the Jnanpith Award?

.....
.....
.....

4.4 Some Significant Works by Ghosh: An Overview:

Amitav Ghosh produced a miscellaneous number of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, that were internationally acclaimed and appreciated as well as recognized as significant literary contribution nationwide. Let us discuss some of his works in brief:

- ***The Circle of Reason (1986)***

Amitav Ghosh’s literary journey and his career as a novelist began with *The Circle of Reason*, published in 1986. The narrative follows the adventurous story of a young Indian man, Alu, who is suspected and falsely accused of being a terrorist. Alu is a young weaver, who as an orphan, came to live with his uncle, Balaram, in a small Bengali village of Lalpukar, within a close vicinity of the Indo-Bangladesh border. As a young boy, Alu learnt weaving, working as his uncle’s apprentice and soon becomes a master in his craft. Ghosh’s debut novel takes his readers on a magical adventure as the protagonist embarks on a journey leaving behind his home and homeland unto unknown territories. He travels through Bombay to the Persian Gulf to North Africa, with a bird-loving policeman, Jyoti Das, in pursuit. The novel is a postcolonial narrative that blends the literary elements of a fable and picaresque fiction and follows a non-linear structure. The novel, *The Circle of Reason*, won the Prix Medicis Étrangère Award, a French literary award, in 1990.

- ***The Shadow Lines (1988)***

The novel *The Shadow Lines*, by Amitav Ghosh was published in 1988 and is set against the backdrop of British Raj in India. The novel does not follow a linear pattern of conventional story-telling but rather intricately builds a web of memories and flashbacks as it brings together people of different time and events. The novel constitutes two parts- “Going Away” and “Coming In”. The first part of the novel, “Going Away”, primarily highlights the narrator’s relationship with his grandmother, Thamma, his cousin, Tridib, and the daughter of an Indian diplomat, Ila. The second section, “Coming In”, is basically the narrator’s remembering and relating the story of the past of the lives of his family members in Calcutta. The narrative is bildungsroman in that it portrays the life and experiences of a young boy, his life in India, and later his growing years in London. The novel highlights historical events like the Swadeshi Movement, Communal riots of 1963-64 in Dhaka and Calcutta, Second World War, and the Partition of India. The novel constantly dwindles back and forth as the protagonist reminisces the bygone time and his family and friends whose lives intersected during a series of partition riots in Calcutta and Pakistan in 1963 and 1964. Amitav Ghosh was honoured with the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1989 for the novel, *The Shadow Lines*.

- ***The Calcutta Chromosome (1995)***

The novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, by Amitav Ghosh is a quasi-science fiction narrative set in a futuristic world. The plot of the narrative chronicles the life of Sir Ronald Ross, the scientist who won the Noble Prize for his breakthrough contribution on the research on malaria in 1989. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh attempts to narrate the tale of Ronald Ross’s discovery of malarial parasite on 20th August, 1897, drawing upon Ross’s *Memoirs* (1923), while fabricating a fictional storyline with imaginary characters of his own. The book is a medical thriller, set in Calcutta and New York at an unspecified futuristic time, and follows the protagonist, Antar’s attempt to unravel the mysterious disappearance of one of his New York based colleague, Murugan, in Calcutta. The novel is a post-modern narrative that is intrinsically narrated

through the interplay of a distant past and the impending future. A series of micro-narratives culminates to form the master narrative through a complex web of memory, mythical beliefs, and scientific inferences. The Hindu philosophical concept of Mauna or silence is one of the major themes that represent a kind of unattainable experience that transcends the level of words, speech or language. Ghosh leaves the novel somewhat open-ended for the reader's own understanding and interpretation. The novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, was awarded the Arthur C Clarke Award in 1997.

- ***The Glass Palace (2000)***

The Glass Palace is an epic historical novel by Amitav Ghosh, set across India, Myanmar and Malaysia and spans from the mid nineteenth century up to the twentieth century. The novel chronicles historical events like the third Anglo-Burmese War, the consequent fall of the Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay, and the Second World War. The title of the novel is derived from *Glass Palace Chronicle*, an old Burmese historical narrative composed during the reign of King Bagyidaw in 1829. The novel comprises of seven parts- namely, "Mandalay", "Ratnagiri", "The Money Tree", "The Wedding", "Morningside", "The Front", and "The Glass Palace". The narrative begins in Burma with an eleven years old protagonist, Rajkumar, in the city of Mandalaya, at the backdrop of the Third Anglo-Burmese War. He was looking for Ma Cho, the woman he worked for, when he encounters Dolly, a young attendant of the Burmese princesses, and instantly falls in love with her. However, soon the Royal family was extradited by the British and forced to leave the glass palace and Dolly too leaves. The novel explores themes of identity, exile, belongingness, migration, political turmoil, love, and loss, as the characters grapple with complexities regarding their nationality and cultural heritage surrounded by the ruthless horrors of British colonialism and capitalist exploitation. *The Glass Palace* is a poignant portrayal of human emotions, and values like bravery and resilience during crisis, across time and space. The novel highlights certain crucial aspects of the economic landscape of Burma during the colonial period and the catastrophic effects of WWII on the nation as the society was trying to

cope with the new wave of modernity. *The Glass Palace* won the Eurasian regional “Best Book” award in the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize but Ghosh withdrew from it. The book also won the Frankfurt eBook Award and the New York Notable Books Award in 2001. It was also the winner of the Grand Prize of Fiction. The novel was translated into over 25 languages. The Burmese translation was done by writer Nay Win Myint that won the Myanmar National Literature Award in 2012.

- ***The Hungry Tide* (2004)**

The Hungry Tide is the fourth novel by Amitav Ghosh, set in the little islands of Sundarbans that lies off the eastern coast of India, in the Bay of Bengal. The narrative explores the protagonist’s quest to find the rare Irrawaddy dolphins. Piyali Roy, a young marine biologist of Bengali descent was raised in Seattle and hence, identifies herself as an American. She was academically engaged with the Scripps Institute of Oceanography, in La Jolla. She travels to the Sunderbans in search of a rare endangered species of dolphins, *Orcaella brevirostris*. The novel highlights the precarious life of the dwellers as they struggle with the ever-present natural disasters alongside socio-political unrest in the region. The human-animal conflict forms a major surviving challenge as the ferocious tiger attacks are common in the area. The tidal flood is another common catastrophe which the people residing in and around those little islands face, often leaving the land devastated. The constant threat of eviction was another fuelling crisis for the settlers which date back to the Morichjhanpi massacre of 1978–79, when the government forcefully evicted thousands of Bengali refugees from the island. The novel won the Hutch Crossword Book Award for Fiction in 2004.

Stop to Consider:

Morichjhanpi Massacre:

The Marichjhapi massacre refers to the forceful displacement of Bengali Hindu Dalit refugees from the Marichjhapi island in the Sundarbans, West Bengal. This eviction led to the brutal massacre

of the Hindu Dalit refugees who settled on the legally protected reserve forest land on Marichjhapi islands. Approximately dated from 24th January to 18th May, the year, 1979, marks the horrific annihilation of several hundreds of men, women, and children. The aftermath of the massacre led to a rise in the death toll of the evicted refugees due to starvation and diseases.

- ***The Ibis Trilogy (2004)***

The Ibis Trilogy by Amitav Ghosh constitutes three works of historical fiction that recounts the trade of opium between India and China and the trafficking of girmitiyas or indentured labourers across the Indo-China borders. *The Ibis Trilogy* is set at the backdrop of the opium trade in China that caused widespread addiction in the country. The trilogy falls under the genre of post-colonial literature where Ghosh uses the opium trade as a narrative device to explore the historical legacy of the colonial era and the everyday life of people under British colonialism. The text presents how the opium trade and the role of indentured labour affected the country's economic and political scenario under the British. The three novels in this trilogy are- *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). The trilogy is patterned in the form of a nonlinear narrative or disrupted narrative.

The first volume of the *Ibis Trilogy*, *Sea of Poppies*, is set on the banks of the river Ganges, in Calcutta, prior to the First Opium War. In the novel, river Ganga is compared to the Egyptian river Nile. Ghosh portrays his characters as the seeds of poppy emanating in large numbers to form a sea with every single seed heading towards an uncertain future. *The Sea of Poppies* bagged the Vodafone Crossword Book Award for Fiction in 2008. The novel was shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize. In the same year, it also won the British Book Design and Production Award. In the year, 2009, the novel won the Indiaplaza Golden Quill Award for best novel and Indiaplaza Golden Quill Popular Vote Award. It was also awarded the very prestigious Tagore Literature Award, by Sahitya Akademi in 2012.

The second volume of the trilogy, *River of Smoke*, continues from the previous novel, *Sea of Poppies*, where the group of people travelling in the Ibis were caught in a storm and eventually ended up in Mauritius, but with a lesser number of passengers. The novel is set in the Fanqui town of China, which functions as the meeting point for foreign traders and the Chinese locals for trading purpose, a year before the start of the First Opium War. The novel functions as accumulation of characters from different cultural and geographical background with a common interest for trade with China. The novel was shortlisted for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2011. It was also longlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in the same year. The novel was further shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature in the year 2013.

The final volume *Flood of Fire*, follows from the previous two volumes and the story continues from 1839 up to 1841. After a series of events, the characters find themselves amidst the First Opium War. The novel was shortlisted for The Hindu Literary Prize. It was awarded the Crossword Book Jury Award in Fiction in 2015.

- ***Gun Island (2019)***

The novel, *Gun Island*, is the latest novel by Amitav Ghosh. The narrative foregrounds some pressing environmental issues like climate change and pollution of water bodies from chemical waste from factories. The novel pursues similar cross-cultural designs perceptible in his preceding works. He explores themes such as diaspora and migration and illustrates a colourful, mysterious world of animals and sea creatures. The novel chronicles the quest of the protagonist, Deen, a scholar and book collector, who returns to the Sunderbans from New York to unveil the mysterious, seventeenth century legend of the Gun-Merchant or the Bonduki Sadagar. The novel sheds light on the history of old Venice, anciently named as Al-Bunduqevya which means guns. This led Deen to conclude that Bonduki Sadagar may not have necessarily meant a Gun Merchant but actually a Merchant from Venice. He travels to Venice for further research on the Gun Merchant where he consequently discovers many Bangladeshis being employed as illegal migrant labour. Their troublesome journey across the Middle-East

and Africa and the militant opposition to their existence in the city by the Italian authorities forms a major part of the novel in stark contrast to the Gun Merchant's past peaceful and prosperous journey to Venice. There is a diverse presence of strong women characters in the novel. The novel, in a way, can be seen as a continuing narrative of one of Ghosh's earlier novel, *The Hungry Tide*, in that Piyali Roy, the cetologist who goes to Sunderbans for her quest for the rare Irrawaddy dolphins in the *The Hungry Tide* reappears as a hopeful romantic partner for Deen in *Gun Island*. Lubna, herself a Bangladeshi immigrant, is a significant woman character who worked for the cause of illegal immigrants in the novel. Nilima Bose runs a charitable organization, the Badabon Trust, for similar cause.

- ***Jungle Nama (2021)***

The novel, *Jungle Nama*, is a graphic verse novel by Amitav Ghosh, published on 12 February, 2021. It is Ghosh's first book in verse and is an adaptation of a medieval Bengali legend about Bon Bibi, the Forest Goddess of the Sundarbans. The book opens with a prologue describing the vengeful beauty, serenity, and the geographical topography of the Sundarbans. The narrative explores themes of human greed and ecological misadventure that have resulted in rapid environmental degradation and climate change. Ghosh was inspired to write this book by one of his trip to a remote Sunderban island, accompanied by a group of local villagers, back in the year, 2000. He took part on a ceremonial worship of the Goddess Bon Bibi on a mudbank next to a fresh paw print of a tiger. The book is a retelling of the traditional Bengali folk tale of Bon Bibi and explores the local belief system and the culture of Sundarbans that emphasizes on maintaining the balance between human needs and the healthy sustenance of the natural world. The novel is made up of seven chapters, followed by an afterword describing the original legend of Bon Bibi. The book was illustrated by Pakistani-American artist, Salman Toor.

Amitav Ghosh also profoundly tried his hands at other genres like essays and other non-fiction works of literature. His *Dancing in Cambodia and at Large in Burma* is a collection of five essays, published in 1998.

The Imam and the Indian is another significant collection of essay by Ghosh, published in 2002. Ghosh’s works primarily focuses on the degrading natural landscape and climate crisis that has resulted due to the unchecked and blinded human interference with the natural world for our materialistic benefits and fulfillment. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* is a non-fiction book by Amitav Ghosh that focuses primarily on the present climate crisis. Here, Ghosh discusses the history, politics and the cultural depiction of climate change. The book consists of three parts- “Stories”, “History”, and “Politics”. The first part, “Stories”, discusses how modern novel as a genre of literature and art form struggles to contribute or grapple with the concept of climate change. The second part, “History”, discusses the role of colonialism in the climate crisis. The third section, “Politics”, highlights how capitalism and imperialism worked as systematic drivers of climate change. *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* is another significant non-fictional work by Ghosh that explores colonialism and the environmental issues with particular focus on the Banda Islands. The text recounts the Dutch East India Company’s conquest of the Banda Islands for nutmeg. The text also shed light on the brutal massacre of the Bandanese people in 1621.

SAQ:

Q.1. What is the name of Amitav Ghosh’s first novel? When was it published?

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. In which year was Amitav Ghosh awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award? Write the name of the book for which he received the award.

.....
.....
.....

Q.3. Name the novel by Amitav Ghosh which is based on the life of the scientist, Sir Ronald Ross?

.....
.....
.....

Q.4. What are the significant historical events recounted in the novel, *The Glass Palace*, by Amitav Ghosh?

.....
.....
.....

Q.5. Discuss the historical significance of Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy*.

.....
.....
.....

4.5 Summing Up:

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most celebrated contemporary Indian authors whose contribution to Indian English literature is immense. A large body of his work explores historical facts, infused with a rich cultural context. Many a times, he immaculately weaves together a fictional narrative often set at the backdrop of a real historical event, offering his readers a fair play of both imagination and facts concomitantly. Ghosh's writings often shed light on global themes which is not restricted to a particular group of people and his characters resonate with a global audience. Most significantly, Ghosh's works were highly environmentally conscious as he strongly addresses the critical issues of environmental degradation, climate crisis, the socio-political turmoil and its impact on the environment, the disruptive ecological balance due to excessive human interference, etc. His linguistic depth and literary vision made him stand out in the crowd, marking him as one of the best-known writers in Indian English literature.

4.6 References and Suggested Readings:

Burton, Antoinette. "Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below". *History of the Present*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2012, pp. 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>

Chakrabarti, Ranjan. "Local People and the Global Tiger: An Environmental History of the Sundarbans". *Global Environment*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2009, pp. 72-95. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43201488>

Dhar, Nandini. "Unloosened Forms, Untranslatable Concerns and Unformed: *The Limits of American Notions of Race in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies*". *The Comparatist*, Vol. 42, October 2018, pp. 6-39. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26533646>

Hasan, Nazia. "Tracing the Strong Green Streaks in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh: An Eco-critical Reading". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 182-193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43856755>

Kaur, Rajender. "Home Is Where the Oracella Are: Toward a New Paradigm of Transcultural Ecocritical Engagement in Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007, pp. 125-141. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44086561>

Murphy, Patrick D. "Community Resilience and the Cosmopolitan Role in the Environmental Challenge-Response Novels of Ghosh, Grace, and Sinha". *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2013, pp. 148-168. <https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.50.1.0148>

Nayar, Pramod K. "The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide". *College Literature*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2010, pp. 88-119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27917766>

White, Laura A. "Novel Vision: Seeing the Sunderbans through Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide". *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2013, pp. 513-531. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44087261>

UNIT - 5

Amitav Ghosh: In an Antique Land (Introducing the Novel)

Unit Structure:

- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Reading the Text: An Overview
- 5.4 The Source and the Style of Composition
- 5.5 Summing Up
- 5.6 References and Suggested Readings

5.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to–

- *learn* about the text,
- *understand* the basic features of the text,
- *know* the source of the text,
- *analyse* the content and style of the text.

5.2 Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most celebrated contemporary Indian writers in English. His literary contribution to Indian English literature is immense. Apart from its literary significance, his works are also important for raising environmental awareness for the dilapidated and deteriorating condition of the natural world that human interference has led to, especially its role in the mitigation of climate change. Most of his works also maintains historical significance in terms of the setting or the backdrop of most of his narratives. The novel, *In an Antique Land*, chronicles Ghosh's experiences of one of his trip to Egypt and his attempt to trace accounts of an Indian slave owned by a Jewish merchant of twelfth century Egypt. The book is noted for the ambiguous literary style with elements of both fiction and non-fiction and its nonconformity to abide by a single traditional genre of literature.

5.3 Reading the Text: An Overview:

In an Antique Land by Amitav Ghosh is a semi-historical narrative, published in 1992. The text is partially an anthropological study of Lataifa, a small town in Egypt. As a young graduate, Ghosh spent considerable time in Lataifa, studying about the lost city of Alexandria. The book explores the cultural heritage of both ancient and contemporary Egypt. Ghosh's narrative attempts to unravel the story of a Jewish trader who owned an Indian slave back in the twelfth century. The book is partially a personal reflection of Ghosh as an Indian man while trying to understand the historical legacy of Egypt.

Ghosh's visit to Egypt in 1980 was originally occasioned to write his doctoral thesis, entitled, *Kinship in Relation to the Economic and Social Organisation of an Egyptian Village Community*. Amitav Ghosh was a student of cultural anthropology at the University of Alexandria. Many years after his graduation, he unearths a manuscript narrating the story of a Jewish merchant and his Indian slave and their journey from Egypt to India, and back to Egypt, as their relationship undergoes major transition during the due course of time. Ghosh was intensely engrossed and preoccupied with unraveling the identity of the Indian slave and his relationship with his master and thus began to delve into their everyday lives and experiences.

The narrative dates back to 1980, when Ghosh resided in Lataifa, a small farming town in Egypt, a predominantly Muslim Egyptian territory. The book opens with the author dwelling in a roof-top attic in Lataifa, just outside the periphery of Alexandria. Oftentimes, during his stay, Ghosh would wonder at his survival skill to live in that room that he shared with chickens as well as his minacious landlord, Abu-Ali. Ghosh writes about his experiences as a Hindu Indian man among the Egyptian Muslims in Lataifa, reciting fascinating stories of the Egyptian culture and tradition and a bunch of eccentric characters he meets during that time. During his stay in Lataifa, Ghosh not only begins to explore and understand the Lataifan culture but also begins to reflect on his own religious and cultural temperament and is fascinated by the ways both

differ in their own bizarre and unique ways. He also did some analysis on how modern Lataifa have undergone significant changes in terms of materialistic possession such as introduction of modern appliances and gadgets like refrigerator and television. Furthermore, the rush to find lucrative jobs has compelled the young upcoming generation to leave their homes and move to more developed places, thus severing their ties with their families as well as their homeland.

SAQ:

1. From your reading of the text, discuss the social condition of contemporary Egypt as narrated by Ghosh in the book, *In an Antique Land*?

.....
.....
.....

Ghosh vigilantly studied the manuscript he found in Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, detailing about the Jewish trader and his relationship with the Indian slave. The book is filled minutely with aspects of everyday life in Medieval Egypt. The Indian slave that Ghosh so intimately connected with, in some ways, represented him in all his financial transactions. The narrative illustrates the daily life of the Egyptian people along with that of an Indian in Egypt, many centuries before Ghosh's advent to the Egyptian land.

As an Indian living in the foreign land, Ghosh reflected on the life in contemporary Egypt from the perspective of an outsider. His emphasis on the Jewish merchant and the Indian slave is very much a personal reflection on his own self as both the characters in his book too are outsiders, belonging to foreign land. Ghosh nourishes sympathy for both the characters who were outsiders, dwelling as minorities in a Muslim predominant state, examining his role as an outsider in 1980's Egypt as well as a student of cultural anthropology.

The book comprises of two parts- the first is an anthropological account of two Egyptian villages in the Nile Delta, and the second is a historical account of the lives of a Jewish merchant and his two slaves, Ashu and Bomma. The first section recounts Ghosh's visits to two villages in Egypt- first, in 1980-81, during the time he was writing his doctoral thesis and again, a few years later, in 1988. The second section documents Ghosh's investigation of the life of Abraham Ben Yiju, and his two slaves in twelfth century Egypt.

SAQ:

1. Discuss briefly the structure of the book, *In an Antique Land*?

.....
.....
.....

In an Antique Land opens in Lataifa, a small village in Egypt in 1980. Amitav Ghosh was a graduate student writing his doctoral thesis during time and his research compelled him to dig into the life of a twelfth century Jewish merchant and his relationship with his two slaves, one from India. Later, Ghosh leaves Lataifa and move to Nashawy, a larger village in Egypt. The narrative is made up of the detailed lives and experiences of the diverse kind of people he encountered within the vicinity of the two villages. He also narrates their religious maneuvers and sometimes, their futile attempts to convert him to Islam. As an Indian Hindu in a Muslim Egyptian land, Ghosh often had to endure the criticisms from his Muslim friends regarding certain Hindu practices and beliefs like the Hindu cremation ritual of burning the dead in funeral pyre or the custom of worshipping cows and the like. However, these criticisms never had any profound impact on Ghosh and he stood steadfast in his beliefs and never compromised with it. He departs from Egypt in 1981, and spends several years improvising his Arabic language and also leaning the dialect in the documents of Ben Yiju. He returns back in 1988 and explores the two villages of Lataifa and Nashawy, mostly the linguistic preferences of the people living there.

Ghosh studied the Cairo Geniza that belonged to Ben Yuji, which was preserved for seven centuries until it caught the attention of the wider world through the works of many interested academic scholars. Ghosh's study of the manuscript helps him to establish a series of similarities between the cultural and linguistic disposition of the people of ancient and contemporary Egypt. His research led him to study the everyday routine of the people he met and how the modern wave has brought significant transition in their lives, mostly the younger generation. His study of Ben Yuji's documents led him to summarize that, most probably, the Jewish merchant fled to India to escape a blood feud where he later marries one of his slaves, named Ashu. The Indian slave, Bomma, worked as Ben Yuji's apprentice and later takes over his business. Many years later, Ben Yuji returns back to his homeland from India, and eventually moves back to Egypt.

In an Antique Land is a detailed analysis of the historical tapestry of Egypt and the social, religious, and cultural predilection of the Egyptian villagers as well as a reflection of his own Indian identity. It is a difficult book in terms of categorizing it into a particular genre as it entails elements of a fictional narrative as well as a historical account, alongside being a travel book, culminating into an autobiographical account of Ghosh as a writer and a researcher. Ghosh employs the use of "Prologue" and "Epilogue" as the titles of the opening and the closing chapter respectively. The actual reconstruction of the events pertaining to Ben Yuji and his slave was published by Amitav Ghosh as a historical literary narrative, "The Slave of M.S H.6", in the seventh Subaltern Studies. The title of the book, *In an Antique Land*, refers to the opening line of the poem, "Ozymandias".

Check Your Progress:

Q.1. In which year is the book, *In an Antique Land*, published?

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. What was the primary reason for Ghosh's visit to Egypt?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.3. Name the two villages Ghosh resided in during his stay in Egypt?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.4. Name the two slaves that were owned by the Jewish merchant?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Q.5. From where is the title of the book, *In an Antique Land*, taken from?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5.4 The Source and the Style of Composition:

The book, *In an Antique Land*, is composed in a compelling style with combined elements of history, memoir, travel narrative, anthropological research, and interesting tales of daily life. The narrative discusses the experiences of two Indian men in Egypt, separated by time and space. One of them is Ghosh himself, who visited Egypt in 1980 for his academic research, and the other is an Indian slave owned by a Jewish merchant in the 12th century. At the beginning of his academic journey as a scholar of anthropology for doctorate degree in Oxford, Ghosh discovered the manuscripts about the Jewish merchant and his slave in a Geniza in Cairo.

Stop to Consider:

Geniza:

A Geniza is typically a storage chamber in a Jewish synagogue which is specially designed to store worn-out Hebrew books and documents, basically religious scriptures and texts. These books and documents are temporarily stored here so that they can be later disposed of in the conventional ways with the necessary rituals and practices. The term geniza (also genizah) is originally a Hebrew word which means “to hide” or “to put away”. It can be best translated to a more modern day term as “archive” or “repository”. The Geniza is usually built either in an attic or the basement of a synagogue to keep them secured and prevent easy access. Sometimes, they can also be found in cemeteries, in walls or even completely buried underground. In the Middle Eastern countries, almost every synagogue had a geniza that is regularly cleared out and buried with proper rituals. Fortunately, for Ghosh, this particular Geniza which forms the basic source of his research was left out and consequently accumulated eight centuries of documents.

The Indian slave, that Ghosh so preoccupied himself with, first appears in one of the documents discovered in the geniza. It was a letter addressed to the Jewish merchant, Abraham Ben Yiju, who was originally from Tunisia by a friend, who was also a merchant named Khalaf Ibn Ishaq. In the letter, Khalaf refers to the Indian slave and sends him warm greetings. Thus begins Ghosh’s journey to unveil the mystery of the slave.

5.5 Summing Up:

The book, *In an Antique Land*, by Amitav Ghosh is an intriguing exploration and interaction of the author’s Indian identity and cultural disposition and the Egyptian culture and religious predilections. The narrative is a constant intertwining of the past and the present with an intriguing blend of historical research and Ghosh’s personal experience as an outsider in the Egyptian land. The text is somewhat regarded as an interdisciplinary research work

by the author as it does not abide by any particular genre or discipline with elements of fiction, and non-fiction, historical facts, as well as anthropological experimentation. The book is richly fabricated with interesting nuances of the Egyptian culture and the people, creating a sense of awe and wonder among the readers through a series of stories and tales of some of the most eccentric characters that Ghosh encounters during his stay in Egypt.

5.6 References and Suggested Readings:

Bhattacharji , Shobhana. Amitav Ghosh's Travel Writing: "In an Antique Land, Dancing in Cambodia" and "The Imam and the Indian". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 6 (218), Nov-Dec 2003, pp. 197-213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23341083>

Burton ,Antoinette . “Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below”. *History of the Present*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2012, pp. 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>

Desai , Gaurav . “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia”. *Representations*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2004, pp. 125-148. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2004.85.1.125>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2004.85.1.125>

Hasan , Nazia. “Tracing the Strong Green Streaks in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh: An Eco-critical Reading”. *Indian Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 182-193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43856755>

Smith ,Eric D. "Caught Straddling a Border": A Novelistic Reading of Amitav Ghosh's "In an Antique Land". *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2007, pp. 447-472. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41304870>

UNIT - 6

Amitabh Ghosh: *In an Antique Land* (Themes and Techniques)

Unit Structure:

- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Major Themes of the Book
- 6.4 Major Characters
- 6.5 The book as an example of experimental ethnography
- 6.6 Summing Up
- 6.7 References and Suggested Readings

6.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to–

- *have* a detailed understanding of the text,
- *analyse* the major themes of the text,
- *know* the literary techniques,
- *learn* the imageries and symbols.

6.2 Introduction:

Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, has harbored a great deal of critical attention ever since its publication in 1992 for many reasons- from its narrative style to the structure to the genre. As discussed in the previous unit, the text concomitantly carries forward two narratives- one in which Ghosh explores his ethnographic fieldwork, and the other is a historical retelling about a mater-slave duo in twelfth century Egypt. The text forms a significant part of Ghosh's ethnographic research that contribute towards his doctoral thesis as a scholar of anthropology.

6.3 Major Themes of the Novel:

Let us discuss some of the important themes of the book, *In an Antique Land*:

- **Cultural interconnectedness:**

The book, *In an Antique Land*, is a vehement exploration of different culture and the effect of the consequent interaction of these multitudinous cultural norms which dictates the ways of living of a particular community. The primary parallel highlighted by Ghosh in the book is the interaction between the Muslim Egyptian culture and the Hindu Indian beliefs and practices. Ghosh also discuss the socio-religious history of Egypt while narrating about the twelfth century Jewish merchant reflecting on the constant interaction of the Jews and the Muslims. Ghosh's depiction of the Lataifan society is a poignant portrayal of the interconnectedness of different culture, ethnicity, and religion. The manuscript discovered in the geniza in Cairo is written mostly in the pidgin language of Arabic-Hebrew which denotes that the ancient languages were also amalgamation or concoction of multiple cultures. Alongside the harmonic interaction, Ghosh also depicts the presence of a firm cultural boundary and a slightly pessimistic picture of the communion. He narrates an incident when he was detained in a Jewish tomb for being an Indian- an outsider in a foreign land. This particular incident resonated with the events of Partition of India, evoking traumatic memories in him and made him realize that he can never dissociate or leave behind his identity and experiences as an India, no matter where he goes. Ghosh reconnects with the Jewish merchant, Ben Yiju, and his Indian slave who faced similar experiences and crisis in the twelfth century Egypt, inferring the presence of borders and boundaries across space and time. This cross-cultural relationship form one of the central themes of the book.

- **Social changes over time:**

The book, *In an Antique Land*, is a meticulous study of ancient and contemporary Egypt and the transition it underwent over time. Ghosh portrays a truly judicious and percipient picture of the social changes that swept the antique land with the advent of modern technology. He

visited the Egyptian villages twice, spanned across seven years. When Ghosh visited Lataifa for the first time in 1980, there was no electricity. Someone brought a diesel water pump from a nearby town while the whole village gathered on the owner's courtyard to see the machine. Everyone waited for Ghosh astonishingly as he was invited to examine the appliance and put forward his opinion regarding it. Seven year later, when he visited Egypt, in 1988, every household owned modern mechanical gadgets like refrigerator, television, calculator, cassette player, and even microwaves. The ancient adobe houses got replaced with new brick ones. The villages developed and the villagers prospered in terms of materialistic luxuries. Many young villagers had left their homes to find lucrative jobs in more developed nations like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. The simple residents began to send their children to influential schools and colleges and aspired to be more ambitious and successful. The primary reason for this transition is the undeniable influence of the Western culture in the Third World or the oriental nations.

- **The master-slave dynamic:**

The book, *In an Antique Land*, explores the master-slave dynamic in the twelfth century Egyptian society. The history of the Jewish merchant and his slave, as narrated in the manuscript found in the geniza in Cairo, prompts Ghosh to embark on the journey to unravel the mystery of their relationship. The Jewish merchant, Abraham Ben Yiju, is originally from Tunisia. He later moved to Egypt and from there to Mangalore, in India. He spent over two decades in India. During that time, his slave, Bomma, worked as a business representative for him. The narrative not only chronicles the trade relations of the antique land but also highlights the cultural temperament of the land. He incorporate the fact that in the ancient world, slaves were not always treated as bonded labour but were also included into their master's household and oftentimes comes to be considered as significant members of the family. At the beginning of the narrative, the slave is addressed as MS H.6, the name adopted from the catalogue number assigned to one of the letters in which the slave's presence is mentioned. Although the, manuscript is originally written in Judaeo-Arabic, Ghosh educates himself to read and understand

it. Towards the later part of the narrative, with Ghosh's painstakingly extensive research and the local experts of Mangalore, it is tentatively assumed that the name of the slave must possibly be Bomma. His research also leads him to conclude that the master-slave relationship between Abraham Ben Yiju and Bomma was probably more that of patron and client than that of master and slave. Ghosh's research further leads him to confirm that the term slavery also connotes the bounded relationship between a master craftsman and apprentice, a merchant and an accountant, and the like. It was less of a demeaning metaphorical coinage and more of a way of enabling human commitment and connection. However, the accuracy of this interpretation remains vaguely questionable. Noteworthy is that, the text, *In an Antique Land*, highlights the humanness of the relationship between Ben Yiju and his slave, Bomma, in a cross-cultural dynamic rather than a socio-political power hierarchy.

SAQ:

Q.1. From your understanding of the text, *In an Antique Land*, discuss the theme of cross-cultural dynamic with special reference to the relationship between Abraham Ben Yiju and his slave, Bomma. (about 500 words)

.....
.....
.....

Q.2. Discuss the social changes observed between the ancient and contemporary Egypt that were noted by Amitav Ghosh in the book, *In an Antique Land*. (about 450 words)

.....
.....
.....

6.4 Major Characters:

The author of the book, *In an Antique Land*, Amitav Ghosh himself is the central character of the text. Designed in the form of a memoir combined with the literary elements of a travelogue, the book explores Ghosh's journey

to the Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy and his interaction with the people there. This interaction brings forth a host of eccentric characters, some of them are listed below:

- **The Slave:** The slave, often addressed as the slave of MS H.6 in the geniza, is of Indian origin who was owned by a Jewish merchant, Abraham Ben Yiju, in twelfth century Egypt. In the latter part of the narrative, his name is revealed to be Bomma. Though a slave, Bomma is described as a significant member of Ben Yiju's family, who later becomes his apprentice, and eventually takes over Yiju's business.
- **Abraham Ben Yiju:** He is the Jewish merchant in Egypt, originally from Tunisia. He travelled widely and owned two slaves, Ashu and Bomma. He escaped to India from Egypt, and later marries one of his slavegirl, Ashu. From his reading of the geniza, Ghosh assumes him to be a kind and a generous man.
- **Ashu:** She is the slavegirl owned by Abraham Ben Yuji. She travelled with him to India from Egypt, where she was freed and later marries her former master, Yuji. She also bore him a son, Surur.
- **Surur:** He was the son of Ben Yiju and Ashu. He was tutored by a learned man, Madmun. Madmun adored Surur and once sent a piece of beautiful coral to him as a gift.
- **Abu-Ali:** He was Ghosh's landlord in Lataifa. He is an ill-tempered and fearsome man and one of the few who owned many modern gadgets in the village. He is a fat, stout man who hurt his leg as a child and never fully recovered from it.
- **Shaikh Musa:** He is one of the elders in the village of Lataifa. He was a trustworthy and sensible man, whom Ghosh trusted and relied upon. Ghosh would often discuss his thoughts and opinions with Musa and often had food together with him.
- **Ustad Mustafa:** He is the uncle of one of Ghosh's friend. He studied law at the University of Alexandria and was a staunch Muslim. He often bombarded Ghosh with bizarre, unsettling questions about India. Many times, he also vainly tried to convince Ghosh to convert to

Islam. However, he eventually accepted he would never do so, partly because doing so would upset Ghosh's father.

- **Nabeel:** Nbeel Idris Badawy is one the good friends of Ghosh from Egypt. He later moved to Iraq and worked as a photographer's assistant in Baghdad. Though the socio-political situation deteriorated due to the ongoing war crisis, Nabeel refused to leave Baghdad. His whereabouts became ambiguous towards the end of the book.

6.5 The book as an example of experimental ethnography:

In an Antique Land is an ambiguous narrative in terms of its structure and the literary genre. Having multiple elements of a memoir, a travelogue, a novel, the text can also be considered a significant example of ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnography, in technical terms, can be defined as a systematic study of individual behavior and societal functioning. It is a form of qualitative research that studies the social interaction of an individual in a given territory. The text can be classified as a critical ethnographic writing because it explores the socio-cultural dynamic of ancient and contemporary Egypt where Ghosh traces and ties the two time-frames in the same space into a single narrative. There is no close interaction between the two sections but were seemingly intertwined by the shared experiences of the characters of being an outsider in a foreign land. Ghosh, though a promising ethnographer, commits some hilarious miscalculations, precisely because of his sensitivity towards his Indian identity and the cultural differences. One funny instance that Ghosh recalls, regarding his perception of Egyptian women and his attempt to avoid looking them at their faces: "I was so cowed by everything I had read about Arab traditions of shame and modesty that I barely glanced at them, for fear of giving offence. Later it was I who was shame-stricken, thinking of the astonishment and laughter I must have provoked, walking past them, eyes lowered, never uttering so much as a word of greeting" (41). Noteworthy, is the fact that the narrator's incorporation of his revelation of his own crudeness makes the narrative less authoritative than any conventional ethnography. The book, *In an Antique Land*, most significantly focuses on the religious differences which profoundly influences

and dictates the author's relationship with the Egyptians. Oftentimes, it is witnessed that the narrator is deluged with a series of inquisitive questions about the Hindu culture and rituals like cremation, circumcision, and many more. The devout Muslim villagers of Egypt were curious as well as shocked by Ghosh's cultural disposition and religious beliefs. On many occasions, the narrator found it difficult to continue the conversations and would slowly walk away from it. Ghosh's subjective exploration and interaction of the Egyptian society seeks to diminish the authoritative persona of the author as an ethnographer.

6.6 Summing Up:

In an Antique Land is a brilliant exploration and analysis of the subversive history of Egypt, designed as a traveler's tale. As mentioned previously, the narrative recounts the life and experiences of two Indian men in Egypt, separated by time and space- one, the author himself and the other an Indian slave owned by a Jewish merchant in the twelfth century. The text chronicles the enduring relationship between the master and the slave and the transition it witnessed in due course of time. Ghosh creates a rich tapestry of an exuberant multi-layered narrative that not only takes the reader on a journey to twelfth century Egypt through the life history of the Indian slave but also provides a renewed understanding of the author's personal life.

6.7 References and Suggested Readings:

Bhattacharji, Shobhana. Amitav Ghosh's Travel Writing: "In an Antique Land, Dancing in Cambodia" and "The Imam and the Indian". *Indian Literature*, Vol. 47, No. 6 (218), Nov-Dec 2003, pp. 197-213. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23341083>

Burton, Antoinette. "Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below". *History of the Present*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2012, pp. 71-77. <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/historypresent.2.1.0071>

Desai , Gaurav . “Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia”. *Representations*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2004, pp. 125-148. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2004.85.1.125>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2004.85.1.125>

Hasan , Nazia. “Tracing the Strong Green Streaks in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh: An Eco-critical Reading”. *Indian Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January/February 2013, pp. 182-193. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43856755>

Jeyalakshmi, P. “Amitav Ghosh’s In an Antique Land: A Review”. *IJARIE*, Vol-3, Issue-5, 2017, pp- 1900-1903. www.ijarie.com

Smith , Eric D. “Caught Straddling a Border”: A Novelistic Reading of Amitav Ghosh’s “In an Antique Land”. *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2007, pp. 447-472. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41304870>

Thapa, Neelam. “In an Antique Land: Locating the Dislocated”. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)*. Volume 11, Issue XI, Nov 2023, pp- 2637-2640. www.ijraset.com
