

## **UNIT 10: R. K. NARAYAN *THE GUIDE* (1958) AND ANITA DESAI *CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY* (1980)**

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### **10.0 INTRODUCTION**

R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, regarded as the great trio of Indian English novels, are considered as finest painters of Indian culture and sensibilities. They produced epoch making fiction bringing forth the pertinent issues of poverty, hunger, religious sentiments, death plaguing the newly independent India. All these three novelists made lives and cultures of India accessible to the people abroad. They made an attempt to project the contemporary Indian society without distorting the reality. All of them were reformists and their works often contain spiritual messages.

### **10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit seeks to introduce students to two major novelists in Indian Writing in English, namely R. K. Narayan and Anita Desai. It is an attempt to

- provide the students with a holistic description of the life and works of R K Narayan and Anita Desai.

- focus the critical reading of the two select texts, namely R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*.
- examine the major thematic concerns in the two texts.
- to explore the socio-religious and political background that shaped the works of Narayan and Desai.

## 10.2 R. K. NARAYAN: LIFE AND WORKS

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Ayyar Narayanaswami, or R. K. Narayan, is considered as one of the master story-tellers in Indian English Fiction. He was born in Madras or present day Chennai on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1906. He comes from a working class South Indian family. His father was a school headmaster and because of his father's transferable job, Narayan spent most of his childhood in the loving care of his grandmother. He completed his initial studies at his grandmother's place. It was his grandmother who taught him arithmetic, mythology and Sanskrit. He also attended many different schools in Chennai like, Lutheran Mission School, Christian College High School, etc. He was interested in English literature from his young age.


He started his literary career with his short stories, which appeared in *The Hindu* newspaper. He began to work as the Mysore correspondent of *Justice*, a Madras-based newspaper. In 1930 Narayan wrote his first novel called *Swami and Friends* which was rejected by many publishers. He sent the manuscript of *Swami and Friends* to his friend at Oxford who in turn showed it to Graham Greene. Greene agreed to arrange for its publication and the novel was finally published in 1935. This book is important because it is in this work that he created the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi which acts as a setting in many of his subsequent works.

His second novel, *The Bachelors of Arts*, was published in 1937 and was based on his experiences at college. This book was again published by Graham Greene who by now started counselling Narayan on how to write and what to write about to target the English speaking audience. In 1938, Narayan wrote his third novel called *The Dark Room* which dealt with the subject of emotional abuse within a marriage and it was warmly received, both by readers and critics. His fourth book called *The English Teacher* was more autobiographical than any of his earlier novels. After this, Narayan authored books like, *Mr Sampath* (1949), *The Financial*

*Expert* (1951) and *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) etc. He wrote *The Guide* in 1956 while he was touring United States. It earned him the Sahitya Akademi Award. In 1961, he wrote his next novel called *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

Narayan travelled to the United States and Australia. He gave lectures on Indian literature in Sydney and Melbourne. With his growing success, he also started writing columns for *The Hindu* and *The Atlantic*. His first mythological work *Gods, Demons and Others*, a collection of short stories was published in 1964. His book was illustrated by his younger brother R. K. Laxman, who was a famous cartoonist. In 1967, he came up with his next novel titled *The Vendor of Sweets*. Later, that year Narayan travelled to England, where he received the first of his honorary doctorates from the University of Leeds. Within next few years he started translating Kamba Ramayanam into English—a promise he made to his dying uncle once. In 1980 he was named as the honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In the same year he was also chosen as a member of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian Parliament.

Narayan won numerous accolades for his literary work: Sahitya Akademi Award, Padma Bhushan, AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of Literature, honorary membership of the American Academy of Arts and Literature, Padma Vibhushan, etc. During the 1980s Narayan wrote prolifically. His works during this period include *Malgudi Days* (1982), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1986) and *A Writer's Nightmare* (1987). In 1990s, his published works include: *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), *Grandmother's Tale* (1992), *The Grandmother's Tale and Other Stories* (1994) etc. Narayan died in 2001 at the age of 94. R.K. Narayan will be remembered for the creation of Malgudi, a semi-urban fictional town in southern India where most of his stories were set.

	<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>
1. Mention the social issues discussed by R.K. Narayan in his novels.	
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2. Name Narayan's first novel. Who arranged for its publication?

3. Which is the fictional town introduced by Narayan in his novel *Swami and Friends*?

### 10.3 READING THE NOVEL *THE GUIDE*

R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* is set in the fictional town named Malgudi. The novel recounts the adventures of a tourist guide Raju in Malgudi. He is the protagonist of the novel and popularly known as 'Railway Raju' in the whole Malgudi and a person without his own aspirations. Raju basically aspires to be one other people want him to be. The novel is a depiction of the transformation of Raju from a tourist guide to a prisoner turned holy man and finally a spiritual guide.

The novel starts with Raju, the tourist guide who is just released from the jail. He sits cross-legged beside an ancient shrine near the village Mangal on the banks of the river Sarayu. A villager named Velan appears at the temple. Through a series of conversation Velan presumes Raju to be some kind of a holy man. He discusses with Raju his younger sister's refusal to marry the groom selected for her by the family members. Raju urges Velan to bring his sister to him. Next morning Velan and his sister arrive at the temple. Raju explains to her that "what must happen must happen" and no one can change the course of life. After meeting Raju she agrees to fulfil her family's wishes and thus begins Raju's journey as a holy man.

The villagers consider him to be a kind of Mahatma and gather to pay their respect to the Holy man. People begin to worship him with gifts and edibles. Raju too tries to perform the role of a saint to perfection. In the first half of the year there is enough rain in the village but in the second half of the year there seems to be no rain. Raju reacts, "Such things are common; don't worry too much about them. Let

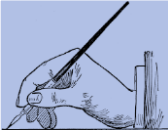
us hope for the best.” However, the cattle do not get grass to eat. The river Sarayu becomes dry. The villagers always talk about the scarcity of the rains. Velan takes the Swami to observe the scene in the village. The Swami raises his hand and says, “Be peaceful; I will fix it with gods”.

Later Velan’s brother informs Raju about a severe famine in the village and the fight that ensues amongst the villagers due to scarcity of water. The villagers expect Raju to perform some miracle to bring rain. So he has to undertake a fast. The fast attracts much attention and people even from faraway places come to have darshan of the Mahatma. On the twelfth day of the fast, Raju falls down exhausted just as there are signs of rain on the distant horizon. At this point Raju tries to convince Velan that he is not a saint; he is an ordinary man like anyone else. Velan listens to him without uttering a word of surprise or interjection in all humility. Contrary to that Raju tells Velan the story of his life.

During this conversation we come to know about an important episode of Raju’s life; the relation between Raju and a beautiful dancer named Rosie. One day a couple named Marco and Rosie arrives at the Malgudi railway station. Raju guides them to the hotel and from there he takes Rosie to watch a Cabaret dance. Marco hates dance, and he does not like Rosie taking up dance performances. Raju praises her dance and declares his love for her. He helps Rosie to realize her wish to become a professional dancer. Rosie too develops a close bond with Raju and narrates her family history and her marriage. Raju becomes more interested in her and ignores his duty as a tourist guide. One day Raju interferes in the quarrel between Rosie and Marco but to his surprise Rosie asks him to leave the place.

A month later Rosie visits Raju’s home and narrates how Marco left for Madras leaving her behind. Raju gives her shelter and emotional support. He plans to start a new life with Rosie as a public dancer. He thinks of using Rosie’s art for money. Rosie changes her name to Nalini when she begins her career as a public dancer. Raju brings contracts and Nalini performs. Eventually, Raju’s interest lies only in money, and not in Rosie/Nalini. However, this trend of earning money does not last long as Raju ends up in prison for forgery. Raju is sent to jail for two years. Later he comes to know that Rosie has left the village and everything else except a book of Marco. In this way Raju narrates his past life to Velan and tells him that he is not a saint but a common man. The novel ends with a realisation of Raju that one needs to be a true self, what he truly is, just another individual. At this moment, his

past endeavors, including his ties to Malgudi, prison, Rosie, and fame, all peel away. With this clarity, he is now able to help others without an ulterior motive. His path has become clear, and he follows it selflessly. From a physical guide, he becomes a spiritual guide to himself as well as to others.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS	
	1. Who is the protagonist in the novel <i>The Guide</i> ?
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2. Differentiate the roles played by Raju as a tourist guide and a saint.	
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3. Which action of Raju leads people to regard him as a holy man?	
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## 10.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

### RAJU

R.K. Narayan's antihero Raju was born in a fictional town named Malgudi. His multifaceted career is inevitably controlled by his destiny, as ironically he turns into a hermit. Through Raju, Narayan tries to highlight the problems and possibilities of spiritual transcendence in a materialist world.

Originally a railway vendor turned tourist guide, Raju meets and develops a close bond with Rosie. He seduces her away from her husband Marco. As she acquires fame as a dancer, Raju as her impresario establishes himself as an

influential member of the Malgudi high society. Then after being released and set free from prison he continues as a fake hermit amidst the villagers of Mangal, till he discovers in himself amazing spiritual strength and turns into a true ascetic.

The dominating tendency of Raju is to guide – whether the tourists of Malgudi, or Rosie through her career, or the inhabitants of Mangal. He loves to be admired, and dislikes those who, like Marco, refuse to do so. Motivated by these self-regarding instincts, Raju's personal redemption is achieved only when he considers others' needs above his own requirements.

His success as a guide provokes Raju to consider himself a kind of omnipotent master who is able to shape the fate of others if he wants. As the tourist guide, he pretends to know every detail about the sites. He relishes his role as Rosie's impresario. The humble villagers of Mangal also admire him, believing that he can really control the destiny and "fix it with the gods". Raju is eager to maintain his superficial importance. He dresses in better clothes for the outing with Rosie, spends money extravagantly to secure a place in the Malgudi high society, and keeps a beard and a long hair to look like a true hermit. He assumes that the best bait for winning Rosie is to show interest in classical dance, and for making fools of the villagers he creates an air of mysticism.

Trouble arises as soon as he begins to believe in his own role-play. Caught up in his own egotism, he fails to realize the needs of others. He never tries to understand Rosie's sensitive, introspective nature. Bharatanatyam to him is simply "the greatest art business".

While he decides to become a common swami, uttering mysterious profundities to the people in return of food and respect, they want a 'Mahatma'. Faced with the prospect of a fast unto death, his flamboyance is silenced by fear as he realizes the mistakes he had committed by his pretensions. Irony reaches the zenith on the final day when he denies the repeated pleadings of the doctors to break the fast. "Help me to my feet", he says before collapsing, and the self-absorbed man finally moves to self-renunciation. The blending of the two narratives perhaps suggests the reader to judge the character Raju both socially and spiritually. He thus can be called a 'round' character with surprising elements of unpredictability.

## **ROSIE**

Rosie is presented in the novel as a beautiful dancer from the family of the Devadasis, the temple dancers, and the wife of Marco. Her marriage has been like a curse in disguise to her as Marco is totally engrossed in his career and is totally apathetic towards her. She is very passionate about dancing but her husband does not allow her to dance. Marco calls her dancing as 'street acrobatics' and she calls his archaeological studies as a 'ruin collecting activity'.

When Marco leaves her alone in Malgudi, she goes back to Raju. At this stage Raju supports her emotionally. And finally she surrenders and falls in love with Raju.

She is religious by nature as she believes in Goddess Saraswati and has the bronze image of Nataraja in her office. She does not discriminate people on the basis of their financial status. On the contrary, when Raju prefers to meet people who are very rich and influential in the society Rosie does not care much about these people. Being herself an artist, she respects art and likes to be in the company of artist and other music lovers.

The real shock comes to her after hearing about Raju's act of forgery and his imprisonment. Yet she remains calm and blames her *karma* for the calamity. Like a true friend, Rosie tries her best to save Raju. She signs fresh dancing contracts to raise more money to save Raju. This highlights the sympathetic nature of Rosie.

### **MARCO**

Marco is a shortened version of Marco who is an archaeologist. He marries Rosie through a matrimonial advertisement. He has a very low opinion of her art which he calls 'street acrobatics'. He has nothing to share with Rosie either as a husband or as a human being. He is very self-centred and appears extremely inhuman to Rosie. However, Marco is a very honest and sincere scholar. His perseverance leads him to get his book published.

He never forgets to acknowledge Raju's help in finding the Mempi Caves in his book named *The Cultural History of India*. When he comes to know about Rosie's adultery, he is shocked. Finally, he abandons Rosie and departs alone to Madras.

### **VELAN**

Velan is the headman of the village Mangal. He takes Raju for a saint or Mahatma. Velan is the first rustic Raju meets when he takes shelter in an ancient shrine. Velan takes Raju as a wandering Sadhu at first, but when his obstinate sister agrees to marry a man of her own choice, he visits Raju for advice. Due to Raju's



persuasion he is fully convinced about Raju's spiritual powers. He remains a sincere and honest disciple of Raju till the end of the novel. Raju discloses his own secrets to Velan but he never changes his attitude towards Raju. Velan is chiefly responsible for Raju's role as a saint. He attends on the 'fasting saint' personally with full dedication. It is Velan at the end of the novel who receives the Swami's message that the rains are coming.

### **RAJU'S MOTHER**

She is a traditional Indian woman. She permits Rosie to live with them even after knowing that she comes from a lower class dancer family. In her first meeting with Rosie, Raju's mother admires her for travelling alone and for her education. But when she comes to know about the reality, she becomes angry with her son and advises him to send Rosie back to her husband. When Raju refuses to send Rosie away, she leaves her house and goes to her brother's village.

## **10.5 MAJOR THEMES**

### **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Crime and punishment or the theme of a sinner becoming a saint emerges as a major theme in the novel. Raju's crimes are of adultery and forgery. For his act of forgery he is punished and imprisoned. Raju's story of crime or sin has a deeper meaning. Apart from his unethical and immoral relationship with Rosie, Raju disregards his mother and close friend Gaffur, betrays the trust of the gentleman Marco. The story of cheating does not end even after his release from the jail. By coincidence, he lands in the village called Mangal and the villagers takes him for a saint. He deceives the innocent rustics of Mangal. When Raju cheats the entire village community by adopting the role of a 'Mahatma', he commits a bigger crime, a crime against innocence, faith and goodness.

### **CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY**

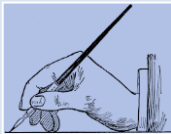
East-West conflict is a major theme in R. K. Narayan's novels. Rosie, Velan, Raju's mother and uncle, Gaffur, the driver are all characters who represent traditional Indian culture and ethos. Raju and Marco, on the contrary, bear features of western or modern culture and manners. Thus the conflict between tradition and

modernity or influence of one over the other is evident in the behaviour and conversation of these characters throughout the novel. For instance, Rosie, though a post-graduate, is a traditional Indian wife, who longs for affection and care from her husband. She cannot cope up with the archaeological interests of her husband, Marco. Marco dislikes being disturbed by anyone, even his wife in his studies and professional activities. This difference is the cause of quarrel between Rosie and Marco.

The villagers are so superstitious that they believe Raju's fasting would bring rain. Narayan wants to tell the readers that there are many Rajus or fake sanyasis in our society. In reality, Narayan actually comes out in favour of the institution in the end. He is unable to show the villagers rejecting Raju, or Velan abusing and unmasking him. He does not want the novel to be a propaganda tract against superstitious villagers. Through the novel Narayan points out that in the struggle between tradition and modernity, tradition wins, though in a reluctant manner.

R. K. Narayan portrays a South Indian conservative society in the village, Mangal. Though the contact of Western culture brings many changes in the village, castes and traditional occupations continue to exist. Marriages are still arranged. Astrology is accepted there. Touching the feet of the saint, making offerings in kind or prostrating before god, are other ritualistic forms. Raju's fasting to appease the rain gods and bring rain to save the people is the most significant ritual in the novel. The coming of the Railways to Malgudi is symbolically the impact of an industrial and urban society on a predominantly simple, agricultural community. In the novel *The Guide*, Narayan seems to be particularly fascinated by the presence of swamis and saints, gurus and guides, cobras and concubines in India's colourful society. With his characteristic humour he is able to capture the spectrum of Indian life, with its superstitions and hypocrisies, its beliefs and follies, its rigidities and flexibilities.

From the social point of view *The Guide* not only depicts Indian society, its customs, traditions, culture, ostentations, superstitions, religious faith but also presents a conflict between the traditional and modern values which are symbolised by Raju's mother and his maternal uncle on the one hand and by Raju and Rosie on the other hand.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the crimes committed by Raju?

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2. Mention few features of the traditional Indian society as depicted in the novel *The Guide*?

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### 10.6 ANITA DESAI: LIFE AND WORKS

Anita Desai can be considered as one of the best known contemporary women writers of Indian fiction in English. She was born in India in 1937. Her mother was from Germany while her father was from India. Her mother's western background influenced the family in terms of music and literature. Growing up, Desai read the novels of Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and Jane Austin, to name a few. Woolf has had a great influence on Desai, and several critics compare Desai's work with Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

Anita Desai's novels carry a sense of universal feminism. She has depicted the tyrannies, torture and violence confronted by women in Indian society. She delves deep into women's psyche in most of her novels. Incompatible relationships, family quarrels, women's quest for independent identity, alienation of women are major themes in her novels. She deals in detail with the psyche of women, with their

lived experience in the family and wider social space and shows how they are perennially subjected to patriarchal egos.

Desai's novel *Clear Light of Day* includes Desai's memories her own childhood days: the neighbourhood in Old Delhi, their own house, and the four siblings. Desai considers the novel to be her most autobiographical one till now, even though the characters are fictional. The world of Desai's fiction is largely a domestic one. She is interested primarily in the lives of women in post-Independence India rather than the history or politics of the subcontinent on a more extensive scale. *In Clear Light of Day* (1980), although the fires of Partition riots still burn in the background, Desai's interest is firmly focused on the difficulties facing a woman who attempts to assert her identity within the family framework.


*Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), which moves out of India to look at wider postcolonial issues of displacement, is the most accomplished of Desai's early novels. It is a typical third-world immigrant novel focusing on the lives of Dev and Ajit, two Indians in Britain, and the racial discrimination they experience in the foreign land. The novel focuses on the alienation Ajit's wife, Sarah, suffers in her own country following her marriage to an Indian and her changed position in relation to the (British) nation state. Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) is another female-centred narrative that portrays the lives of three women—the elderly Nanda Kaul, her great-granddaughter Raka, and Nanda Kaul's lifelong friend Ila Das. These characters retreat to Carignano, a small villa in the Himalayan hill station of Kasauli, to escape the brutal patriarchal worlds in which they have lived.

*In Custody* (1985) marks a broadening of Desai's oeuvre. The novel plots the disillusionment of Deven, a young Hindi lecturer at a college in the small town of Mirpore, and the various calamities that befall him after he is persuaded to go to Delhi to interview his hero, India's greatest living Urdu poet, Nur—only to find himself being dragged deeper and deeper into Nur's unsavoury world. In *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1989) through a series of flashbacks, Desai looks at the life of a now-elderly German Jew who fled to India fifty years earlier in the 1930s to escape the Nazis, and who stayed on after Independence only to be murdered in Bombay by a German youth he tried to help.

Desai continues her interest in Europeans in India in *Journey to Ithaca* (1995). The novel focuses on Matteo, a guru-seeking Westerner in India, and his wife Sophie. In *Fasting, Feasting* Desai returns to familial issues and particularly to

the theme of women being trapped in traditional family structures in a rapidly changing postcolonial world. She depicts the lives of two daughters and a son of a traditional Indian family in the modern world.

Anita Desai received, among others, the Sahitya Akademi award in 1979 and the Padma Sri award in 1989.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>	
	1. Mention the modern writers Anita Desai enjoyed reading?
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	2. What is the central unifying theme that pervades Desai's novels?
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	3. Mention some of Desai's novels where she deals with women centric issues?
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**10.7 READING THE NOVEL CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY**

*Clear Light of Day* focuses on familial tension and complex relationships existing among members of a family in Old Delhi. The novel begins when the main characters are adults and progresses backward in time to their childhoods, with a final section returning to their adult lives. The novel is divided into four parts.

The first part begins in the year 1980 when Tara awakens one morning in her childhood home in New Delhi, feeling nostalgic. Tara's husband Bakul works in Indian embassies and travels a lot, leaving her lonely. They visit India and their


ancestral home after every three years. Tara's sister Bim and their intellectually disabled brother Baba live alone at the family home. The sisters engage in conversation about the ageing house. Baba plays music all day long in the gramophone. This worries Tara. She asks Baba to go to the office but he declines. Bim tutors girls in her house and treats everyone to ice cream which Bakul criticizes. The sisters discuss their brother Raja, whose daughter is getting married soon. Bim and Raja were once close but are now estranged. Bim shows a letter to Tara in which Raja charges her the same rent as the Nawab charged her parents. So, Bim finds it insulting and resolves not to go to the wedding.

The next section goes back to their adolescence period when Raja and Bim shared a close bond with each other. It was the partition period when the country was divided on the basis of religion. Raja considered their landlord Hyder Ali Saheb as his hero. He acquired interest in Urdu books rather than Hindi from the Hyders. He decided to study Urdu as his primary language in school and later yearned to go to Jamia Milia Islamia, a college known for its inclination towards Islamic culture. His parents disapproved his decision and convinced him that he should join Hindu college in the context of the growing communal disharmony. Their mother died from an illness and father died in an accident. The children were largely unaffected because their parents hardly spent time with them. Their Aunt Mira stepped in to take care of them, but she began to drink heavily in order to cope with her stress. Raja suffered from tuberculosis and Bim took care of him. Tara met Bakul and fell in love with him. She ignored Bim's advice and left the city. Aunt Mira too died from excessive consumption of alcohol. Raja finally recovered and left for Hyderabad to join Hyder Ali who had settled in Hyderabad owing to communal violence in Old Delhi.

The third section goes back to 1940's when they were children. Baba, their younger brother, was born. Baba exhibited some defects in his growth. So their parents called Mira Masi to live with them and take care of their children. Aunt Mira develops a close bond with the children. Bim and Raja flourished in studies and Tara developed as an diffident child. Both the sisters began to grow apart because of their differences in opinion. While Bim approved of proper education for girls and was more ambitious, Tara desired to marry and settle down.

The fourth section returns to their present situation. Tara requests Bim to forgive Raja. Tara also learns about Bim's financial crisis. Bim visits their neighbour

the Misras and attends a concert in their house. She gradually realises that families, despite their disputes, are tied to one another. They need to forgive each other and keep their relationship intact forever. Thus, in this final section Tara leaves for the wedding, and Bim asks her to bring Raja back with her for a visit to Old Delhi. She is ready to forgive him.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>	
	<p>1. Who are the two characters in the novel who remain alone in the family house after their parents' death and siblings' departure?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Which culture attracts Raja's attention and whom does he consider as his hero?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>3. What are the professions of Bim and Bakul?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

## 10.7 MAJOR CHARACTERS

### **BABA**

Baba is the youngest child of the Das family. He is born with a mental disability. He is entirely dependent on Bim and Mira Masi. His aunt teaches him how to play pebbles which turns out to be one of his passions in life. Baba plays his gramophone using the same records that he has been using from his childhood. This shows that his mentality has not changed despite his aging. Additionally, the loud music from his gramophone serves as an invariable reminder of Baba's presence in the house. These fixations show that he is afraid of change and that he wants

everything to remain the same. Baba shares strong relationship only with Bim as they are the only siblings who remain in the house.

### **RAJA**

Raja is Bim's younger brother. He is ambitious by nature and enthusiastic about learning new cultural ideas, especially those concerned with the Islamic way of life. Raja and Bim share a thirst for reading and writing poetry. During their childhood days, Raja and Bim had similar ideas as to what they would want to do when they grow up, such as becoming 'superheroes'. Furthermore, Raja would share his poetry with Bim, hence there existed a close bond between the siblings. Hyder Ali Sahib, the Muslim landlord is Raja's role model; he admires the way in which Hyder Ali lives, his library, the gatherings at his house. This is one of the reasons why Raja defends the Muslims. He wants to ignore the political situation or conflict between the two communities and feels that there should be unity and peace amongst the Hindus and the Muslims. Raja later turns out to be an affluent businessman and family man.

### **AUNT MIRA**

Aunt Mira is a distant cousin of Bim's mother. She lost her husband when she was just thirteen years and was blamed by the society for her husband's death. She works as an unpaid servant to her in-laws and shares a close bond with the children. She is heavily disturbed when a cow and her calf die in a well. Aunt Mira turns to alcohol to ease her pain. It appears that she increased her alcohol intake after Raja and Tara left. Eventually she dies due to excessive alcoholism.

### **BIM**

Bim is the eldest sister in the Das family. She is a woman with strong personality. She possesses leadership qualities which help her to run the house after Tara and Raja leave the house. She decides to lead an independent life by pursuing higher education and not marrying. She ages prematurely due to the stress surrounding her household. She takes care of her autistic brother Baba when everyone else deserts them. However, years and years of loneliness and struggle brings a change in her personality. She turns out to be a tyrant and insensitive towards her brother-in-law Bakul. She displays more care and hospitality towards her pets rather than her sister Tara and the latter's husband Bakul.

### **TARA**



Tara Das is the second youngest child of the Das family. She is the one who used to run to Aunt Mira-masi for comfort and protection as a child when she was bullied by Bimla, her elder sister. She hates going to school and does not pursue higher studies. She is not as ambitious as Bim and Raja. She eventually marries Bakul and leaves Old Delhi to start a family of her own. When she visits Old Delhi with her husband she realises that Old Delhi has not changed at all. Bim and Baba follow the same lifestyle because they are afraid of change.

## **BAKUL**

Bakul is Tara's husband. He is an intelligent, sophisticated and ambitious gentleman. He is a member of the Indian Foreign Service and as a result he has to travel frequently. He finds it difficult to adjust with Tara's siblings because he thinks he is a class above and better than those living in Old Delhi. He prefers to visit his family in the city rather than stay in Old Delhi. He is not very favourable of Bim because of her intimidating, strong personality.

## **10.9 MAJOR THEMES**

### **THE PARTITION OF BRITISH INDIA AND ITS AFTERMATH**

*Clear Light of Day* shows us glimpses of India from the 1940s up to the 1970s. This was a period of transformation of the country due to the partition of India. The characters do not witness the violence directly but the partition ends up dividing the family. Raja leaves his parental home and moves to Hyderabad to follow his hero Hyder Ali Saheb. Tara marries out of desperation and leaves her family. The language of Urdu was regarded as high culture before the partition of India, and in the aftermath of the partition Urdu became a language that was no longer taught in schools, and it became very difficult to find places where one could learn the language. The glamour that manifested itself at Hyder Ali's house is seen by Raja as almost a shocking contrast to the shabbiness of their own house. Raja takes great interest in Urdu poetry. Hyder Ali realizes Raja's interest for poetry, and invites him for poetry nights. Raja becomes a regular guest in his house, even though he is a Hindu and not a Muslim. Raja's passion for the Islamic culture can be seen as resulting from Desai's memories of the pre-partition India where the different cultures lived in peaceful co-existence with each other.

## ADOLESCENCE

Desai deals in detail with the early years of the Das siblings and how it shaped their current lives. Bim and Raja are ambitious and independent by nature. Raja turns out to be an affluent businessman still trying to be the hero he idolised, Hyder Ali. Bim decides never to marry and leads a lonely independent life. Tara is totally dependent on her husband. He takes decisions on her behalf. Baba also depends to a large extent upon Bim and Mira Masi owing to his mental disability.

### 10.10 SUMMING UP

To conclude RK Narayan's *The Guide* reveals the Indian way of life. The book serves as a mirror of Indian culture and tradition. Narayan has offered an impartial view of the country without idealizing or condemning it. The author has deftly portrayed the real scenario of Indian villages with poverty, diseases and illiteracy plaguing the common people.

Anita Desai's novel draws a parallel between the partition of the country and the separation of the family members. She has explored the issue of subordination of women in the patriarchal society through the characters of Tara and Misra sisters but at the same time through Bim's character she projects how women strive for their autonomous existence in a male dominated society.



### 10.11 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Narayan's art of characterization in the novel *The Guide*?
2. Write a note on the major thematic concerns of Narayan in the novel *The Guide*?
3. Justify the title of the novel *The Guide*?
4. Discuss briefly Anita Desai's important works?
5. Discuss Desai's characterization and thematic concerns in the novel *Clear Light of Day*?



### 10.12 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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## **UNIT 11: WOMEN IN NARAYAN AND DESAI'S NOVEL**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Learning Objectives
- 11.2 Representation of Women in Indian English Fiction
- 11.3 Narayan's Depiction of Women Characters in His Novels
- 11.4 Desai's Depiction of Women Characters in Her Novels
- 11.5 Characterization of Women in *The Guide*
- 11.6 Characterization of Women in *Clear Light of Day*
- 11.7 Summing Up
- 11.8 Assessment Questions
- 11.9 References and Recommended Readings

### **11.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit will discuss two of the major novelists of Indian English writing R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai. While Narayan's novels basically deal with the life and sufferings of middle-class women of South Indian society, Anita Desai mostly explores the psychic depth of the female characters in her novels. Her character sketches comprise sensitive human beings who are found to be victims of the traditional patriarchal society. *The Guide* and *Clear Light of Day* that we have prescribed for your study will give you comprehensive idea about the novelists and their style.

### **11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit seeks to analyze the portrayal of women characters in Indian English Fiction. The primary focus will be on

- whether the female characters are presented in a stereotypical way or they are endowed with modern outlook.
- projection of a feminist centered approach by some of the writers.
- projection of women characters by both male and female writers.

- women characters as depicted in *The Guide* and *Clear Light of Day*

## **11.2 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION**

From time immemorial India has been a patriarchal society. Most of the published writers were male and so their representation of women was biased. They used language as a medium to chain women. They allocated marginal space to women characters in their novels. They attributed all the negative or weaker qualities to women such as passivity, emotionality, illiteracy, irrationality as opposed to representation of male characters as rational, adventurous, literate, active etc. Women had to confine themselves within the narrow domestic sphere of their home or inner domain. They had to fulfill the role of daughter, sister, wife, mother imposed upon them by the patriarchal society. The ancient scriptures like the Vedas too lend impetus to the stereotypical projection of women. For instance, the wife is addressed as the “ardhangi”, that is the best half of man. Hinduism assigns the terms “pativrata” to ideal wife.

Narayan, Anand and Rao have also represented women in their novels. Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) focuses on the male protagonist Bakha, an untouchable character, and his sufferings in the caste ridden society. The character of Sohini is viewed only from outside. She is depicted as meek, patient and has to suffer insults from morning till night. In the novel *Coolie* (1936) Anand assigns a silent, sacrificial role to Laxmi, the wife of coolie. She stands by her husband without any kind of questioning. However, in the novel *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960) Anand moves away from the traditional representation of women characters. The peasant’s wife Gauri is suppressed by oppressive forces but she rebels against them. She tries to lead a free and independent life.

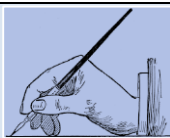
Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) shows women in different light. In this novel women take active part in the freedom struggle by shedding the bars of orthodoxy. Raja Rao employs Achakka, an elderly Brahmin widow, as a narrator and depicts Kenchamma, the goddess of hill, as a savior of the villagers. Again in Rao’s novel *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) bondage is projected as women’s destiny as embodied in the character of Savithri. Bhabhani Bhattacharya, another significant Indian English novelist, focuses on women’s emancipation and liberation. Kajoli in

*So Many Hungers* (1947) represents a journey from self-denial to self-confidence. In spite of suffering from extreme poverty and rape, she ultimately comes out and participates with the patriots in the hunger strike.

The depiction of women characters has undergone changes in the last few decades. One of the main reasons is the growth of a feminist or women-centered approach that seeks to explore a female subjectivity in order to establish an independent identity for women. Women writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai deal with the sociological effect on the psyche of female characters. They strive for the empowerment and emancipation of middle class women.

Shashi Deshpande has exposed gender discrimination in a patriarchal society in her novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983). She depicts the miserable plight of the protagonist Indu. She struggles to assert her individuality which leads her to confrontation with the male members of the family. Her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) portrays the life of a woman named Sarita who marries a doctor and becomes a victim of brutalization. However, she tries to gain her own individual identity through her writings. Urmi in Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1992) is another strong rebellious female protagonist. She is educated and employed as a lecturer in a college. She supports other victims of patriarchal society.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1996) the predicament of women is depicted through the character of Ammu. Unlike her brother Chacko, she was not allowed to have education. Her marital life too is miserable as her husband is an alcoholic and urges her to go to his boss to satisfy his lust. Ammu's is reprimanded for her love for Velutha. She succumbs to socio-political forces dictated by tradition. Bharati Mukherjee in her novel *Wife* (1975) deals with a woman named Dimple who migrates to New York with the hope that marriage will bring her freedom. She faces alienation in the foreign land and her husband Amit too is unconcerned about her happiness. Ultimately, she kills her husband and commits suicide. So in these ways male writers as well as female writers have depicted woman characters in their novels. While the male writers have discussed women's issues from a surface level, the women writers have penetrated into the inner psyche of their protagonists.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Mention the negative attributes assigned to woman by the male writers in order to marginalize their depiction in the novels?

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2. Name few women writers and their fiction where portrayal of female subjectivity is found.

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### 11.3 NARAYAN'S DEPICTION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN HIS NOVELS

Narayan's novels basically deal with the life and sufferings of middle-class women of South Indian society. His women characters are also fully drawn characters just as his male protagonists are. It is in relationship with the male characters that the female characters are portrayed in his novels. Narayan also raises his voice against the discrimination meted out to women in a patriarchal society.


Narayan's novel *The Dark Room* (1938) presents the character of Savitri, wife of a company executive Ramani and a mother of three children. The novel depicts the fruitless efforts of Savitri to get rid of the servile role she is expected to play in the house. Her opinions are not taken into account by her husband. For instance, once she engages in a conversation with her husband whether to send their young son who is ill to attend school or not. Her husband retorts back "Mind your own business, do you hear go and do any work you like in the kitchen but leave the training of a

grown-up boy to me. It's none of a woman's business". So, she is forced to be a weak, timid, passive character.

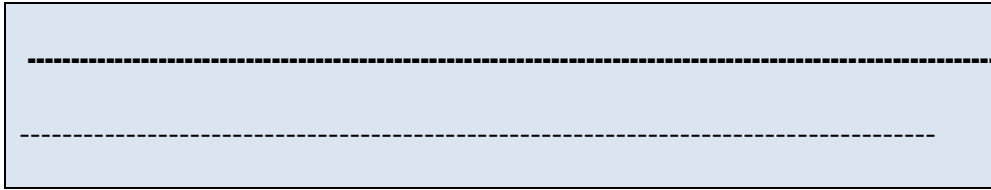
His novel *The Painter of Signs* (1976) projects an emancipated woman in the form of the female character Daisy. She is a young woman involved in family planning campaigns. She is a social worker interested in curtailing India's population growth. She feels that her sense of purpose and her independent existence may be affected by her married life. So she decides not to marry Raman, a painter of sign boards who helps her in her social work.

In another novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955) set in the pre-independence era the protagonist Bharati defies the stereotypical role assigned to women to remain within the four walls of the house. She turns out to be the most patriotic character as she joins Gandhi's movement to bring about the independence of India. The female protagonist Shanti in the novel *Mr. Sampath* (1949) revolts against the traditional life of a widow. She leaves her son with strangers and becomes the mistress of Mr. Sampath who promises to bring her money and fame by casting her in a film. She chooses the life of easy morals rather than the sufferings of being a widow in an orthodox society.

Thus it can be seen that Narayan's female characters crave for individuality and self-identity. He represents Indian women transforming from being meek and passive to being more active and vibrant. Most of the characters are strong willed with a progressive outlook towards life.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>	
	<p>1. Which section of woman is the main focus in Narayan's novels?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. Name the emancipated female characters in Narayan's novels?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>





#### **11.4 DESAI'S DEPICTION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN HER NOVELS**

Anita Desai mostly explores the psychic depth of the female characters in her novels. Her character sketches comprise sensitive human beings who are found to be victims of the traditional patriarchal society. They withdraw themselves into a life of loneliness and seclusion in order to escape from the oppression perpetrated by the society. Feminist issues such as identity crisis and freedom from the male-centered world are main preoccupations in her novels. Her heroines are by nature silent sufferers. She portrays how life for a woman involves series of obligations and commitments. There is a compelling urge for freedom and self-dignity in her female characters. Desai's novels *Cry the Peacock* (1963) and *Fasting Feasting* (1999) bear testimony to construction of gender roles which encourage a boy to be educated, aggressive and violent while girls are compelled to be submissive, passive and dependent.

In Desai's first novel *Cry the Peacock* the individuality crisis of the female character Maya is portrayed. She is a submissive girl who leads a subdued life under the shadow of her overpowering father. She accepts her father's choice of a husband named Gautam. Her husband turns out to be a proud, cold, detached person totally blind to Maya's sensitive self-longings and happiness. She is not allowed to play any decision making role in the family. When Maya's pet Toto dies she finds it difficult to reconcile herself to the loss. Her husband instead of providing emotional support says, "You go chattering like a monkey, and I am annoyed that I have been interrupted in my thinking." Such insensitivity brings emotional turmoil to Maya as she is reduced to a non-human creature by her husband. Gautam's family members also treat her as an outsider and ignore her presence in familial discussions. Maya's interest in Kathakali dance is also thwarted by her husband. Through the character of Maya Desai tries to portray women's unfulfilled life.

Anita Desai's novel *Fasting Feasting* again delineates the existential crisis faced by Uma. The birth of Uma's younger brother Arun sounds the end of Uma's

academic pursuits. Her parents consider the boy's education more important than Uma's. Uma fails to come up to the expectations of her mother, lacking confidence either for housework or babysitting. Her parents decide to get her married. The boy's family demand huge dowry to build a house for their son and Uma. Later they cancel the marriage with the excuse that the boy will undertake higher studies but they do not return the money taken as dowry. Uma ultimately marries a man named Harish, a man of elderly age. The man too deserts her. Later they come to know that he was already married and a father of four children. Uma ultimately returns to her parent's home as a divorcee. Uma's characterization shows that women lead a subjugated life both in their parent's home and in that of their in-laws. Uma's mother, her sister and her cousin Anamika are all portrayed as victims of patriarchy in the novel.

Desai's another novel *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) also deals with victimization of women by men. Nanda Kaul is an elderly lady from wealthy upper middle-class family and wife of a former Vice-Chancellor. The novel opens with Nanda leading a secluded life in a mountain known as Carignano in Kasauli, with the Himalayas on the foreground. She is a self-imposed expatriate from family, society and life itself in order to escape the oppression by the patriarchal society. Her family life had not given her any happiness. She was compelled to "act" out the role of a "gracious" wife of the VC. Nanda's great-granddaughter Raka is a victim of domestic violence. She intrudes into Nanda's lonely life at Carignano after her abusive father and oppressed mother, move to Geneva. Another important woman character in the novel is Ila Das, a close friend of Nanda and a welfare officer in a village in Kasauli. She is raped and killed after she protests against child marriage. Thus through her novels Anita Desai draws attention to the gender inequality prevalent in the society. She depicts how the emotional need of the female characters remain unsatiated. The characters suffer from existential crisis. Most of the characters are not even acknowledged as individuals capable of feelings and intelligence by the patriarchal society.

### **11.5 CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE GUIDE**

In R.K Narayan's *The Guide* Rosie is the most vividly portrayed female character. The character of Rosie is very intricate. On one hand she challenges the Hindu orthodox stereotypical nature of woman and on the other hand a part of her is


intensely orthodox. For instance she desperately tries to free herself and earn her own living but at the same time she allows patriarchy to dominate her. She comes from Devdasi family who are dedicated to the temples as dancers and considered as low class. In spite of her family background she acquires a University degree and ultimately marries a scholar named Marco.

Rosie's life is a continuous struggle for adjustment. Her marriage is a total failure because her husband does not care for her emotional and other requisites. Her husband never treats her as a human being and dislikes her passion for Bharat Natyam dance. She finds some kind of support in Raju but he too cheats her because of his materialistic pursuits. Like an orthodox woman Rosie keeps on carrying the burden of her failed marriage. She constantly feels blessed that Marco married her in spite of her poor family background. Even after becoming famous as a professional dancer she never leaves Marco. Her unsympathetic husband's book remains dear to her and she carries it with her throughout her life. In the course of her journey as a dancer she even changes her westernized name Rosie to Nalini which means the lotus, the seat of Goddess Lakshmi in order to fit herself in the conventional society.

Rosie's sexual relationship with Raju is again her revolt against the conventional society. The continuous indifference of her husband to her inner desires and the maneuvering skills of Raju actually lead to her moral downfall. Again her orthodox nature overpowers her and she repents for her mistake. She even decides to give up her passion for dance and forever remain loyal to her husband Marco. Thus Rosie's seems to be in a dilemma between her passion for dance and the values and norms imposed upon her by the society. But on the whole she represents independent women of an India that is gradually changing under the influence of the West because she is able to sustain herself through her art even when her husband deserts her.

Raju's mother is another female character in the novel. She is an embodiment of Indian tradition. Her concern is limited to the domestic sphere. She is a dutiful wife and at the same time a loving and affectionate mother to Raju. She is kind and tolerant by nature. Despite her disapproval of Rosie's presence in her house she never misbehaves with her. However like an orthodox woman she feels that the right place for a married woman is her husband's house. When Raju does not let Rosie go, she leaves her own house to stay with her brother. This indirectly suggests that she

is not ready to allow socially unacceptable situations in her house. Thus we can say that Narayan intermingles both traditional and modern qualities in his female characters.

	<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>
1. Mention some of the traditional and modern qualities attributed to the character Rosie?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
2. What is Rosie's profession?	
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**11.6 CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY**

In this novel the female protagonist Bimla Das is a spinster who yearns for self-identity and psychological fulfillment. She leads a dull life looking after her retarded younger brother and old family house. The title of the novel probably suggests the liberation of women from all patriarchal and societal bondages. Bim is a highly sensitive woman. She desires to pursue higher education and earn her own money. Bim takes pleasure in reading Urdu books like her brother Raja. Her character is a bit complex too. On one hand, she desires to be a revolutionary and on the other hand it is she who resides in the same Old Delhi and follows her monotonous routine.

She does not let the distress of her parents' death to overpower her. Instead, she looks after her alcoholic Mira Masi and her retarded brother Baba. She sacrifices all her pleasures and happiness for the sake of her family. Desai does not project Bim as a conventional woman, as a sufferer and an entity for gratification by the patriarchy; instead Bim is represented as an iron-willed, self-reliant and educated woman. Right from her school days she seeks power and recognition. She is elected as the class prefect, captain of the netball team and the head girl. Bim puts on her brother's attire in order to feel more confident and superior and gain equal recognition as men. Bim's character serves as a foil to her weak-willed, uneducated sister. Her preferences for knowledge over imagination, challenge over comfort distinguish her from her dreamy sister Tara who marries a diplomat Bakul and leaves the family house to escape from the pains of her childhood memories and hard life in Old Delhi. Tara's escape from her childhood house to her marital home represents her movement from one type of oppression to another. In her childhood home she is ignored by her siblings and in her husband's house she is treated just as an object without any self-identity by her husband.

The Misra girls are the neighbours of the Das family. They represent typical Indian women who stay at home and possess all feminine virtues. Marriage rather than establishment of self-identity is the motive of their life. They readily accept women's inferior status in the society. Another female character Mrs Das, that is the mother of Bim, Raja, Tara represents a weird mother. She does not share a real affective and cordial relation with her children. She informs her children that they will have a new governess Aunt Mira as it is difficult for her to control them. Mrs Das's lack of sensitivity and passive motherhood results in her strained relationship with her children. Thus, through the character of Bim Desai represents women striving for autonomous existence in a patriarchal society unlike the Misra girls, Tara and Mrs Das who conform to the role of dependency imposed upon women.

### **11.7 SUMMING UP**

R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai have dealt with female characters who strive for freedom and self-identity. Most of the female characters are explored in terms of their relationship with their male counterpoint. Both of them have focused

extensively on the existential crisis faced by women in the orthodox patriarchal society.



### 11.8 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss in detail the image of women as portrayed by different Indian English novelists.
2. Attempt a comparative study of the image of woman in the novels of Narayan and Desai.
3. Discuss the theme of feminine sensibility as depicted by Desai in her novel *Clear Light of Day*.
4. Women are silent sufferers of patriarchal society. Explain in relation to Desai's novels.
5. Discuss Raju's mother as a traditional woman in the novel *The Guide*.
6. Briefly portray the character of Rosie in the novel *The Guide*.



### 11.9 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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## **UNIT 12: REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CHANGES IN INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Learning Objectives
- 12.2 Literature as a mirror image of social changes
- 12.3 Recent trends in Indian English Fiction
- 12.4 R.K. Narayan's depiction of social issues in his novels
- 12.5 Anita Desai's depiction of social issues in her novels
- 12.6 Narayan's *The Guide* and its representation of changing Indian society
- 12.7 Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and its representation of feminine sensibility
- 12.8 Summing Up
- 12.9 Assessment Questions
- 12.10 References and Recommended Readings

### **12.0 INTRODUCTION**

An analysis has been made in this paper with regard to R K Narayan's female protagonists in the right perspective highlighting his feminist concern. From Savitri in *The Dark Room* (1938) to Bala in *Grandmother's Tale* (1992), Narayan's women characters have a strong base of Indianness. The concept of New Women is first invented by Ibsen in his *A Doll's House*. New Women is not one who revolt against the patriarchal system through her protest but one who try to establish her identity in this world. And R. K. Narayan is such a novelist who has dealt with such a new women who establishes herself in the society.

### **12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

This unit seeks to throw light on the socially committed Indian English fiction writers and their literary works. The primary focus will be on

- literature as a means for bringing about social changes.
- socio economic changes in the Indian society with special emphasis on the post-independence era.

- the quest for self- identity in the novels *The Guide* and *Clear Light of Day*.

## **12.2 LITERATURE AS A MIRROR IMAGE OF SOCIAL CHANGES**

Literature is the reflection of the life in all its varied forms and shapes. It serves as a mirror to life and society. The works of any age are characterized by the socio-political tensions, fears, aspirations of the time. Novel as a genre is often considered as a powerful medium which helps to project the age in a descriptive and analytical manner. Its form is suitable to present the social, political, cultural and historical growth of society at a great length. Literature and history are intimately linked with each other. The Indian English writers often deal extensively with important historical events, momentous happenings and incidents of national importance. Literature presents the positive values and negative aspects of the society so that people can amend their mistakes and emulate the good values. Thus literature serves as a corrective mirror in order to bring positive changes in the society. A writer is a product of his society, so the greatest of artists is sometimes a conscious, sometimes an unconscious, exponent of his time-spirit.

India has witnessed several socio-political and economic changes in the post-independence period. The socio-political ferment constitutes a substantial component of Indian English Literature. Literature has played a pivotal role in inculcating nationalistic fervor amongst common man and in contributing substantially to the nation building process. The important thematic preoccupation of Indian English fiction writers includes the glorification of Indian heritage, mustering support for freedom movement, the partition riots and the subsequent communal violence, condition of women etc. So, the writers play an active role in bringing social changes through their works.

## **12.3 RECENT TRENDS IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION**

Indian English novel became more realistic and modern with the emergence of the great Indian trio of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in the 1930's. They dominated the literary scene for a long period and contributed immensely to the growth of the novel as a medium of social justice. They were mainly concerned with the downtrodden sections of the society, middle class life,



Gandhian movement, traditional cultural ethos of India. Anand's novels such as *Untouchables*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* deal with the oppression and discrimination faced by lower class people in the society. R.K. Narayan in his *Malgudi Days* (1942) represents microcosm of Indian life through the creation of the fictional town Malgudi. His novel *Kanthapura* is about Gandhian philosophy and modern India. Raja Rao's novels such as *The Serpent and the Rope*, *The Cat and Shakespeare* deal with spiritual aspects of Indian life.


Indian English Literature is no longer confined to the novels of the writers residing in India only. Many Indian origin writers settled abroad have contributed to the rapidly developing Indian literature. V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and others bring out the problems of alienation and displacement faced by the people in their adopted country. These writers cleverly weave the theme of cultural hybridity into their works. They also foreground the problems of cultural conflicts and acculturation faced by the members of diasporic community. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) are classic examples of diasporic sensibilities.

Another important feature of modern Indian English fiction is its shift of emphasis from the external to the internal, that is from socio-political issues to the individual problems. The recent writers have explored the issues of individual identity, psychological complexities, social, political and ecological problems, refusal to accept traditional values, and so on. Arun Joshi's novels such as *The Foreigner* (1958), *The Apprentice* (1974), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1981), V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) are notable examples of novels representing existential crisis faced by the protagonists.

Feminism and its emphasis on women's marginalization, subordination and empowerment have also brought about major changes in Indian English Literature. Women writers notably Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and others deal with the inner turmoil of the characters arising out of their unsuccessful relationship with their husbands and in-laws, discrimination by the patriarchal society in the field of education and jobs and their struggle to establish their self-identity in the society. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, *Cry, the Peacock* deal with the existential crisis faced by the female characters like Nanda Kaul, Tara, Maya. Similarly, Arundhati Roy in *The God of*

*Small Things* presents female characters who are torn between traditional norms and modern attitudes.

Postcolonial perspectives have also shaped Indian English fiction to a great extent. Instead of merely imitating their western counterparts the writers have created their distinctive stamp of Indianness. The writers have challenged and questioned the Eurocentric ideology regarding India. The postcolonial novelists have written with an informed awareness so as to redefine the nation in the contexts of its roots. I. Allan Seally's *Trotter Nama*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* deal with modern Indian history. They use Indian myths and oral traditions to challenge Western account of Indian history.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS	
	1. What is the relationship between literature and social changes?
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2. Name three important writers who for the first time used novel as a means for representing Indian social reality?	
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3. What are the main concerns of diasporic writers?	
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4. Mention a few writers who have made an attempt to project Indian history in their novels?	
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#### 12.4 R.K. NARAYAN'S DEPICTION OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN HIS NOVELS

R.K. Narayan was a visionary writer. His vision was based on reality. He was a keen observer of the social changes taking place in India. He envisaged a society where people could enjoy free life without any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion or power. Through his novels he strives constantly to bring positive changes in the society. He does not hesitate to criticize the institutions that stifle human development.

In his first novel *Swami and Friends* Narayan shows his aversion to any kind of sectarianism through the protagonist Swaminathan who is disgusted with the social environment around him. The boy is not ready to accept his master's religious ranting as it is communal. Similarly, Narayan openly expresses his dissatisfaction with the education system which emphasizes only theoretical knowledge instead of development of individuality in his novels *The Bachelor of Arts* and *Swami and Friends*. The protagonists of both the novels Chandra and Swami respectively find the learning process very tedious. Narayan at the same time praises the headmaster in novel *The English Teacher* who believes in teaching in the 'play way' method. In this novel the English teacher gives up his college job and decides to take up work that will help to bring positive changes in the society.

In his novel *Mr. Sampath, The Printer of Malgudi* Narayan brings forth a new profession, that is an editor of the newspaper, through the character of Srinivas. The job is not a lucrative one but as an editor of the newspaper he highlights the corruptions and malpractices prevalent in Malgudi. He tries to uphold the cause of the poor people. Narayan in his novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* again champions the cause of the poor. He projects Mahatma Gandhi as a propagator of social changes. Gandhi's presence not only raises the political will of the people but also help to improve the plight of poor people. Gandhi's views against untouchability and castetism and his decision to stay in the houses of the sweepers are indications of the changes sweeping into Malgudi.

Another social change depicted by Narayan in his post-independence novel is the plight of women characters. He portrays characters of women who break away

from the stereotypes of womanhood and try to assert their own individual identities. For instance, in the novel *The English Teacher* Sushila is an educated woman. She participates equally in the decisions related to her family. Her education helps her to assert her self-identity. She takes interest in the works of Lamb and Shakespeare but at the same time her library contains religious books such as hymns by Tamil saints, Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita. Similarly, in the novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*, Bharati defies the traditional role of a woman and actively joins Gandhi's movement to bring about the independence of India.

### **12.5 ANITA DESAI'S DEPICTION OF SOCIAL ISSUES IN HER NOVELS**


Anita Desai has added a new dimension to Indian English fiction by putting emphasis on the psychic life of her female characters. Through her novels she lends a voice to the oppressed women. The protagonists yearn for revolutionary changes in the society which will bring them freedom. Most of her characters crave for self-assertion. The complexities of man-woman relationships and nurturing of individuality are recurring themes in her novels. Her novels deal with the predicament of sensitive women characters who find it difficult to adjust to the social norms.

Anita Desai's novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963), expresses Maya's desire to live life to the full but she finds it difficult to deal with the harsh realities of life. Maya lived a life of solitude in her father's house. She was brought up tenderly by her doting father. Her father's overprotective nature does not allow her any independence to think and grow as an entity. She is unable to face the realities of married life in her husband Gautama's house. In her husband's family the atmosphere is charged with intellectual, political and social discussion. Maya does not participate in these discussions. So, the family members consider her to be immature. She finds it difficult to recover from her dwindling sense of inferiority in the family. Gautama feels that she is a neurotic and pampered child. Through Maya's character Desai represents the dissolution of feminine sensibility under the stress of overprotective childhood life and unsuccessful married life.

The novel *Fire on the Mountain* deals with the life of an aged, tired individual who is in search of peace and solitude away from all family ties in a mountain retreat at Kasauli. Nanda Kaul has lost her selfhood in a life of social conventions as the

wife of a Vice-Chancellor in a Punjab town. She is not happy in her married life with a husband who has had a mistress Miss David all his life. In spite of her sorrows Nanda has to bear the burden of the feminine image of a perfect wife, perfect mother and efficient keeper of her husband's house. She takes refuge in the Kasauli hills in order to escape from the patriarchal value system. Liberated from the harsh realities of married life, she is forced into a new problem with the arrival of her grandchild Raka at the hills. Traumatized by a disturbed childhood, Raka is hostile to any kind of relationship. Her act of setting the forest on fire symbolizes the annihilation of the conventional world and its injustice.

In the novel *Fasting Feasting*, the protagonist Uma is a simple, uneducated spinster from an orthodox Indian family. She has two siblings – a sister and a brother. Her parents decide to prepare the two daughters only for marriage and educate the son for a good career. After the birth of her brother Uma's parents decide not to send her to school anymore. Uma has to stay at home and do the household works till a suitable marriage is arranged for her. Uma proves to be unlucky in terms of marriage too. The first proposal could not be materialized as the boy liked her younger sister Aruna. Her second match, the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, is greatly liked by her parents. A huge dowry is offered and the engagement date is fixed but later the prospective groom cancels the engagement because he wants to pursue higher education. Her mother curses her bad luck and her family stops caring for her. At last Uma's marriage is fixed to a boy named Harish almost as old as her father without Uma's consent. This marriage too turns out to be a failure. Harish leaves for Meerut without even informing Uma. So, through this novel also Desai addresses the problems faced by women in a patriarchal society.

	<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>
1. What are the social changes Narayan wants to bring through his novels?	
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2. What are the main social themes in Desai's novels?

### **12.6 NARAYAN'S *THE GUIDE* AND ITS REPRESENTATION OF CHANGING INDIAN SOCIETY**

R.K. Narayan's novel *The Guide* reflects the course of India's socio-cultural evolution. The unique nature of Indian modernity, that is the combination of western values with Indian tradition, is represented explicitly in the novel. The conflict between religion and rationality, spirituality and materiality, superstitions and scientific outlook abounds in this novel. The emergence of a kind of subjectivity in the postcolonial era is also described in this novel. Narayan neither rejects Westernization nor celebrates tradition but deals with the interface between western values and Indian tradition.

The emergence of a new woman is exposed through the character of Rosie. She develops from being a modest lady to a self-reliant independent woman. Rosie is a post-graduate woman. She pursues her own career as a professional dancer in order to assert her self-identity. Though she comes from a socially stigmatized class of devadasi she seeks recognition in the society as a classical dancer. She tries to gain recognition by marrying a respectable man Marco but later she realizes that she can lead a life of her own even without Marco. Her close affinities to Raju the guide strain her relationship with Marco. When Marco deserts her she takes shelter in Raju's house without any hesitation. She does not worry about the outside world and their views regarding her character. The western influence is evident in her attitude and behaviour.

The coming of railways in Malgudi represents the transformation from a secluded community to a modern society. The railway station which brings outsiders

brings about a radical change in the Malgudi society. Modernity and some of its attendant evils replace some of the values of traditional Malgudi community. Raju, a simple-minded villager, picks up abusive terms from the railway men. He becomes a railway guide, gradually gives up honest ways of earning money and brings ruin upon himself and the married life of Rosie and Marco. Education is another important area which is affected with the advent of the train. Raju's formal education is hampered as his father urges him to run their railway station shop for the sake of managing the economic crisis. Raju's condition actually replicates the Indian societal system where lower middle class people consider their children's education as of secondary importance only.


Raju and Rosie's character represents an intermingling of Western and non-Western values. Raju dissociates himself from the society after his intimacy with Rosie and faces unpleasant outcomes. He returns to the society and achieves redemption only through his role as a swami. The villagers urge him to fast to please the rain gods and bring rain. This shows how traditional rituals continue to exist even after the advent of modernity in Malgudi. Again Rosie is deeply entrenched in Indian values. She feels depressed for her failed marital life with Marco. Her passion for classical dance and the changing of her name from Rosie to Nalini in order to be accepted by the orthodox society reflects the Indianness in her character.

### ***12.7 DESAI'S CLEAR LIGHT OF DAY AND ITS REPRESENTATION OF FEMININE SENSIBILITY***

In the novel *Clear Light of Day* Bim represents a modern woman who is confident and courageous to live independently in the society. She is an educated woman, a History teacher by profession. Her ambition is to acquire degrees and lead an independent life. As the eldest sister, she is burdened with different responsibilities. After the death of her parents, she has to look after her alcoholic aunt Mira Masi, her sick brother Raja and her mentally retarded brother Baba. Her responsibilities doubled after Raja's desertion and Tara's marriage. But instead of escaping the situation she bravely withstands the onslaught of time and society. Bim even rejects the proposal of a doctor in order to look after her brother Baba. She does not like anyone to feel pity for her. She rejects the traditional role of achieving

identity as someone's wife. She is portrayed as an assertive character who wants to rule the family home rather than being ruled.

Tara, on the contrary, does not act against the patriarchal society. She surrenders to the traditional norms and wants to keep the traditions alive. She embodies all the feminine traits determined by the male society – weakness, dependency, and shyness. Tara allows her life to be totally governed by her husband. The movements and choices in her life are determined by her husband Bakul. Mira Masi is another female character portrayed as a victim of the orthodox society. She is a victim of child marriage. Her husband goes abroad for further study immediately after their marriage. There he catches a bad cold and dies. Her husband's family blames her for his death and feels that she should suffer for her guilt. Mira Masi, however, tries to overcome her sorrow by taking care of Das's children when their parents abandon their duties.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS</b>	
	1. What are the modern qualities embodied in the character Rosie?
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2. What are the changes brought forth by railways in Malgudi?	
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## **12.8 SUMMING UP**

The Indian English novelists have dealt extensively with the radical changes that came in the post-independence Indian society. R.K. Narayan has successfully projected the post-independence Indian society oscillating between tradition and modernity. He has portrayed progressive ideas about women through the character of Rosie, the professional dancer. Anita Desai too has represented the stereotypical suffering woman as well as modern rebellious self-sufficient woman in her novel *Clear Light of Day*.

## **12.9 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss the importance of Indian English novels as a prevailing tool of social change.
2. Discuss the changes in social trends as depicted in Indian English novels in general.
3. Discuss Narayan's depiction of social changes with special reference to *The Guide*.
4. Describe the image of the modern woman as presented by Desai in her novel *Clear Light of Day*.
5. Mention the unique nature of Indian modernity as reflected in the novel *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan?

## **12.10 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS**

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