

B. A. (Programme) II/III Year English- A

**Compulsory Language Course
Fluency in English**

Unit : 1-15



SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING
(Campus of Open Learning)
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Department of English

Graduate Course

Fluency in English Part II

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LEARNING TO WRITE—I

Free Writing

— Nalini Prabhakar

1.1. Introduction

Let us begin this unit Learning to Write I with a few general observations. Reading and writing as you know play a very important role in our lives. I am sure all of you have a certain amount of experience of writing, if nothing else, at least writing answers to examination questions. Often it is our writing skills which determine our success or failure in examinations. We also practice many other forms of writing; for instance we write letters to our friends, family, fill up routine forms, applications and at least some of us have some experience of creative writing, writing diaries and so on.

Is writing difficult? Well there is no simple answer to this question. For instance, most of us find it easy to write in our mother tongues than in a second language, English, which for most of us is an acquired language. But that is not to say, writing in our mother tongue comes naturally to us. We still need to learn writing, though we speak the language well, without much effort. We need to learn writing because, writing involves certain specific formal, logical skills, which we need to master to communicate effectively.

So let's learn writing and especially writing in a second language. This exercise we shall do in five of the fifteen units prescribed for your course. So let us begin with "free writing".

1.2. Free Writing

Writing, as you yourself must have experienced, is rarely taught in the classrooms. Students often are expected to acquire writing skills on their own by following models of good writing provided to them. Thus the focus has been more on the product rather than the process. But good writing skills are not acquired over-night. It takes years of practice to produce good writing, a finished product. But how and where does one begin?

The simplest and the best way to begin is to write for oneself. This is called free writing. When we write for our-self we need not bother about spelling, grammar, neatness, correctness etc. so long as it makes sense to us. Most writing as we know has an intended reader. In other words we write with a reader in mind. The tone and quality of writing is often determined by this imagined reader. For instance, when we write a letter to the principal of a college the tone is formal. But when we write for ourselves we write without any constraints. The advantages of free writing are many:

- a) It helps us clarify our thoughts and feelings.
- b) We become more open and honest.
- c) It helps us to write without fear of being criticised.
- d) Free writing can help us understand our own thoughts which form the base of original thoughts. It also provides us with material for public writing.

We must remember that we can develop good writing skills only after years of practice. Free writing is perhaps the best way to begin that process. To complement your efforts at writing, you must also develop a reading habit. Reading newspaper, magazines and other kinds of writing will help you develop many of the skills required for good writing.

UNDERSTANDING PROCESSES

Learning Can be Fun

By Arvind Gupta and Sunita Pandhe

— Nalini Prabhakar

1.1. Introduction

In the previous unit, we had made a distinction between writing as a product (finished piece of writing) and writing as a process (free writing). Unit I attempted to spell out the advantages of following the process. To develop good writing skills we need to focus on the process which makes good writing possible. In this unit we extend the same argument a little further by focussing on the process of learning. Often we have seen that good processes lead to good outcomes as well. Let us examine how this observation is applicable in education as well.

1.2. The Animal School: A Parable

This unit begins with the parable of The Animal School. As you know, a parable is a story which has a moral. In this story we have a school where animals with different kinds of skills are forced to study all the subjects. When they had joined school they were masters at the skills that were necessary for their survival. But by the time they finished schooling, though they had learnt a little bit of everything, they lost the skills they had mastered to survive in the world. Some of the animals (gophers-a rat like animal) though had the courage to resist the uniform and in a sense mindless school education which was being forced upon them, because digging (an important survival skill for them) was not included in the curriculum. That is not to say that they didn't educate their children, because they sent their children to the badger to learn digging and finally started a school offering alternate education.

What then is the moral of this story? The moral of the story is that forcing children to learn everything without giving due importance to the special skills they already have, is not only counterproductive but seriously damages whatever special talents they might have. In the long run this kind of education makes them unfit for anything. This is a very serious issue. And we need to think seriously about the kind of education that is provided by the prevailing system of schooling in India.

1.3. What is Learning?

The schooling system in India forces children to learn all subjects even if they are not interested in it. The result is that most children are unhappy at school and lose interest in the kind of learning that is provided by the school. Consequently learning is regarded as boring and unpleasant. This notion is so widespread in our society that we consider play and 'learning' as two separate and distinct activities. This problem has assumed dangerous proportions. As we move towards globalization' society rewards those who do well in examinations. Hence parents also force their children to acquire skills which are commercially more productive. Thus children are under tremendous pressure to learn so that he/she can get a good job. This unhealthy competition has led to a situation where school going children, who are unable to compete and

get good marks, go into depression and sometimes take their own lives. Is getting good marks in examination, or cramming up a lot of information, learning?

1.4. How Learning takes place

Our society has fallen victim to the mistaken notion that learning can only take place in the structured environment of a school. Further, we as a society seem to think that acquiring a lot of information from books and other second hand sources is learning. But we fail to understand that the most important things in life are learnt from the family and the society we live in. For, example we know that children in the villages have great knowledge about plants, herbs, crops animal behaviour and weather. In fact the village folk know much more about these things than a botanist or zoologist. But unlike the botanist or the zoologist they may not be able to provide a scientific explanation for these things. They acquire this knowledge by observing and participating in activities related to these things. Thus they learn at the best school available, and that is life itself.

We must learn to appreciate the fact that learning is a process. This process can be sometimes tedious, but is often fulfilling. The joy of learning is lost if we separate learning from our day-to-day life and make it a race to get more marks, more information, more awards and more success. Learning itself is a reward. By linking learning with rewards, we force children to acquire information which has very little connection with the child's lived reality.

1.5. Learning is its own reward

In the earlier section we have noted that education is getting more and more commercialized. The fall out of this commercialisation is an unhealthy competition for more marks, medals, positions etc. This system of rewards is harmful in the long run because once the record is attained the students lose interest in the subject and as a result fail to connect emotionally with the subject that they are studying. The authors point out many instances of this separation of intellect and emotion. For instance, students who debate keenly for equality and justice fail to practice it in their real lives. In a sense all the information they had gathered for the debate becomes useless, because they fail to learn to practice it in their lives. Hence we can say that learning becomes fruitful if it helps us to become better human beings and useful members of the society we live in. Meaningful learning happens when we are able to combine our intellect with our emotion, in other words when we are able to feel our thoughts. And only then learning becomes its own reward.

1.6. Learning from mistakes

Another issue that the authors point out about our education system is the fear of mistakes. This fear is so acute that often parents do not allow children to do things on their own. The authors point out that most of the school holiday homework is done by the parents because they want their children to get good grades in school not only in academics but also in other activities as well. For instance if the children are asked to draw and paint, parents take the help of art tutors to produce a good drawing/painting. The focus then is on producing a painting (a finished product) and not on the process of making a painting. So the end result is that the child is denied the experience of painting. This experience is very important for the child, because it is through this that the child learns about lines, colours and discovers the many aspects of painting. Of course, the child will make mistakes, waste paper, colour, but the child has a right to make mistakes because it is a natural part of learning. And this is true not just of academics

but also of other activities as well. One cannot become a good sportsperson, dancer, painter etc. without making mistakes.

1.7. Learning can take place anywhere

Another misconception that we have about learning is that learning takes place only inside a classroom, where the teacher transmits and the students receive. The author cites his own experience of teaching tribal children in Madhya Pradesh to disprove this idea. The tribal children who displayed amazing knowledge about their environment and geography had great difficulty in comprehending the geography lesson prescribed in their text book. This problem was compounded by the fact that the text book lesson was in Hindi while the children spoke Chhattisgarhi. This incident demonstrates that though these children may not do well in examinations they are well educated. They have been educated not in the class but in their environment. Their education is perhaps, more meaningful and integrated with their society. Children learn a lot by observing things around them and by doing things on their own and not, as we tend to believe, from a teacher in the classroom.

1.8. Changes in the school system

It is clear from the contents in the essay, that the school system must change, so that learning becomes holistic and meaningful. But we must remember that merely changing the materials and organisational structure will not lead to healthy growth. As we have observed in this essay, healthy growth is only possible when we are free to innovate and experiment. Our focus should be on the learning process and we should encourage our children to explore their surroundings to discover things for themselves and allow them to make their mistakes. And the best person to do this at school is the teacher. We must give our teachers the freedom and the support to innovate so that they can help the children realise their potential. We need money. But more than the money we need freedom from constant prescription and controls to make our classrooms more productive and meaningful.

UNDERSTANDING INTERVIEWS

Billy Elliot is My Story, Only Less Happy

By Shoma Chaudhury

— Nalini Prabhakar

1.1. Introduction

Interviews, as we all know, are formal meetings, where someone is asked questions in order to find out more about the person. There are various kinds of interviews. For instance when you apply for a job or admission into an academic institution you have to face an interview where they try to find out if you are suitable for the job or academic course. The journalists interview politicians or famous personalities to find out their views on certain issues or find out more about their lives. The police interview people to find out more about a crime. Now all these interviews need different kinds of interview skills. In this unit you are going to read an interview where a journalist (Shoma Chaudhury) interviews a famous theatre personality (Barry John). When a journalist interviews a famous personality, he/she tries to bring to the notice of the reading public the personality and aspects of the person's life which are generally not known, because no one will be interested in reading things about a person's life which they already know. So the journalist must:

- a) Know as much as possible about the person he/she is going to interview.
- b) Prepare a list of questions which he/she is going to ask so that the interview becomes interesting and brings out details about the person which are not known to the reading public.
- c) Prepare questions in such a way that it reveals the process which made the person what he/she is today.

Now let us read the interview and see if Shoma Chaudhury has managed to do all this in the interview.

1.2. *Billy Elliot is My Story, Only Less Happy*

Barry John started an alternate theatre movement in Delhi with the formation of TAG (Theatre Action Group) in the 70's. His contribution to theatre is well known and TAG was a leading theatre group in Delhi for more than two decades. Thus the interview begins with the assumption that the readers are familiar with Barry John and TAG. Thus the challenge before the journalist is to interview Barry John in a way which would throw light on the initial influences, the formative ideas, the circumstances, which prompted Barry John to start an alternate theatre movement. The interview must also bring out the uniqueness of TAG and this particular theatre movement as different from other kinds of theatre that existed at that point of time.

Consequently the interview begins with a question on the vision of theatre which shaped the TAG's theatre activities followed by questions on the importance of TAG to the people who were a part of this movement.

The answer to the first three questions reveals the following:

- a) Barry John started his theatre activities in Delhi in the 70's with a theatre group called Yatrik doing conventional theatre.
- b) He taught drama in schools for a living. He also started producing plays in colleges as well and there he came in touch with young college students who were influenced by the new counter culture movement.
- c) TAG was formed to give expression to the urge amongst the youth. The initial years at TAG were very exciting and were spent in experimenting new forms of expression in theatre.
- d) This experimental theatre was an exploration and did away with naturalism (or in a simple way realism) in theatre.
- e) This theatre not only helped each individual to express his/her own creativity but also created strong bonds amongst each other by challenging each other to bring out the best in each other.
- f) But what set Barry John's theatre apart from the others is his belief that theatre was educational as well as therapeutic (to help people to feel better about themselves). He believes that process of producing a play helps the growth of mind, body, heart and soul.
- g) The belief that theatre could be therapeutic has its roots in Barry John's own personal experiences. His own unhappy childhood and his fight for freedom and his own struggles to do theatre taught him that theatre could be therapeutic because he himself found it in theatre.
- h) Barry refuses to talk about the positive effects of TAG on individuals because it might violate the privacy of others. But he says that people are the central issue of his theatre. A theatre which does not find ordinary people and their lives, the good things and the dreadful things that they do, interesting is a waste of time. Thus for Barry John theatre has to be people-centric.

1.3. The next two questions refer to the period when TAG, as a theatre movement, is no longer the force that it used to be earlier. The first question tries to find out if Barry's John's vision has been kept alive by the people who apprenticed with him. The second question relates to the general health of English theatre in Delhi. We come to know the following from Barry John's answer:

- a) Barry John did not believe in starting a particular kind of theatre. He would, in fact, be unhappy if such a trend emerged because he believed that each person's creativity is rooted with that particular person's inner self. Barry's intention was not to create or train people to continue doing Barry John's theatre but to help people realise their own potential and creativity. That is the best that a teacher can do for his/her students. However the only thing that he would like to see in his apprentices, as he has found in case of Shahrukh Khan and Manoj Bajpai, is passion, honesty in one's work. The work should be important and not the money earned.
- b) Barry John believes that theatre in Delhi is, though not dead, not what it used to be. He himself has not been very active partly because he is growing older and partly because of the theatre school (IMAGO) which he runs. He spends a lot of

time in the theatre school because he must be honest to the people who enroll at his school.

- c) He feels detached from the current theatre scene in Delhi because theatre now is viewed more as entertainment and the humanising and educational value of theatre is ignored. Unlike his own time when brilliant people like Roshan Seth and others used a lot of imagination and very little money to build a vibrant theatre movement, the current theatre scene in Delhi is dominated by lavish sets, fancy lighting and commercialism. The theatre in Delhi, Barry John feels, lacks heart which was the most important thing for TAG.

1.4. The next two questions deal with the personal life of Barry John, his initial struggles and his journey to India. We come to know the following:

- a) Barry John had to struggle not just against unwilling parents but also many other things to make a career of theatre. His parents never saw him on stage as an actor. His father wanted him to work for Massey Ferguson (tractor makers) after school. His own circumstances (his father was a factory worker belonging to the lower middle class and he was brought up in a small industrial town called Coventry) was the biggest obstacle.
- b) One of the reasons why he fought to get into a college was to study drama and become a teacher. But another and perhaps a greater reason, was to escape from home. Since joining college Barry John never lived at home and spent most of his vacations working at odd jobs so that he could retain his freedom.
- c) Barry John could not find a place in English theatre because he came from a working class background because English theatre in the 60's was very class bound and people from right kind of public schools who spoke English extremely well could get into it. So when he got the opportunity to travel to India he jumped at the idea. John Hodgson, the head of the department of drama where Barry John studied helped him make up his mind by encouraging him to take up the offer.

1.5. The final two questions bring us to the present time and concern the current theatre activities of Barry John. We come to know that:

- a) Barry John is doing three plays now and they form a trilogy called Honey trilogy. The one dealing with religion "It's all about God, Honey" was ready two years ago. It was their response to what happened in Gujarat. But they haven't found a sponsor for the play because they are only worried about the commercial success of the plays.
- b) In response to question about a promising voice, Barry John identifies Roysten Abel as one and hopes that he gets enough financial support to pursue theatre without any worries.

UNDERSTANDING TRANSLATIONS

If I Return This Time

By Kunwar Narain

— P.K. Sathpathy

1.1. Introduction

In this unit you are given a poem to read and comprehend. This poem, written by Kunwar Narain, is translated from Hindi to English. Translation, which was a neglected activity, has assumed great importance over the last few decades. Why is translation important? Translation is important because it gives us access to ideas, thoughts and culture of people who use a language unknown to us. In short translation helps communication across cultures. Translation is a highly skilled activity which requires, not just a knowledge of at least two languages, but also familiarity with the sense, rhythm and subtle nuances of the languages one is dealing with. There are specialised Masters programmes in translation in many universities now. Of late, with the entry of multinational companies and increased trans border economic activities, translators are much in demand and translation has become a lucrative profession.

1.2. If I Return This Time!

This poem has a very simple structure with two main stanzas and a refrain which is repeated thrice with some variations. The poet is speaking in the first person and he is talking about a possible return or in other words a rebirth. The first two lines gives us the tone of the poem.

“If I return this time
I must return greater”

The conditional ‘if’ at the beginning of the sentence defines the condition of his return. He must, if at all return, return greater than what he is in this life. This wish to return greater suggests that this life that the poet is living is, perhaps, a lesser life, a life the poet is not happy about. Though the ‘if’ at the beginning points out the uncertainty of a return, of a rebirth, there is a wish to return so that the poet could possibly lead a different kind of life. The uncertainty of rebirth accentuates the emotional urge to return greater, and more acute.

The first stanza begins with a ‘Not’ to make a negative statement which clarifies what he means when he says ‘I must return greater.’ He must return but not with “pointed moustaches” or “tails of steel”. Both these images create a manly and aggressive picture of man and animal.

Pointed moustache is, as you know, common to the brave, manly and aggressive warrior class. A class that prides itself on its manly virtues and looks down upon qualities like kindness and compassion which it considers as womanly. Tails of steel on the other hand evokes the image of a prowling, aggressive and a fierce beast whose presence sends shivers down the spines of other animals. But these are not qualities the poet considers as greater. He would rather be kind and “give way to others” and not scare them with terrifying “tigerish devouring looks.” The tiger image here represents one, extreme, the harsh, cruel and unforgiving part of human beings. The poet rejects it. Then what does he want to be in his rebirth?

1.3. The second stanza begins again with the same refrain

If I return
I must return more human.

If he returns, then he would like to be more human and not like a man with a tiger-like nature and temperament. In the second stanza we see another animal image. The image of a puppy. The image of the run-over puppy contrasts violently with that of the tiger. But if the poet, this time, survives the fate of a run-over puppy, which is pitiable, then he must return more thankful. Thankful for surviving the travails of, city life. But unlike the puppy, who is scared, the poet won't sit back licking only his wounds. He would go beyond his own troubles and tribulation to reach out to others. He would be more caring towards him fellow human beings and it is this caring that will make him completely human.

Thus we see that the poet rejects not just the violent and aggressive higher image but also that of the weak submissive and pitiable image of the puppy. The poet seems to suggest that the complete human exists within the space between the aggressive and submissive.

1.4. The poem ends with the refrain "If I return at all." The 'if' of the last line seems to suggest that though the poet seems to have some idea about the way he would like to return, he is not very optimistic about the return. The tone seems to suggest that the poet thinks that the chances of his return are indeed almost non-existent. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that the poet believes in rebirth. But what is nevertheless clear is that he wishes men to be more human than the inhuman tiger but not less than human like the puppy in its whining and complaining state.

LEARNING TO WRITE—II

Editing

— P.K. Sathpathy

1.1. Introduction

In Unit 1 we had discussed the advantages of free writing. While discussing the process of writing we had emphasized on the process of writing rather than the final, finished product. The process of writing begins with writing for oneself. In this unit we identify a few more steps of the same process and we shall try to put them to practice.

1.2. Editing

While free writing concerns the initial stage of the process, editing represents the second stage of the process. Editing is a very important process which gives form and finish to our writings. This lesson identifies some of the factors in this process. They are:

- a) We need to have two different frames of minds for writing.
 - i) a fertile and inventive mental make up which rejects all external forces (teachers, schools, institutions, ... etc) and helps us come up with a lots of ideas.
 - ii) a critical and questioning mental make up which helps us look at our own writing in a critical manner. It helps us to revise, cut and rewrite what we have produced with an inventive and fertile frame of mind.
- b) Though these two attitudes seems contradictory we need to have them and make them complementary to each other. We can do that by keeping them separate from each other.
- c) We must adopt the first attitude while in the process of preparing our first draft. In other words in our free writing phase. This must be followed by the second attitude. We must be tough on ourselves in this stage so that we are able to cross out, correct, revise and rearrange what we have already written. We must be critical of our writing and reflect on it. If we do this we will be able to identify the weakness and short- comings in our writing and be able to rework them.
- d) We must respect our individuality when we are writing our drafts. All of us are individuals and think and experience in distinct ways. We must ask questions like what voices do I use most? What voices feel most like me? By asking these questions we learn to identify and acknowledge our own individual voice.
- e) We all have different kinds of experiences. Hence it is important to trust our experiences and use them in our writing. We must remember that our experiences make our writing true, honest and sincere. We must remember that no one can deny or belittle our experiences because our experiences are authentic.
- f) While recognizing and trusting our experiences we should not neglect the experiences of others who have had similar experiences. Establishing linkages with other's experiences will give our writing a wider appeal and help us locate our experiences within a broader context. These linkages helps us share, help and respond to each

other's writings. Thus we get to experience writing as a social and a communal activity and share in the joy of a communal experience.

1.3. All these tips can only be helpful only if we put them to practice in a group where we trust each other with our writing. So try and form a small group with your friends and start writing.

UNDERSTANDING SATIRE

'A Mother's Decision'

by Ritu Bhatia

— Dr. Seema Suri

Objectives

This unit will help you understand and appreciate the satire in the short story ‘A Mother’s Decision’. Read the story before going through this unit. Some of the words not commonly used are explained in the glossary and I am sure you could look up the meanings of any other words that you don’t understand in a good dictionary. The *Introduction* will provide a social context for the story and the *Analysis* is meant to draw your attention to the satirical elements in it. The questions at the end will test your understanding.

Introduction

Try this entertaining activity. Catch hold of any elder in your immediate or extended family: parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles and ask them how they got married. I am sure they would love to tell you about it. You will be amused and surprised at the wealth of information that you have been able to gather about a major social trend in India: that of ‘arranged marriages’. An arranged marriage would be one where the man and woman decide to get married after a formal, well-established and elaborate process of searching, selecting, and approving a ‘suitable match’ has been completed. This task is usually performed by the parents but it is not considered untoward for almost anyone amongst one’s relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues or even casual acquaintances to take upon themselves the responsibility of finding a suitable match.

Globalization, westernization and an increase in the number of women in the workforce are some of the factors that have resulted in a greater number of, what are colloquially known as, love marriages, where it is the man and woman who take the decision to get married. At the same time the institution of arranged marriages has managed to survive; though there have been many changes. While your grandparents most probably got married without even a look at each other before the wedding, nowadays parents arrange for the man and woman to meet a couple of times but mostly in the presence of family members. The more liberal ones might even encourage the couple to go for dates before they make a decision.

Nowadays, due to the changing social scenario, where families are getting smaller and isolated, people rely on newspapers to marry their children. You only need to pick up the Sunday edition of any major newspaper and turn to the classified advertisements. Check out those in the sections marked ‘Matrimonial’ and you will find concrete evidence of the prevalence of this social practice. There are hundreds of advertisements in the sub-sections labelled ‘Brides Wanted’ and ‘Grooms Wanted’.

In a society where, except for a few elitist sections, free intermingling of men and women is not encouraged, even educated and independent young people leave it to their parents to find a partner. There is a lot that can be said in favour of arranged marriages. For instance most characteristics like age, education and cultural background are matched, eliminating

potential areas of conflict. The success rate of arranged marriages is pretty good but this is a debatable issue and beyond the scope of this lesson.

This social custom has a negative side to it as well. Women, and even men, generally end up being treated like goods displayed in a store. Considerations of the most narrow-minded kind; such as those related to community, caste or complexion, influence the decisions of parents. Marriage is treated like a passport to a more affluent lifestyle or a consolidation of wealth. Hard-headed calculations are at the back of negotiations, making the arranged marriage resemble a business deal. Ritu Bhatia's short story 'A Mother's Decision' is, as you must have guessed by now, a satire on the arranged marriage.

Have you heard the word 'satire' before? A satire is a kind of fiction, novel, play, short story or poem, in which the author ridicules and criticizes, through the medium of his/her fiction, something in people or society that angers him/her. It could be hypocrisy, pretentiousness or individual vices. Satire is generally meant to be funny. Read the story a second time and try to pinpoint what exactly the author is making fun of.

Glossary

<i>billowing</i>	: swelling, like the waves
<i>bingo</i>	: a game played for money or prizes in which numbers are read out to players who have cards with some numbers printed on them
<i>brazen</i>	: without shame, bold
<i>calling</i>	: profession or career
<i>decibel</i>	: a unit of measurement to describe how loud a sound is
<i>dejectedly</i>	: miserably, unhappy
<i>flabby</i>	: not firm, loose, soft
<i>indolence</i>	: laziness
<i>ineptitude</i>	: complete lack of skill or efficiency
<i>jogged his memory</i>	: tried hard to remember
<i>lopsided</i>	: uneven, because the two sides (in this case of the face) are uneven
<i>pirouetting</i>	: turning the body around while standing on the toes, like a dancer
<i>preen</i>	: to feel satisfied and proud of one's appearance
<i>ranted</i>	: said foolish things in a loud and excited way
<i>reverie</i>	: a kind of daydream in which you think of pleasant things
<i>searing</i>	: pain that is very sharp and causes a burning feeling
<i>tottered</i>	: walked in an unsteady way

Study-Guide

One of the ways in which satire functions is through irony, a form of writing in which the words are made to mean the opposite of their normal or usual meaning. The title of the short story is ironic. For instance, which qualities come to your mind when you think of the word 'mother'? I am sure they would be all positive ones, such as loving, caring, and sensitive to her children's desires and helping them grow into well-adjusted and balanced individuals. Now make a list of the words you would use to describe Saroj Chawla, the mother in this short story. What do you observe?

This short story is about a day, a very important one, in the life of Saroj Chawla. She has fixed the marriage of her forty-year old son Harish with Renu, the daughter of a retired army officer, Colonel Luthra. In a light-hearted, humorous way, the author focuses on Saroj's thoughts and the visit to 'see' the girl. It is amusing that adult men and women are called 'boys' and 'girls', when it comes to talking about them in the context of their marriage.

Harish, as we are told, is forty years old but under his mother's control. It is she who decides what he will eat and what he will wear, right down to his inner wear. She constantly instructs him on how to conduct himself. When they are about to leave for the Luthra's residence she tells him: "Drink-wink *lena*—you must take whatever is offered to you."(p.33) At their house Harish is about to refuse a second drink but one look from his mother is enough to stop him. There are hints to suggest that he did not have any say in the choice of his present career. After his father's death five years ago Harish was "forced to take over" his video rental business, apparently by his mother. He doesn't have much of a social life and his spare time is spent accompanying his mother on shopping excursions or visits to relatives.

The reason why Harish hasn't married so far is his mother. Like many parents who take upon themselves the responsibility of finding a suitable match, she does not consult Harry before taking any decision. It is obvious that over the years Saroj has considered and rejected many offers, as Renu was "the fifth girl being considered for Harry this year." (p.31) There is also the reference to a proposal brought by Saroj's aunt, Savitri *buaji*. In spite of being a qualified chartered accountant and earning well, the poor girl is rejected because she has a squint in an eye. In the system of arranged marriages there is a bias against women, who end up being evaluated on the basis of their complexion or appearance. It is amusing to note that Saroj is offended:

...Saroj was bristling with indignation: Imagine suggesting a defective girl for her son. It was an insult!

(p. 32)

Like most mothers, Saroj is blind to her son's rather unattractive face, but Savitri *buaji* unkindly reminds Saroj that Harish is also imperfect.

Over the years Harish has learnt that it is wiser to surrender to his mother's will rather than assert himself. He seems to have given up on many things, letting his mother manage his life. At the same time he rebels against his mother's authority in his own way. Note his attitude to his work. He has made a mess of the video-rental business with his indifference and carelessness. Saroj does not understand that Harish is a failure because he is just not interested in his work. Instead she reasons: "He is much too kind to be running a business—not an ounce of greed in that boy." (p. 31). The business is running in losses and the mother and son survive on their savings. Harry is not at all worried about the situation and has left it to his mother to find a solution.

Though Harish's mother dominates him in most matters there is "one area of his life over which she had no control"—the "make-believe world" he inhabits. Harish is a fan of Bollywood and spends most of his evenings watching movies late into the night. He fantasizes about the beautiful actresses on screen, finding the emotional fulfillment that is denied to him in real life:

In his make-believe world he became their hero, capable of making them shudder and weep, sometimes even simultaneously.

(p. 29)

He imagines that he is the irresistible male, having the power to make women tremble—the exact opposite of what he is in real life, unattractive and powerless before the only woman in his life. For Harish cinema is an escape from the dull, lonely and joyless life that he leads. At his shop, instead of supervising the business he shuts himself in a little room, watching movies instead of supervising the business. At home too he spends most of his time in front of the television, watching movies late into the night. The passion and enthusiasm that should have coloured his life and relationships is directed towards Bollywood. The otherwise detached and sullen Harry instantly brightens up on any mention of Bollywood. The same man, who forgets to collect the rent for his videos, is “a walking encyclopedia of information on Bollywood.” (p. 29)

Saroj realizes that Harish is never going to make a success of the video-rental business and decides that marriage is the solution:

Finally, Saroj had concluded that getting him married to the ‘right’ girl, one with enough money to support them, was the answer.

(p. 31)

Note that the author has put the word ‘right’ within quotes—to draw your attention to the subsequent part of the sentence. Don’t miss the irony here; the author presents us with the exact opposite of what ‘right’ would generally mean. For Saroj the ‘right’ girl is not one who would make her son happy but one who is rich. A satirist does not criticize characters directly and lets them expose themselves. In this short story, the author does this by presenting before the reader the thoughts in Saroj’s mind. Pay special attention to the passages where Saroj is contemplating the proposed alliance with the Luthras, such as this one:

Colonel Luthra, the girl’s father was a retired army man who now owned a leather export business. Their daughter Renu—the one being offered to Harish—was twenty-nine, a bit old, but the package was a good one. Aside from a house in Garden Estate, and the Tata Sumo being offered, Colonel Luthra had assured. Saroj that Harry would be the Manager of his largest factory.

(p. 30)

Don’t miss the bitterness implied in the word ‘package’, used to describe the match. These lines illustrate the kind of calculations that often lie behind the decision to marry. It is amusing that though her own son is forty years old, Saroj thinks that Renu, at twenty-nine, is too old for him.

The most satiric passage is the one where Saroj goes into the prayer-room to ask for God’s blessings before visiting the Luthras. Instead of spiritual or noble thoughts what is going on in her mind?

A list of all the things in the house that needed replacement flashed into her head. A washing machine, a refrigerator, all the carpets. She made a mental note to ask Harry if there was anything he needed. Saroj sighed: *I’m tired, Bhagwan. Domestic help these days is so unreliable.*

(p. 32)

These lines are a superb example of how an author can ridicule human nature without any direct comments. The commercial aspect of arranged marriages is laid bare.

As a parent it is not Saroj alone who is guilty of misusing her bargaining power as the

mother of a son. Colonel Luthra uses his wealth as a bait to capture a suitable son-in-law. Even before he or his daughter has met Harish he has tempted Saroj with the offer of a house, an expensive car and a job as a manager in his factory. You might wonder why the Luthras, who are obviously rich, are interested in Harish, who is less than average looking and neither rich, nor successful in his business. Colonel Luthra has not found anyone willing to marry his daughter Renu, maybe because she is fat or ‘healthy’, as politely described by her mother. It would not be incorrect to presume that their wealth wouldn’t be much of an incentive for anyone from a matching social status. Renu’s parents have been able to gauge Saroj’s greed and know that she will never miss the opportunity to catch a wealthy daughter-in-law. They are astute and realize that Harish would accept their daughter as he is totally under his mother’s thumb. Moreover, Colonel Luthra would also like to have a son-in-law whom he can easily manage.

Do you think that Saroj is telling the truth when she tells Colonel Luthra that Harish always wanted to start his own leather business? Most probably Renu’s mother is also exaggerating when she tells Saroj that Renu “has a way with children.”(p.34)

The visit to the Luthras is a reflection of how such meetings are generally conducted. In a humorous way, the author exposes the hypocrisy and pretentiousness that marks such occasions. Saroj brings out her best clothes, wears perfume and a lot of heavy jewellery to give the impression of an affluence that she aspires for but does not possess. Harish too is made to wear a shirt that a cousin brought from America even though it is most unsuitable for the warm weather.

Like good sales people, Renu’s parents list her limited achievements and display her embroidered handkerchiefs, while her mother declares that “she is a person of extraordinary talent” (p. 34). It is perhaps as correct as Saroj’s assertion that Harish was “a success at running the video shop.” (p. 34) Throughout the proceedings Harry is unaware of his surroundings. His usual indifference is compounded by the fact that, as instructed by his mother, he has drunk alcohol and starts to feel dizzy. Harish, it seems, has never drunk alcohol before. The only clear thought in his head is that he is going to miss the movie to be shown on TV and all he can hear is the pop singer Sunita Rao’s voice in the room. After a couple of drinks his mind is so clouded that he cannot even focus on Renu’s face when she enters the room. All he could see was “a pair of plump, fair hands.” (p. 35). Saroj, however, is delighted or pretends to be delighted. Maybe the girl’s fair colour is like an added bonus for her:

“*Arre wah*—such a pretty girl, so fair,” ranted Saroj.
(p. 35)

The morning after she boasts to her sister that the girl is “*Gori, gori*—very fair girl.” You would be interested to know that in our country, the sales of fairness creams far out number the total sales of all other types of creams, of all brands, put together. Switch on the television or open the pages of any women’s magazine and you will notice the very large numbers of advertisements for creams that promise to make you fairer in a few weeks’ time. As a nation we are obsessed with fair skin, according it much more value than any other attribute. Saroj’s attitude is not much different.

So Harish’s marriage is fixed up without any involvement on his part. Throughout the meeting his mental and physical state makes it impossible for him to clearly observe what is happening. His mother is, as expected, overjoyed with the success of the meeting. Harish can only guess at the outcome because he has a hangover and can barely remember anything. Even

at this crucial moment in his life he is preoccupied with the movies he will watch in the evening. It is a sad comment on the poor man's utter surrender of any interest in his own life. His mother has succeeded in turning him into a mere puppet who will, in all probability, keep on living his life the same way, even after he is married.

Let Us Sum Up

The short story 'A Mother's Decision' is a satire on the tradition of arranged marriages. The story is an indirect attack on parents like Saroj Chawla, who are not at all sensitive to their children's desires or feelings and treat potential brides/ grooms like commodities. The author has exposed the reality behind arranged marriages—the financial factors, prejudices and biases that influence the decision to marry a particular person.

Through the medium of Saroj Chawla's character we get a glimpse of the calculations behind many a matrimonial alliance. It is not only Saroj, even the Luthras conduct themselves like calculating businesspeople. The story has a humorous tone throughout although Harish's character is pathetic because he has allowed his mother to take over his life. He is a lonely man who has missed out on the joys of life because of her: he is not allowed to choose his career or his life-partner.

Questions for Comprehension

1. What did Harish's father do for a living?
2. Which magazines does Harish love to read? Name some of his favourite film stars.
3. Write a brief note describing Harish's physical appearance.
4. What is Saroj's sister's name? Why is Saroj jealous of her?
5. What is Harish thinking of while sitting in Colonel Luthra's drawing room?
6. Describe Renu Luthra in a brief paragraph.

UNDERSTANDING FEATURE ARTICLES

'Sole Provider, Lonely Warrior'

by Sonia Faleiro

— Dr. Seema Suri

Objectives

This unit will help you read and understand the significance of the feature article, ‘Sole Provider, Lonely Warrior.’ The *Introduction* will briefly list some of the distinctive characteristics of feature articles to enable you to discuss this chapter in the context of these. I have also provided some background information related to the domestic workers’ movement to draw your attention to the social context. Although the feature article is in fairly simple language, the glossary explains some words with which you might not be familiar. The questions at the end are meant to test your understanding of the article.

Introduction

What are feature articles?

Almost every article that you read in a magazine is a feature article. Feature articles and editorials are the most common genres in journalism. The most distinctive characteristic of feature articles is that, unlike front page news, they can be published anytime and anywhere. Anything ranging from the growth in the number of multiplexes to female foeticide in Punjab can constitute the subject matter of a feature article. Some common characteristics of feature articles are that;

- they are almost always written in simple, easy-to-understand prose,
- they are well-researched, containing factual information that can be verified,
- the tone remains neutral, without any discernable bias,
- the writer relies on anecdotes or direct quotes to tell a story, and
- feature articles have an overriding human interest.

'The Other Half'

This feature article is the third in a series on the lives of domestic workers; focusing on their struggle, their hopes and despair. Published by *Tehelka* the series is aptly titled *The Other Half*; referring to the other half of a supposedly ‘shining India’; those poor, homeless migrants who pour into our metropolises and work silently, unacknowledged and unrecognized, supporting the lifestyles of the rich and privileged. While the mass media is busy touting India’s imminent position as a superpower in the global arena, you just need to take a few steps outside your home to realize how much of a myth it is. Talk to any of the numerous helpers in and around your house—the maid, dhobi, chowkidaar or the car-cleaner—and you will learn how liberalization or globalization has not benefited them in any way. In a growingly consumerist culture we are dazzled by the retail revolution and lose sight of the fact that our comfortable life styles are possible because a number of poor, uneducated and severely underprivileged people are working very hard, never complaining or demanding what is rightfully theirs.

There are an estimated 20 million domestic workers in India but it is a sad fact that domestic work is still not recognized as labour. Domestic workers don't have any prescribed minimum wages, cannot organize as unions or demand any of the benefits like a weekly day off or medical, maternity or annual leave. Some organizations, like the National Domestic Workers' Movement that began in Mumbai in 1985, are striving for the empowerment of domestic workers by obtaining legal rights for them. With the help of the Human Rights Law Network, they have filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court, resulting in a Supreme Court order to include domestic work in the Unorganized Sector Workers' Bill. Though it has been stalled on a couple of earlier occasions, once it is passed there is hope that this underclass can hope for a better and dignified life.

The series 'The Other Half' aims to highlight the lives of this poor silent half. 'Sole Provider, Lonely Warrior' is the story of one such domestic worker, Anita Satpute. Through her account the writer attempts to draw our attention to many larger issues—the position of women, exploitation of domestic workers and their living conditions in Mumbai.

Glossary

<i>chawl</i>	:	a one room apartment in a building with many such dwellings
<i>drudgery</i>	:	work that is hard or boring and does not give the person who does it, any importance in society
<i>faux leather</i>	:	artificial leather
<i>flip side</i>	:	the side that can't be seen
<i>frugality</i>	:	not eating too much or spending much money on oneself
<i>munificence</i>	:	generosity
<i>palpable</i>	:	something so obvious that it can easily be seen or felt
<i>portly</i>	:	polite word for fat
<i>procurement</i>	:	(formal word) the act of obtaining something with difficulty
<i>saving grace</i>	:	a quality that compensates for something that is otherwise unpleasant or difficult
<i>shackled</i>	:	tied, as with chains
<i>swarthy</i>	:	dark-complexioned
<i>wistfully</i>	:	sadly, wanting something and knowing that you cannot get it

Study-Guide

The title of the feature article refers to the domestic worker, Anita Satpute. She works every day, from morning till evening, cleaning other people's homes, to earn Rs. 2,000 per month that is the main source of income for her family. That is why she is called the 'sole provider'. Her husband, a cobbler, does not make any effort to earn more money to supplement the family income. He is content with whatever little he earns, leaving it to his wife to bear the burden of providing for their three children. That is why she is called the 'lonely warrior', as there is no one to share her struggle for a better future for her family.

paragraphs 1-3 (p. 38, 39)

In the first few lines the writer manages to arouse our interest in Anita Satpute. The

description of Satpute reaching into her purse to bring out some stale chappatis is touching. She will eat them without reheating to save expensive fuel. The next sentence is almost dramatic:

Satpute and her husband Anil haven't cooked for themselves in eight years.
(p. 38)

We are eager to know more about Satpute and want to know why she hasn't cooked for so many years. She works as a domestic helper and every day her employers hand over leftovers from the previous day's meals, which she gratefully accepts. After work she eats that stale food for dinner but for her three children she cooks fresh food and never keeps any leftovers.

While reading the article pay attention to not only what is said but how it is said. Remember that even journalists use figurative language in their articles and poets use colloquial, everyday language in their poems. Notice how the writer describes Satpute one-room house in a Mumbai chawl, in almost poetic language:

Satpute's one room home in a suburban Mumbai chawl is a reflection of her reality—her dependence on someone else's stale food—and of her hopes, manifested in the meals she painstakingly cooks for her children. The reality is that her family of five lives in a single room, which combines the sights and smells of a kitchen, semi-enclosed toilet and sleeping area. The hope is seen in the new pink and white tiles which cover the lower half of two walls, grimy and chipped; the single cupboard opposite the single bed, which has been prettified with a purple sheet and the ornate metal vases with their explosion of flowers.

(p. 39)

The contrast between her reality and her hopes is very effectively brought out in the details. Satpute may be poor, condemned to a life of hardship and suffering but it has not been able to kill the desire for a better life, some day. Can you identify the metaphors and images in this passage?

How old is Anita Satpute?
In how many houses does she work as a domestic helper?
How many children does she have? How old are they?

paragraphs 4-6 (p. 39-41)

We learn about Satpute's early life, before she got married. Though from a poor family she studied till class VIII, which was more than her siblings could manage. She narrates how she would do all kinds of housework and also help her mother sell vegetables. Satpute remembers how she would wait for her sister to return from her job as a house maid so that she could eat the chappatis she brought. The stale chappati becomes a recurrent symbol of Satpute's deprivation. As she says,

“...From my childhood I have been eating other people's chappatis and till today I do it. I'm used to it now.”
(p. 39)

When it was time to marry her, her parents found it difficult to find a groom. They did not hesitate to tell her that since she was dark and fat, no one would wish to marry her. After three boys had rejected Satpute, her parents married her to the first fellow who would accept her, a cobbler from Mumbai. They did not worry about the fact that Anil Satpute was much

poorer than they were. Don't miss the resentment in her narrative. Satpute believes that it was her parents' anxiety to marry her that condemned her to a life of poverty. Whereas her sisters and brothers are all well-settled, with large homes and cars, she is forced to clean other people's houses. To retain the force of the anger in Satpute's account, the writer quotes it in the original Hindi, though a translation has been added alongside.

*'Sab ameer hai, sab ke paas chaar kamron ka flat hai, car hai, scooter hai.
Meri hi zindagi kharab hai.'* (They are all rich. They have four-room flats, cars, scooters. Only my life is spoilt.)

(p. 40)

At the same time she is proud of her relatively richer relatives and even has a photograph of her sister on the wall of her flat. While her sisters managed to get good jobs with the help of their husbands, Satpute's illiterate husband pushed her into domestic work, even though she had received some basic education. Anil Satpute does not exert himself or work hard to increase his income and is content to sit and earn whatever little he can. Satpute is different and wants to improve the lives of her children, but she is alone in this desire. She gets no appreciation for all her hard work and sacrifices and has to listen to her husband's nagging.

Where did Anita Satpute live before her marriage?

What did her parents do for a living?

How many sisters and brothers does she have?

How old was Satpute when she got married?

For how many years has Satpute been doing domestic work?

paragraphs 7-9 (p. 41-42)

Satpute is called 'the financial head' of the family, a description usually applied to men, because it is with her earnings that most of the household bills are paid. Most of her salary is spent on food and it is only with occasional help from her relatives that the family can survive. Satpute's mother, mother-in-law and sister help her whenever they can. The poor lady is content with the leftover food that her employers pass on to her, grateful for their generosity. At the same time she has never got a paid holiday in the eight years that she has been working or any sort of medical reimbursement. Even when she asks for it, it is denied to her. Satpute, like almost all domestic workers, does not realize that she is being exploited. The poor, illiterate workers are in no position to fight for their rights. Their insecurity forces them to silently accept whatever is offered. They never protest or raise their voices against the injustice.

Though her life is a constant struggle, Satpute finds joy in the hope of a better life for her children. She is proud of the fact that her children are good at studies and she is confident that at least her children will never be forced to do domestic work. Satpute is intelligent and understands that education will help her children build better lives for themselves and maybe help their mother. It is this hope that sustains her.

What are some of the disadvantages of Satpute's work?

What is her eldest daughter's name? What does she do?

What are the names of her two younger children? Where do they study?

Summing Up

The feature article is about the life of Anita Satpute, a domestic worker in Mumbai. We learn a lot about her life, her work and living conditions. The journalist allows her to talk without interrupting and you must have noticed the very large number of direct quotations. In addition to making Satpute's story more authentic and convincing, the sentences which are quoted in original give it a regional flavour.

The story of Anita Satpute has a much wider social significance. It throws light on the work conditions of poor domestic workers, many of whom have migrated from villages to the big cities in search of livelihood. At the same time Satpute's situation underlines the position of women. Satpute was obviously considered a burden by her parents and tied to the first man who would take her. Poor and illiterate themselves, maybe it never occurred to Satpute's parents that there could be other options in life-like encouraging their daughter to complete her education and find a good job. Social conditioning of girls is so strong that they quietly submit to their parents' decisions. Maybe it never crossed Satpute's mind that she could leave her husband if she was not happy with her parents' choice.

You must not forget that the journalist's main objective is to raise awareness about the living conditions of domestic workers, sensitize us to the exploitation they face and maybe change the way we treat our own domestic helpers. One way to do that would have been to compile statistics about the total number of domestic workers, their average wages, or other things and write an article in general terms. Do you think it would have been effective? The image that remains in our mind is of Satpute's stale chappatis, which become a symbol of her deprivation and exploitation. Faleiro manages to evoke our sympathy for this poor lady, in whom the desire for beauty has survived in spite of her harsh conditions.

Sonia Faleiro has succeeded in her purpose precisely because she has avoided an impersonal approach. By allowing Anita Satpute to talk, mostly in her own words, about her struggle, the writer has managed to acquaint us with the domestic worker's innermost thoughts—her anger towards her parents, her disappointment with her husband and her hopes for her children. Satpute's children will never be forced to take up domestic work as their mother will ensure that they complete their education

Questions

1. Make a list of all the Hindi phrases/sentences used in the story.
2. Draw up a list of all the expenses that Satpute has to bear.
3. What according to you is the journalist's purpose in writing this article?
(You may tick more than one option)
 - To draw our attention to the harsh work conditions of domestic helpers.
 - To make us feel sorry for Anita Satpute.
 - To change our attitude towards poor domestic helpers.
 - To familiarize us with the kind of people who live in chawls.
 - To tell us the story of Satpute's life.

UNDERSTANDING POETRY

'Photographing Mother'

by Sundaram

— Dr. Seema Suri

Objective

This unit of the study material is meant to help you read the poem ‘Photographing Mother’ and guide you towards a general idea of the poem. The *Introduction* will briefly discuss the language and structure of the poem and the *Study-Guide* will explain, amongst other things, the mechanics of old-fashioned box cameras. It will assist you in appreciating the poem. The glossary will provide meanings of some unusual words and the questions at the end are meant to test your understanding. Read the poem a couple of times before proceeding.

Introduction

This poem is a translation of a modern Gujarati poem. You will notice that the translator has intentionally left some words in the original language, such as ‘Ba’ and ‘Hari, Hari’. It helps to retain both the emotional impact and regional flavour of the poem.

It is not always enough to respond emotionally to a poem. An appreciation of the poet’s technique and craft will enhance your pleasure in reading the poem. Remember that all poetry is not in the form of rhyming stanzas, with fixed line lengths and rhyming end-words, as in this example:

The sun descending in the *west*,
The evening star does *shine*;
The birds are silent in their *nest*
And I must seek for *mine*.

The moon like a *bower*
In heaven’s high *tower*,
With silent *delight*
Sits and smiles on the *night*

(William Blake; *Night*)

Most modern poetry is in the form of free verse, where there is no fixed pattern of stanzas or lines, because the poets believe that this type of verse is more suited to poetry whose subject matter is the thoughts of the poet. Like many other modern poems ‘Photographing Mother’ is organized, not around patterns of sound but around patterns of thought.

As you must have guessed from the title, the poem centers on the poet’s mother. The poor old lady is ill and dying. Her sons know that she is dying and take her to the studio to be photographed. The poem describes the feelings and thoughts of the poet as he stands watching his mother being photographed.

Glossary

<i>appeased</i>	: caused something (a feeling) to be felt less strongly
<i>Ba</i>	: Gujarati word for ‘mother’
<i>brood</i>	: children in a family
<i>cramped</i>	: house not big enough for the people or things inside it
<i>flattened</i>	: if you flatten someone you defeat them or make them fall over by violently hitting them
<i>Hari, Hari</i>	: Gujarati word for God
<i>impending doom</i>	: something terrible about to happen
<i>nurtured</i>	: nourished
<i>plate</i>	: a thin sheet of glass, coated with a sensitive chemical
<i>silver-tongued</i>	: speaking in an extra polite or polished manner
<i>thankless drudgery</i>	: difficult domestic work for which she received no gratitude
<i>unheeded</i>	: disregarded, neglected

Analysis

The poet and his brother take their mother to be photographed. After they have bargained and decided the cost with the photographer they enter the studio. From the hints in the poem we can presume that the photographer is using an old-fashioned box camera. You must have seen this type of camera in old movies, where the photographer’s head and shoulders disappear behind a black cloth attached to a bulky box-camera, placed on a tripod.

These days getting yourself photographed is a very simple procedure that doesn’t take more than a few minutes. The photographer will quickly take some pictures, most probably with a digital camera and let you preview them on the computer screen, select the best one and print multiple copies. Digital technology has revolutionized the art of photography and made it easy, simple and cheap. If you own a digital camera, computer and printer, you can even do it at home. A variety of software makes it possible to edit photographs and modify the size, colour or light effects.

However, till the early part of the twentieth-century, before Kodak started manufacturing compact, hand-held cameras it was necessary to visit the photographer’s studio for a portrait. You must be wondering why I am giving you so much information about cameras. Unless you are familiar with the mechanics of taking photographs with a box-camera you might find some lines in the poem quite puzzling.

The box-camera, as the name suggests, was basically a large box with a viewing window at one end and the lens at the other. Within the box was a sliding frame, which held a ground glass plate and which the photographer could move back and forth. The image could be seen on this plate. Once the photographer had arranged the background and seated his subject he would go under the black cloth with which the camera was covered. This helped to shut out the light and adjust the focus. Since it was not possible to physically move the heavy camera, the photographer would slide the frame back and forth till he was satisfied with the result. What made his task more difficult was the fact that the image on the glass plate was inverted. After that he would cover the lens, replace the ground glass plate with a glass plate covered with a light-sensitive chemical like collodion and then remove the cover over the lens.

Once the light had been allowed to fall on the sensitized glass plate for several seconds, he would cover the lens again, take out the glass plate after ensuring that it was covered with a protective layer of cloth or paper and then take it to the dark room to be developed. Only one glass plate could be exposed at a time. You can now imagine how tedious it must have been for the photographer.

Now read the first half of the poem, which is devoted to a description of the photographer's movements. The photographer takes a lot of time preparing the background; adjusting the decorative items and the mother's sari. Every detail is looked after: the light, background and the mother's expression:

Stealing behind the camera draped in black,
He adjusted the focus and fixed the plate.
Not yet uncovering the lens, he said to her,
This silver-tongued photographer we hardly knew,
'Now look here Ba; sit still and smile straight here,
Forgetting care and grief; think you are at home;
Remember joyful things. Smile a little, *Ba*
And please don't blink.

The photographer tries to be kind to the poet's mother and calls her '*Ba*', Gujarati for mother. He tries to make her feel comfortable and relaxed and tells her to be careful not to blink. Even the slightest error would mean the waste of a plate and a repetition of the whole procedure. The 'silver-tongued' photographer fussing around his mother is only doing his job, unaware of her illness and his request to *Ba* has the opposite effect.

The poet is curious to see the effect of the photographer's instructions and turns to see how his mother smiles:

And I, turning around to see how Mother smiled,
Went sliding from an unreal present straight into the past.
Weigh smile and tears, which one will go down?

At this point the tone of the poem suddenly changes. The poet's mind wanders off into the past. He realizes that the present, the moment in the photographer's studio is 'unreal'. The poet thinks that the present is unreal because the photographer is trying to create an image of a happy woman in the portrait, unaware of the suffering and pain within.

Remember that poetry is different from a short story, novel or play. It is a very condensed form of literature, where many things are left unsaid but as a reader you must be sensitive to the underlying emotions. In the subsequent lines the poet summarizes, in a few words, an entire lifetime of suffering, neglect, and loneliness that his mother has endured. *Ba* lost her husband at a young age and lived with her four children in her in-laws' home.

She lived her life, that's all: no one cared
Widowed young, dependent in her in-law's home,
Mother lived with her brood of four,

It seems that they were not very rich because the house was 'cramped and squalid'. *Ba* spent all her time doing the housework for which she got no gratitude. Since she was dependent on her in-laws we can presume that she never protested. Forgetting about her own problems *Ba* looked towards her children's future:

Thankless drudgery claiming all her days;
Nothing outside that cramped and squalid house;
Her children's future alone appeased desire.

Don't you think that the above lines could be used to describe Anita Satpute, the poor domestic worker about whom you have read in the previous chapter?

It is not difficult to imagine the mother's life-bringing up her four children alone, without a husband to support her or love her, financially dependent on her in-laws and nothing but endless domestic work to fill her days. She never got the chance to express her feelings or thoughts:

No one heard her; she listened to them all.

The result of a lifetime of suppression is that the poet's mother falls ill and soon it becomes clear that she cannot be cured. The poet does not tell us which disease she has but establishes a clear connection between her illness and the combined neglect of everyone around her:

At last her flattened body, breeding disease,
Nurtured by neglect, grew past cure.

Don't miss the bitter irony in the phrase 'nurtured by neglect'. In this section of the poem the poet, very honestly, tells us how he and his siblings did all those things for their mother which they had never done before. Realizing that their mother doesn't have much time left to live they take her to the best doctors and to see all the fun places in town. It is guilt that makes them try and make up for all the years of indifference towards their mother. The poet is critical of his own motives and admits that: 'Half-love, half-duty led us on'. He accepts that he and his brother are being selfish in bringing their mother to be photographed:

..... Sensing impending doom
And as a memorial to our love (or selfishness),
We took her for one final photograph.

The photographer has explained to the mother that it is very important for her to smile for her portrait. Ba who has been silent all this while cannot do as he requests. The mother's inability to smile is a silent reminder to her sons that a lifetime of suffering cannot be easily forgotten. The tears in her eyes tell them that the studio is a place that is 'unreal' and artificial and she is incapable of being a part of it. Her suffering is so deep that it is not even possible for her to pretend to be happy, as people generally do when they are being photographed.

Seeing the tears in Ba's eyes the photographer is angry because his plate is ruined. As I explained earlier, old-fashioned box-cameras were tedious to operate and only one glass plate could be used at a time. So the photographer's anger is justified. Suddenly the poet's tone also becomes more serious:

Angrily, he shouted: 'My plate is ruined!'
Plate? What plate? Her life lay round in ruins, *Hari, Hari*.

The poet's pain is sharply expressed in the last line. Do you think the metaphor of ruins is effective? The evocation of God's name conveys the poet's anguish at his mother's pain and his deep sense of guilt for having neglected her.

Summing Up

The poem ‘Photographing Mother’ is very interesting in the manner it uses photography to underline the harsh reality of the pain and suffering endured by the poet’s mother. Throughout the poem the word mother is used with a capital ‘M’-maybe to suggest that the poor lady is just a mother: she never got a chance to be anything else.

The poem is structured around the contrast between the artificiality of the photographer’s studio and the painful reality of Ba’s life. Almost the entire first half of the poem is devoted to a description of the photographer’s movements. This helps to build the contrast between the artificiality of a photograph and the painful reality of Ba’s life. The poet’s feelings in the studio are very honestly expressed. He does not hesitate to take the blame for indirectly being responsible for his mother’s terminal illness. Like everybody else he has also neglected her. He feels that even the visit to the photographer for ‘one final photograph’ is tainted with selfishness.

The poem succeeds in communicating the pain of both the poet and his mother. It is a moving account of a son’s guilt and regret. The poet’s tragedy is that he cannot change the past and he realizes that he does not have much time to compensate for his neglect.

Questions

1. Make a list of words/phrases in the poem that describe the photographer.
2. Which word in the poem is similar in meaning to the word ‘neglected’?
3. Why is the word ‘Mother’ used with a capital ‘M’ throughout the poem?
4. You might have observed that this poem, the feature article ‘Sole Provider, Lonely Warrior’, and the short story ‘A Mother’s Decision’ are all about mothers. Write an essay discussing the similarities and differences between Saroj Chawla, Anita Satpute and Ba.
5. Which words/phrases in the poem describe the sons’ attitude to their mother?

LEARNING TO WRITE—III

What Makes Good Writing Good

— Dr. Anil Aneja

Introduction

Writing is an important part of our routine communication. Broadly speaking, it is of two kinds: formal and informal. In today's age of technology, many of us send sms and emails almost every day to our friends. That is one kind of writing, writing meant for private communication and is largely of an informal nature. Our letters to friends and small slips of paper which we pass on to others in the classroom for instance, also fall within the category of informal writing. Official letters, reports, articles, assignments etc constitute formal kind of writing. When you write something unmindful of an audience or reader that is called ‘free writing’. When you are conscious of public scrutiny you would tend to be more careful with regard to the rules of grammar and formatting etc. However, irrespective of the fact whether your writing is of an informal or formal nature, it is important that it should be good writing.

With a view to improve your writing skills there are as many as 5 units which have been included in your book *Fluency in English, Part II*. In units 1 and 5 of this book you have already learnt about free writing and editing. The present unit, the third in the series ‘learning to write’ focuses on the qualities of good writing. It outlines certain processes and qualities which you should try to include in your writing so that it becomes clear, meaningful and readable.

Critical Discussion

In the opening paragraph of this unit, the author points to two essential aspects of good writing: what to say and how to say. According to him a harmonious balance of both is necessary for any writing to be called ‘good’. However, most students and teachers are so preoccupied with how to write that they often overlook the content or the message part which, actually is the essence of good writing. Most of the times we are concerned with correct grammar, syntax and lay out or formatting of a document. But in doing so we often forget that we are writing because we wish to say something. Unless we are clear about the message we will not be able to write well.

In the second and third paragraphs, the author suggests certain strategies through which we can achieve this clarity of message. These are wide reading, thinking and observation.

Thinking is a process through which we look ‘inward’ or introspect’. It is a process through which our mind provides order, a pattern and coherence to what we feel, observe or instinctively respond to. It is the faculty that helps us define our views and perceptions about people and environment of which we are a part. If we do not use the faculty of thought our writing would be quite chaotic.

However, many times thinking alone is not enough to understand all that goes around us. This is where the role of reading comes into play. When we read articles and books written by established thinkers and authors, our own perceptions and thoughts acquire a sharper focus and a clearer meaning. Suppose, you see a movie or read a book you would naturally have

a certain view about it. But when you read a movie review about that movie in the newspaper, or read a book review about the book which you have recently read, your view may be echoed by the respective reviewers. Or, alternately, the reviews may be in sharp contrast to your own reactions. In such a case, perhaps these reviews would help you realize where you have gone wrong. Or, it may also happen that despite reading an opposite review about a particular movie or book, you may still think that your understanding of it is more correct. In such a case, you would be forced to think why the reviewer has reviewed that movie or book in a different manner and why, despite that review you would still like to hold on to your own views. Naturally, in this entire process your thoughts would get further clarified. So Now, we hope you can see in a clear manner how reading helps you clarify your thinking.

A sense or faculty of keen observation makes your writing refreshing and different from others. As the author of this Unit states if you merely describe the obvious, there will be nothing worth reading in your writing. Naturally then, it would not attract the reader. However, if you are able to point out certain things which would have normally escaped others, then your writing would become some thing different and attractive. Observation is a combination of ones perceptions and thoughts. You can see now how the process of good writing involves a number of activities at the same time.

As has been stated in the first paragraph of Unit 9, there are two aspects to writing, what is said and how it is said. So far we have talked about the content part and how the content of our writing can be made more focused and effective. This however does not mean that we can neglect the manner of writing or how that content is presented.

Paragraphs 4-5 focus on this aspect of writing. Good writing, whether informal or formal follows certain rules which are known as the convention of writing. Now, you don't always have to be a copy-cat by following only certain fixed conventions of writing. But it is always good to be aware of them. For instance, when you write a letter to a friend or an email to someone, you can be quite informal in your greetings and language, yet there is a format which you are expected to follow. You would write your address and date before you come to greeting. Similarly, even when the email is of an informal nature, you would still write something in the subject line. Formal writing has its own set conventions depending on whether you are writing a formal letter, a report or an assignment to be shown to your teacher.

Now, you may sometimes feel that you do not want to stick to a set pattern and write in your own way. While you can make some modifications in the set formats, you can not obviously be altogether original in your writing pattern. This is because almost every kind of writing has an assumed or a real reader. It follows then that your writing style and presentation should be acceptable to both you and your proposed or assumed reader.

Another feature which significantly contributes in making any writing good is an 'ear for language'. By this the author means the ability to use the write word to denote a particular meaning. Often we can choose from many similar meaning words. A wrong choice may severely damage the quality of our writing. For instance, the sense contained in the word 'beautiful' may also be stated through many similar meaning words such as: admirable, alluring, attractive, bewitching and gorgeous. However, each of these words has a slight variance in meaning. So while using words you should be aware of their exact meanings and implications as well as of the subtle variances between two similar meaning words. Consulting dictionary to know the exact meaning of words is useful. Sometimes, it so happens that we know the general meaning of a particular word through its frequent use, but are not aware of its precise meaning. So even

if you know the general meaning of a word, always look up a dictionary to know its precise meaning.

In paragraph 6 of this unit, the author highlights the importance of revising after writing. Revising refers to the activity of re-reading or going over your writing after you have finished writing. When we revise our writing, we realize that we have made a number of mistakes. Often it happens that we find a better expression for certain things from the one we have used in the original writing. So revising can be compared to polishing over raw wood. Make it a habit not to show your writing to anyone unless you have yourself read through it once and corrected the mistakes. Even in time bound writing activities such as examinations, make sure to leave some time for revision.

We hope that next time you engage yourself in any writing activity, you will follow the suggestions made in Unit 9 of your book, in this study material and also the steps suggested in the earlier units. If you do so, then in all probability you will find a difference in your writing from the earlier times.

Glossary

Here are the meanings of some of the difficult words in unit 9:

<i>syntactical</i> :	relating to arrangement of words and phrases
<i>expend</i> :	to spend or use up
<i>introspect</i> :	to examine ones own thoughts and feelings
<i>critique</i> :	critical assessment
<i>predictable</i> :	occurring in an expected way
<i>variation</i> :	change, alteration
<i>domain</i> :	an area of activity or knowledge
<i>bugbear</i> :	a cause of anxiety or irritation

Exercises

There are four exercises at the end of Unit 9 in your book. The first exercise asks you to make separate lists of things, people and activities from the given jumble. The exercise is partially solved here. The list of things for instance would be:

Newspaper, Thesaurus, magazines, encyclopedia, dictionary, books.

Now based on this example make two separate lists of people and activities.

2. To solve this exercise, consult any good book on communication skills, or on writing skills or alternately, any good grammar book. Refer to the chapters or sections which deal with the writing of formal and informal letters, newspaper reports and essays, dialogues and descriptions, reports and memos. Knowing the different rules conventions relating to the above forms of writing and communication will prove to be very useful for you.

3. We strongly urge you to write an essay on one of the topics given in this exercise and send to your teachers as an assignment.

UNDERSTANDING VALUES

Our Muddled Generation

By Dinesh Kumar

— Dr. Anil Aneja

Introduction

Unit 10 of your book contains an article titled “Our Muddled Generation” by Dinesh Kumar, which was published in a newspaper titled The Hindu. The purpose of including this article is to draw your attention towards the issue of confused and materialistic values which generally prevail among the youth of today. The author begins the article by giving an example of a candidate whom he and his colleague have interviewed for a job in their company. Through this example and through his subsequent comments the author depicts a rather disturbing picture of today’s youth as “evasive”, “irresponsible” and as “rolling stones”. Through such a presentation the author indirectly implies the kind of values our youth ought to be fostering, values, such as non-materialism, responsibility, hard work and purposefulness.

Critical Discussion

The essay “The Muddled Generation” can be divided in three parts. The first two paragraphs describe the attitudes of a candidate who has come for an interview. Paragraphs 3-7 focus on the general attitudes of the youth. The observations here are based on the example which we have seen in paras 1-2. The last two paragraphs point to the bleak future and the aimlessness of today’s youth by calling that generation “the rolling stones”.

The youth appearing for an interview in paras 1-2 is smart and good looking and can easily be compared to a model. The person’s external appearance together with a mobile phone in the pocket which the youth cannot ignore even at the time of interview: all point to a materialistic culture and bent of mind. Though externally attractive and a good communicator, the youth does not have any inner or intellectual substance: he/she is vague about subjects of study, does not seem to have much knowledge of current affairs, has no opinion on any issue and the only purpose of this job seeking youth is to make “a lot of money”. The youth here is not an individual, but a specimen of the entire generation. The similarity between this youth and others is suggested by the use of the word “clones”. The author sadly remarks that the youth today have “no conviction in their voices”. Though they claim to want to work for the poor and the country, but these are hollow words. In truth, the youth do not even know what to do with their own lives.

In paras 3-7 the writer refers to a report according to which nearly 80% graduates of India do not have required skills for employment. The writer’s own interactions with the youth how ever suggest that this percentage is much higher, perhaps 90%. It is not that the youth are totally useless. They talk good English and do possess some superficial knowledge, but no depth and substance. Most of them do not have proper etiquettes and often have a lopsided notion of what good manners and confidence entail.

The writer is surprised to note that these young men and women do not even know how to answer simple questions such as what they like doing or how they spend their time. They

have no sense of proper code of conduct (ethics) or behaviour. Posing is the order of the day, so even when shallow and disinterested in every thing except money, the young boys and girls pretend to be great readers, or have music as their hobby, have interest in sports or gardening etc. This is despite the fact that they have perhaps never done any of these things.

In the last two paragraphs paras 8-9, titled “the rolling stones”, the author points to a paradoxical scenario. On the one hand, India is a fast developing country, and on the other we have a generation which is totally materialistic, aimless, lazy and confused. Given a choice between doing something worthwhile and just being lazy, most of the young people would prefer the latter. Normally, youth is associated with idealism, that is believing in a world view which seems perfect even when it may not be realistic. But today’s youth, according to the writer do not have any such idealism, convictions or morality. Materialism, or money is the only ruling factor.

Even when the writer highlights the negative attitudes and values of the youth, it is not just a portrayal of condemnation. By depicting what the youth lacks he is indirectly advocating for our young generation to imbibe those very values which are absent today.

Glossary

Here are the meanings of some of the difficult words in this essay:

<i>evasive</i>	: avoiding a direct answer to the question
<i>sheepishly</i>	: in an embarrassed manner
<i>clones</i>	: persons regarded as identical to another
<i>hype</i>	: exaggerated publicity
<i>avid</i>	: keenly enthusiastic

Exercises

There are four kinds of exercises at the end of this essay: Reading comprehension, writing, speaking and debate. In the reading comprehension exercises the first four questions are directly based on the text and the remaining four lead you to further activities after reading the text.

Reading Comprehension questions 2, 3 and 4 ask you to take a position. If you do not agree with the statements given in these questions, you should feel free to say so. But when you disagree with a statement or choose one of the two or three options, you should have good reasons for doing so.

Always make it a point to solve the exercises and send your assignments, that is these solved exercises to your teachers for correction.

UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE

The Leader of Men

By Siddharth Chowdhury

— Dr. Anil Aneja

Introduction

A narrative or a story is one of the most popular forms of creative writing. From our early childhood most of us have been quite used to listening to stories of various kinds. Some are primarily instructional, some others mythical and the third kind: purely meant for entertainment. As we grow up to be adolescents and adults we continue to enjoy reading stories be it in our textbooks, magazines and newspapers or in short story collections. Thus, narrative, or story form of prose writing remains one of the most popular among all sections of society and among people of every age-group.

Narrative or stories are of various kinds: some having a particular character or a set of characters at their center, others based on incidents or situations, and some others having a particular theme or an idea a their center. The story form is primarily descriptive and almost all stories have a message, that is through the story, by portraying a character, depicting a situation or by describing an incident the writer wishes to convey a message to his/her readers. However, the narrative form generally gains interest and attention of the readers by virtue of vivid and life-like characterization, sequencing of incidents or events or due to the writer's imaginative rendering of a certain commonplace situation or incident.

“The Leader of Men” By Sidharth Chaudhry, which constitutes Unit 11 of your textbook is primarily based on characterization. It has three main characters: Roop Singh (the Guard), Mr. Kedia (the President of the owners' association), and Ritwik (the narrator). The action of this story spans over nearly one month, beginning sometime in December and ending on the night of 31st December Though the story has many dimensions, it can primarily be described as the tragic tale of a sensitive man; Roop Singh who tries to make the best of circumstances, does his utmost to preserve his individuality amidst adverse social and economic situations and to maintain his pride, dignity and self-worth among trying situations till a point when his innate goodness and human dignity can no longer endure the rebuffs, taunts and insults of the world and materialistic Kedia. In his anguish and hurt he endeavours to destroy both himself and the world around him. It is a gripping story and portrays a situation with which most of us can identify with.

Critical Analysis

The story “The Leader of Men” can be divided in four parts: Roop Singh in conversation in the lobby, the two middle parts one dealing with the growing friendship and empathy between Roop Singh and Ritwik the narrator, an empathy which also serves to unfold Roop Singh's Character to us. The third part when the guards are called for dinner on 31st December and Kedia insults Roop Singh as he picks up his plate to serve himself and the concluding portion when Roop Singh, overcome with anguish and injured pride destroys himself and also causes extensive physical damage both to his own person and the lobby items.

Even before the narrator of the story gets to know Roop Singh he is struck by his personality, his habit of keeping aloof and his efficiency in discharging his duties. The difference between Roop Singh and other guards is stressed by the narrator through the physical description of Roop Singh as he faces Kedia at the reception desk and also through references to Roop Singh's "innate pride", his "sense of defiance" and "wounded honour". Roop Singh's dignity comes through to us not just through his physical description, (specially through a reference to his moustache, a symbol of honour in Rajput culture), but also through his fearlessness in countering Kedia as the former believes that he is being unjustly accused.

In contrast to Roop Singh and Ritwik, the narrator, Kedia is an embodiment of the materialistic world which again is stressed by the narrator both through his (Kedia's) physical attributes and reference to his character. He is called "the consummate consumer":. Further the author states that Kedia "lives" "when he consumes" and "buying is his form of Nirvana".

In contrast to Kedia, the narrator Ritwik, though belonging to the same social class as Kedia is an enlightened, educated and sensitive human being. That is why he is able to look upon the entire situation with detachment and supports Roop Singh even when Kedia expects him to do otherwise.

As the story progresses, the narrator gets to know more about Roop Singh, his Rajput lineage, his poverty, his education and his predilection towards reading books and his interest in keeping himself abreast of the world around him by reading newspapers. As Kedia blames Roop Singh for every negative thing, Roop Singh stops saluting Kedia, again a symbol of his Rajput bearing and pride. But being the kind of person Roop is, he would have probably stopped saluting Kedia even if he belonged to some other caste. Though his being a Rajput is important, it seems it is his sensitivity and dignity as a human being, rather than the racial pride that is the main issue in this story.

The other significant happening in the middle part is the growing empathy, an empathy almost bordering on friendship between the narrator and Roop Singh. Whereas in the earlier case not saluting Kedia was a sign of defiance on Roop Singh's part, in the case of the narrator, when Roop Singh stops saluting him it is a symbol of his regard and positive attitude. They share information about one another, spend time together in the evenings and the narrator even lends his books to him which Roop Singh reads with great interest.

The party on the night of 31st December is a symbol of both wasteful materialism and superficiality of the upper class. The wasted food is vividly described. If the guards are called to eat this food, it is not due to any concern for them, but rather it is done to save some food from getting wasted. People like Kedia are so inhuman that even when the guards are taking their food, Kedia cannot help being mean to Roop Singh. After all, he had not barged in. He was called in. The inhumanity is not only visible in Kedia's taunts, but also in the attitude of the other guards who remain unaffected by Roop Singh being insulted. Even when he puts down his plate and walks away, other guards continue eating and enjoying themselves.

The Climax

The climax of this story is both touching and disturbing. It is both unfortunate and tragic. Roop Singh's dignity has been hurt to the core by Kedia's insults. But perhaps it is not just the humiliation of the night that has shaken him so much, it is the entire sequence of events, the humiliation caused by his poverty, the economic difficulties which he has faced, the sense of leaving his family and being made to take up jobs which he well knew to be below his caliber.

In short, it is the humiliation caused by being victimized by the system which appears to take hold of him. Unable to avenge the world that has brought him to this wretched state, Roop Singh turns against both himself and the immediate world around him, namely, the items in the lobby. It is neither deliberate nor rational, but at the same time it is difficult to condemn Roop Singh. Somewhere in our hearts we have a sense that he was justified in doing what he did.

However, in the process of symbolically attacking the world which had oppressed him so far, Roop Singh causes irreparable damage to himself, as he would never be able to work with his hands again.

The ending of this story is rather ironic. Roop Singh's damage to himself is of a lasting nature both physically and in terms of its wider economic implications for himself and his family, but nobody is bothered about it. Rather, it is the damage to the property, the items in the Lobby that people are concerned with. The security agency is asked to pay for it, though it is people like Kedia who are really to blame for the tragic end which Roop Singh meets for no fault of his. In the destruction caused by Roop Singh there is an affirmation of the innate self worth, human values and human dignity represented by characters such as the narrator and Roop Singh.

Glossary

Here is the meaning of some of the difficult words in the story:

<i>poky</i>	: uncomfortable small
<i>gleaming</i>	: shining
<i>chrome</i>	: shining metal coating
<i>patrician</i>	: aristocratic
<i>sundry</i>	: assorted, miscellaneous
<i>stocky</i>	: short and sturdy
<i>bloat</i>	: cause to swell
<i>periphery</i>	: outer limits of an area or object
<i>nirvana</i>	: state of perfect happiness
<i>defiance</i>	: disobedience, rebellious
<i>subversive</i>	: undermining an established system
<i>subsisted</i>	: support oneself at a basic level
<i>galled</i>	: annoyed
<i>conjecture</i>	: guess
<i>oblivious</i>	: unaware of ones surroundings

Exercises

As in the previous units, three kinds of exercises are given at the end of unit 11. The comprehension exercises are designed to test whether you have understood the story correctly. In our view with the help of the above notes you should have no difficulty in answering these questions.

Take question 1 of the reading comprehension for instance.

The phrases which are used to describe Roop singh are: 5'10", well built, glorious light brown moustache, efficient, smart amazingly aware, well read a lazy free loader didn't fit in at all.

Now, make a similar list of the phrases which apply to Kedia from the ones listed in question 1 of reading comprehension.

Questions 2-9 may be answered with the help of text and study notes.

LEARNING TO WRITE—IV

Writing for Examinations

— Ms. Usha Anand

Introduction

By the time you reach this unit you have learned about various stages and various kinds of writing. You know free writing is easy and spontaneous and helps to put down your thoughts in black and white. Editing teaches you to think about your readers and choose, arrange and rearrange your content and language. This makes it more suitable and acceptable to a larger number of readers. Learning to Write-III tells you about what makes good writing. Basically, good writing is a combination of good, well-informed content and good language. While knowledge forms the basis of content (subject matter), the choice of the right words and the arrangement of words, phrases and sentences makes for good language. And this brings us to the topic of Unit 12—*Writing for Examinations*.

Warm Up

- Q.1. Do you think luck plays an important part in tests and examinations?
- A. This is a question which affects so many people that we have to think before giving a categorical answer. There can be arguments both for and against the importance of luck, but we have to take a realistic view.

These days examiners have devised many kinds of tests for assessment of examinees. There are objective type answers, short answers with a word limit and essay type answers. Exercises in various items of writing for specific use as in business letters, notices, advertisements, reports etc. are also part of examination papers.

In such a situation, luck can only have a limited role. Maybe in an objective answer or in being asked to do an exercise that you are good at or have practised over the last few days before the examination, you would score well. But, as they say, there is no substitute for hard work. It needs concentration and practice. And once you have the skill, luck is on your side. More than half the battle is won.

So, the long and the short of the issue is that *preparation* matters in an examination and luck is not a dependable crutch for any examinee to lean on.

- Q.2. How do you prepare for examinations, mug up as much as you can or take copious notes?
- A. I am sure all students are very practical these days. They know that examiners are shrewd and can ask tricky questions, change the format of the question paper, and generally, give the examinee a surprise. In this cruel world, no sensible student can rely on mugging up answers. Jotting down points and taking copious notes is the better way to prepare for an exam. It is only when you read carefully that you can take down notes which help you to recall the details of the topic.
- Q.3. How much time and attention do you spend on reading the instructions given in question papers?

- A. You must be aware that some boards of secondary education have now sanctioned extra time for the examinees to simply go through the question paper. Surely, this is a carefully considered step towards helping the students to read the instructions given in the question papers.

At your level, if you spend ten to fifteen minutes coming to grips with your question paper and planning your strategy to answer it, you will gain in terms of performance and marks obtained. Reading instructions helps you to avoid answering questions from the same section, exceeding word limits, choosing between either—or questions etc. So, time and attention spent on reading instructions is productively and well spent.

* * *

The Text:

The writer of this unit rightly points out that examination questions have a very specific purpose. They are intended to test your understanding and knowledge. Your answers are the only means for you to convey to your unknown, unseen examiner, the degree of competence you have acquired over a certain subject. How you can effectively do this is the subject of this unit.

The examiner is not like you. He has all the information and you have to write all you know on the subject. It is suggested that instead of writing for an examiner, the student should imagine himself as writing for a lay person, an ordinary person, whom he is trying to inform, to the best of his ability.

Time management is of the essence in an examination. Students should not make the mistake of rushing through instructions in the question paper because question papers generally have a set format. Examiners can make changes in the pattern of a question paper and a careless student might miss out on vital instructions. He might answer two questions from just one section while he is required to do one from each of the two. Careful reading might take ten minutes but will prevent silly lapses which might cost the student dearly in terms of marks.

Another point to remember is to relate your answer to the question rather than just write what you know of the subject. Very often this might just be a summary of a relevant topic. Relate the details of the summary to the question asked to get good marks.

A limited vocabulary might cause a student to find a particular word in the question paper difficult. That is no reason to panic. Read and re-read the question in smaller parts and you will get a clue. Take a look at the example given on p. 67 of your text book.

All parts of a question must be answered. If you answer only three out of four parts, you naturally lose the marks assigned to that missed part. Also, it is important to follow the format. While a letter should be written as a letter, a composition should be written as a composition. The same is true of other forms like notices, advertisements etc. A *certain number of marks is always set aside for the layout*.

Students are often unsure about the length of their answers. The marks assigned to a question often give you the clue. The fewer the marks, the shorter your answer should be.

If you are given a topic sentence and asked for views, remember that for many debateable issues, there are no clear or categorical answers. Express your views with clarity but also show awareness and respect for other points of view. For instance, if an examiner were to ask for views on “giving alms to beggars should be made a punishable offence,” there are many

arguments in favour of, and against, the statement. State a reasonable number of arguments on both sides and then state your position. This would reveal a mature mind, socially and practically aware.

To conclude, then, writing for an examination is a specific kind of writing with input from language, practical judgment, keen observation, concentration and attention to detail. In other words, it requires a mind that is in the state of a full alert.

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE

The End of a Yuga

By Irawati Karve

— *Ms. Usha Anand*

Introduction

Like all other terms used in today's world, the term 'literature' is used in various ways. It can mean various things to various people. But in the framework of this unit, 'literature' is a very developed form of writing. It incorporates reading, learning, experience, feeling, philosophy, a world view, understanding human nature and human behaviour. All these inputs go into the creation of great literature.

Novels, plays, poetry and other artistic, creative written works are referred to as literature. The oldest literary works which bear relevance to human life and society at all times and in all ages are known as classics. The two classics well-known to Indians are The Mahabharata and The Ramayana. These two works are also known as epics.

In its standard sense, an epic is a work that meets at least the following criteria: It is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style and centred on a heroic or quasi divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race. These criteria are applicable to The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. These poems might have been written thousands of years ago but they are still relevant and can teach us a great deal about dealing with life even in today's world. The nature of life does not change. And great literature teaches us how to tackle life, how to deal with life.

However, in different historical periods there have been different ways of approaching life. This is what Irawati Karve tells us. The title itself is self-explanatory. Her book is called 'Yuganta' and the essay in your textbook is entitled 'The End of a Yuga'. A 'Yuga' is a continuous period of time that is considered a single unit because it has a particular feature which makes it notable. It is a long stretch of time with certain characteristics which remain predominant throughout. In the Indian context, a Yuga comprises a period of a few thousand years.

Let us take note of exactly what Irawati Karve has in mind when she uses the term 'Yuga':

"Yuga in Sanskrit means one-fourth of the cycle of the Universe. There are four yugas: Satya, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. The earth with all the living beings is created at the beginning of Satya and is destroyed at the end of a Kali, to be recreated at the start of a new Satya Yuga. According to Hindu beliefs, the Mahabharata war was fought at the very end of the Dwapara Yuga. The beginning of the Kali was the signal for the heroes to start their last journey. The Mahabharata thus marks the end of a yuga."

But we must realize that the end of a yuga is not a sudden dramatic collapse or shutdown of a certain way of life or thought. It marks a speeding up of change in the overall social system—its mindset, lifestyle, value systems etc.

In this sense, 'The Mahabharata' marks the end of an era of greed, conflict, violence, clashes of value systems and most importantly, of a stoical view of life. This epic shows life for

what it really is without any frills, cover-ups, escape routes, romanticism, wish-fulfillment or any of the softer comforts provided by the age of ‘Bhakti’ or devotion. Very simply put, the harsh realities of life are the core of the epic. And there are no escape routes from the tortuous journey that is life.

Warm-Up

Unit 13 begins with a box which contains three questions. Let us look at each one of them. Though they are questions which should generate discussion in a classroom, we can still take a look at them.

- Q.1. If history is a recreation and an understanding of the past do we need to study it today? Why?**

This is a question which eminent educationists have thought and spoken about. History may be a recreation of the past but it helps to show us how we become what we are. Our present identity as a nation or community is shaped by our past. In many subtle and undefinable ways our general mental make-up is shaped by our past. For instance, the Mughal influence is apparent in our aesthetic sense. Plants, flowers, fruits, leaves—all artistically drawn, are derived from the Mughal sense of beauty. So are planned gardens and architectural masterpieces. We cannot deny that the Qutub-Minar or Taj Mahal leave us wishing to borrow an idea or two for our own homes.

The same is true of the impact of the British raj. Churches and old office buildings give you an idea of their idea of comfort and beauty. The “Verandah” is a British input to our buildings. Most importantly, the vast advantage of Indians knowing reasonably good English, which gives them a lead over people from several other countries, would not have been possible without interaction with the British for more than two centuries.

Finally, educationists say that History should be studied, like literature, by everyone. History teaches us about the mistakes of great people and we learn to avoid those very mistakes in our own lives. It also tells us about the qualities of great men so that we may try and acquire them.

- Q.2. Do you think that our sense of identity (who we are, what we want to become, etc) depends on our understanding of the past?**

Human beings do not emerge out of nowhere. No man is an island unto himself. Every individual lives within a larger group of human beings. Man is a social animal.

You must have heard at least one of the above sentences by the time you reached college. What do they all point to? They point to a socio-cultural background against which human beings live.

What makes up their socio-cultural background? A child is born into a family. The family has a certain social status, economic status, lifestyle, value system, customs, traditions, conventions. Where do all these come from? They are the collective product of several generations of ancestors, forefathers who have lived in their time (their historical context) and drawn ideas and inputs from their contemporaries. In this sense, our past makes us, to an extent, what we are today.

It is from that point that we take off when we grow up. We adopt new ideas, new lifestyles, which in turn will slightly alter/change the lives and personalities of future generations. And thus human evolution continues.

- Q.3. Are the Ramayana and The Mahabharata the two great epics of India, history or mythology?

Generally speaking, history is an account of events that actually happened in the past. Mythology, on the other hand, is a system of stories that were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group. These, stories served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do. The gods and goddesses of both Greek and Indian culture are said to be mythological figures. The differentiating factor is whether the narrative is based on fact or fiction, reality or imagination.

In this light both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are epics in which a large number of stories and subplots have been developed around a central core of an episode that actually happened in real life.

The Mahabharata began as a victory song (Jaya) for the victory of one section of a tribal leading family, over another. It is based on a family feud, a struggle for power within different branches of one family.

The Ramayana is centred around palace intrigue—the desire of one queen to see her son on the throne even though the throne does not rightfully belong to him. Rama, the rightful heir is exiled for fourteen years, only to make way for Bharata.

Only this historical core of the two epics is real. The rest is added on by imaginative creative singers of the epic who orally narrated these verses to generation after generation of listeners. All the stories added to the basic story serve two purposes, firstly, to provide entertainment and secondly, to provide moral guidance, teach us lessons on life and living. Because they have these added goals, they are also referred to as “puranas”. A “purana” is any one of a class of Sanskrit sacred writings on Hindu mythology, folklore etc. of varying date and origin. So, really speaking, these epics are “*itihas-puranas*”.

With all the thoughts generated by these warm-up exercises, let us now move on to Irawati Karve’s narrative on The Mahabharata as marking the end of an epoch.

About the Text:

Before reading this part of the study material, read the extract in your textbook from p. 70 to p. 79. As a hint to a faster understanding of the main idea remember that the essay tells you that the Mahabharata marks the end of a certain world-view, a realistic but harsh way of life, thought and culture. The age of the Mahabharata is followed by the age of Bhakti, of deities, gods and goddesses who are generous and in tune with the nature of human beings.

‘Monotheism’ and ‘Polytheism’ are two terms which often emerge in discussion on religion. A religion which propounds belief in *one* god is described as monotheistic while religions which have *many* deities are said to be “Polytheistic”.

The worship of nature,* the earliest form of religion, is described as *pantheism* and marks the acknowledgement that man is subservient to the higher forces prevailing in the universe. These forces are far more powerful than man. Hence, out of fear, he worships them and tries to appease (please) them with sacrificial offerings. We see this in the Mahabharata

* Even Irawati Karve mentions on p. 77 that the ancients prayed daily to the Sun, “Keep our intellect always on the go like a horse whipped by the master”.

where fire worship is mentioned. You are all aware that the five elements are air, fire, water, earth and sky.

The text of Irawati Karve's essays begins with pointing out that in the Mahabharata, references to religion are ritualistic and belief oriented. The system of pleasing Gods to win favours does not seem very common. Nor do we hear too much about temples where religious worship is performed. Rather, moral difficulties, questions of right and wrong are discussed in a philosophical and logical framework. The belief in rebirth and the doctrine of karma are firmly established. Atman, the soul or essence, is often talked about. But the attitude is one of intellectual enquiry. Reason rather than blind faith predominates. Reality is the key in the approach to life, rather than wish-fulfillment and escapism.

The age of Bhakti which followed the period of the Mahabharata is full of manifestations of wish-fulfillment. This is actually a sign of weakness in human nature, to seek divine solutions to problems in human life. Soft escape routes from life's struggles can only dampen the toughness of the human spirit. Bhakti actually underestimates the power of destiny which is such a vital force in the Mahabharata. Even in the fulfilment of destiny, characters face difficult situations like Arjun who doesn't wish to kill his own relatives. But the solution is an intellectual one provided by Krishna who tells him how to face up to the problem by following dharma. To follow dharma is not to go by personal preferences or likes and dislikes but to do what is one's duty. And the duty of a Kshatriya is to act against the enemy. Instead of easy solutions, the Mahabharata presents characters with situations where they have to take a clear position, a moral stand, rather than make compromises. The theory of "detachment" is aimed at enabling people to do what is morally right rather than go by personal considerations. The belief in "Karma" and "destiny" and the sense of detachment all contribute to the way the major characters live and die. Kunti, Draupadi, Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and the Pandavas embody these traits. They struggle, suffer, sacrifice, not because they seek extraordinary gains but because that is the only way for them to live and then, to die. This is the harsh philosophy of life of the Mahabharata epoch. The Bhakti cult reveals a totally different mindset, an emotional one. The hardness, realism, frustration, of real life is sought to be compensated or made less painful by creating kind-hearted "gods" who come to man's rescue. In literature, the direct result is creation of dreamy, unrealistic works which satisfy man's craving for happiness and happy endings. Irawati Karve gives the examples of plays like Vikramorvashiya and Shakuntalam. The original King and Shakuntala were both shrewd and mercenary human beings but Kalidasa depicts them in a very different light. It is a world of make believe.

The Mahabharata is a history; so it has real characters with human strengths and weaknesses. As in real life, they live out their destiny. Superhuman agencies do *not* come to their rescue. Every character lives out the consequences of his actions. His/Her actions in turn are guided by a tight framework of values and behaviour. A mother, a wife, an elder brother, a friend, all behave in a certain way. When the code of conduct is broken, there is trouble. There is no scope for action for personal happiness. A system of filial and social duty is firmly in place. Performing these duties to family and society is in itself a source of happiness, as it is the performance of one's dharma which is the guiding principle of life.

In the later era, things become different. An intellectual approach is replaced by an emotional one. Realism gets replaced by exaggeration. So human behaviour rings false. All the stories of miracles which most of us know belong to this period. The stories of Harishchandra, Sudama, Ajamila, all belong to this genre. They are stories of weak men, frightened of life. This

kind of literature continues till the twentieth century. It is only over the last few decades that REALISTIC literature has again come into vogue.

Exercises:

Reading Comprehension

Q.1. Karve uses a number of adjectives to describe what later came to be called ‘Hinduism’: nameless, elastic, fluid and individual. What does she mean?

A. The earliest form of religion was nature worship and the offering of sacrifice to the Sun as the source of all life. But a specific name for this practice had not been devised; hence, *nameless*.

Elastic is a term which points to the variable nature of the scope of religion. It could simply refer to worship and the performance of rituals or it could include the doctrine of karma and the importance attached to dharma. It is both ritual and moral.

Fluid refers to the evolving nature of religion. As more and more issues of complexity in human life were identified there was a greater need to interpret the basic value system provided by religion, to find solution to human situations.

Individual refers to the fact that inspite of a general consensus on basic issues, each individual had to decide for himself or herself, what constituted religion. Each person had to arrive at his own interpretation/understanding of religion.

Q.2. How is the religion that prevailed at the time of the Mahabharata different from Islam and Christianity on the one hand and Buddhism on the other?

A. Christianity is based on the teachings of Christ, While Islam is based on the teachings of the Prophet. Religion of the times of the Mahabharata is not confined to any such leading figure but is the outcome of the collective wisdom of generations that have gone before the age of the Mahabharata.

Buddhism, according to Irawati Karve, is based on escapism and also has internal contradictions. Buddhism asked people to abjure the world and become monks but ignored the fact that a wealthy and charitable merchant class engaged in the business of life was needed to support these monks.

Q.3. According to Karve, what was the definition of friendship that prevailed in the age of The Mahabharata? Do you think it is a good definition? Justify your response.

A. In the age of the Mahabharata, friendship was possible only between equals. When a poor Drona sought help from King Drupada whom he considered a ‘friend’, he received a big shock, being told that a poor Brahmin and a King could not be ‘friends.’ Similarly, to lend dignity to his friendship with Karna, Duryodhana makes him the ruler of Anga, a principality of his own kingdom. As two wealthy men, they could be friends.

Although this definition of friendship ignores the element of generosity and humanity in human relationships, I think it is a good definition which is very relevant in today’s material world.

Q.4. How is the Krishna depicted in the Mahabharata different from the Krishna of the Bhakti movement?

A. Krishna of the Mahabharata is a human being, a shrewd leader of a principality (Dwarka)

and a close friend of Arjuna. As a close friend, when Arjuna faces a psychological crisis in the actual Mahabharata war, Krishna, acts as a counsellor, a friend, philosopher and guide.

By the time we reach the Bhakti movement, Krishna has, over several generation of story-telling, become a God with divine powers. He has been transformed into an object of worship with temples and cults associated with him.

Q.5. What is the philosophy of life that prevailed at the time of the Mahabharata? Do you find it hard or pessimistic?

A. The philosophy of life or world-view depicted in the Mahabharata is a practical and realistic one. It is based on a spirit of intellectual inquiry and tries to come to grips with the essence of human life. Out of these questions and dilemmas emerged the doctrines of karma and dharma which made man alone responsible for his deeds and his fate. It is neither hard nor pessimistic; it is simply realistic.

UNDERSTANDING FANTASY

Maniben alias Bibijaan

By Shilpa Paralkar

— Dr. Neeta Gupta

Introduction

‘Maniben alias Bibijaan’ the fourteenth Unit in your course, is included as a piece that will help you understand Fantasy. Even before we venture to read the story to find out how fantasy operates within it, we are given a set of ‘Warm Up’ exercises which provide a few more clues.

In today’s world Television has become an integral part of our lives. No longer just a source for entertainment it is also our window to the world. Sitting at home we can watch what is happening in various parts of the world. Within seconds Television can transport us mentally from our comfortable drawing room to the place that is on its screen. Try as we may we just cannot remain confined to our own small world. The outside world barges in through the Television screens and forces us to take notice. The point however is that what we see on our television screen is only what the camera is showing us or what the editor wishes us to see. The crucial question therefore is whether what we see on television is entirely the truth or does it leave some scope for doubt? In the story under consideration Television plays a very important role. It almost assumes a character of its own allowing fantasy to step in and take over.

What is Fantasy?

Fantasy is basically the other side of realism. In a broad sense, fantasy is fiction that contains elements of wizardry, magic, supernatural facts unusual settings and entities that suspend conventions of realism. ‘Fantasy is a genre that has grown so large that several different sub-categories now exist.’ Most people agree that all fiction is fantasy since all fiction is made up of stories about unreal characters. But Fantasy is a literary genre with its own themes and characters. *Fiction has realistic plots and characters while Fantasy deals with the impossible.*

The Need for Fantasy

Most of us at some point in our lives have fantasised about something. As children we weave imaginary worlds around us peopled with imaginary characters. As we grow older we lose touch with our imagination and become grounded in reality. Yet there come times in our lives when we fantasize about things, dream about the future, at times worry about the past and lose touch with reality even if it is momentarily so. Fantasy literature that transports you from the real and mundane world to a world of imagination is therefore popular with children and adults alike. Is it because we want to escape the real world? Does it teach us some magic which can make things better? The answer to both questions is no! *Fantasy literature is not escapist. Nor does it teach any magic. Its importance lies in the fact that it helps us “gain insight about being humans or exploring the human soul, by taking us out of the real world.*’ In our story about Maniben alias Bibijaan the use of fantasy helps us gain some very

important insights into the human mind and the human soul that at times is so fettered by the physical reality surrounding it that it fails to express itself freely and truly. It manages to find expression only through a fantastic and make-believe world. A world that reinstates our belief in humanity because it lets us peer into a human heart that is daring to swim against the tide.

What happens in the story and what does not happen

The story works on multiple levels. At one level we have the world of Manu and his newly married wife, while on the other we have the world of mother and son i.e. Manu and Maniben. On yet another level we have the world of Manu the reactionary who indulges in looting and arson on the day of the riots and then we have the fantasy world of Maniben in which she exists as Bibijaan for the old Muslim man who visits her every afternoon ever since the day her son brought home the television set.

Since the piece is a short story, the brevity of the genre does not allow much breadth and space for lengthy explanations or long authorial interventions when the author can steps in to explain things. Such a luxury is not available to a short story writer as it is to a writer of a full length novel. A lot has therefore to be understood from the little that is said in the story because much more is implied. We have to constantly make connections and be alert to understand what is happening.

Manu and his wife Sejal

The story begins with a disturbing conversation between Manu and Sejal, his wife of three weeks. We are introduced to Manu's mother Maniben, whose full name is Maniben Parekh and who is sixty two years old and has been a widow for the past thirty years. Sejal's complaint is that Maniben has been entertaining a man in the house every afternoon. This man is obviously a Muslim, reports Sejal, for he calls Maniben Bibijaan who every Thursday afternoon makes sheer Khurma for him.

Sejal's report is absolutely shocking for Manu for he is a staunch Hindu, in fact we are told that he is 'the young and promising secretary of the 'Yuvak Bajrang Dal.' A few more details emerge about Manu. He is a school teacher at Shishugrih Vidyalaya and teaches Physics. He is quite popular with the students many of whom take tuitions from him thus increasing his earnings by Rs. 400/- a month. The story is set in Ahmedabad.

Manu and his Mother

There is an imperceptible shift in the narration and we enter the world of Manu and his mother with ease. The first detail mentioned about Maniben is that she is forever frowning. This seemingly minor detail of a frown became the link to the world of mother and son. She frowns when Manu walks into the house one night with a television set and a broken pair of slippers. Maniben is quite disinterested in what her son has brought home but questions him about his broken slipper and why he hasn't had it repaired on the way.

The significance of 3-March-2002

The author is very particular about mentioning the date on which Manu brought home the television set.

Do you think the date 3rd March 2002, is significant? Is its significance in context of the city in which the story is set?

Most of us are aware that on this particular day communal riots had broken out in Ahmedabad. There was widespread arson, looting and killing throughout the city. The writer may not have spelled it out for the readers but the implication of Manu's broken slipper and the long black sooty smear on his shirt sleeve are both pointers to the fact that he has participated in just such a looting and the Television set is the bounty he has brought home. The milkman not coming the next day and the people of the *chawl* staying at home just as Manu, may appear to be inane observation by the author but these are all the outcome of the rioting of the previous day so is the blackboard with the mysterious but sinister digits whose numbers keep on rising through the day. It is obviously implied that these numbers refer to the number of people killed. Manu is congratulated on becoming the proud owner of a T.V. set and a lot of chawl-mates drop in to have a look. Maniben however, watches from a distance. It is only after Manu has gone out with his friends that she musters up enough courage to switch on the T.V. set.

Where does reality end and fantasy begin?

As Maniben switches on the T.V. we are told that "the screen flickered for a few seconds and then the face of an old Muslim man about the same age as Manu's mother filled the screen." What is more important to note is that "He was in the traditional Muslim cap and was weeping bitterly." Despite Maniben's attempts to switch channels, the Muslim man refuses to go and is always there on the screen, crying bitterly. Then he asks for a glass of water!

At this point we have to be careful to make the distinction between perceived reality and imagined reality. Whatever happens within the world of Maniben and her Muslim friend has to be understood from the point of view of fantasy. For us readers Maniben's afternoon companion who visits her through the T.V. set (and who drinks from Damu's cup and yearns to eat sheer kurma) does not exist. As a physical, tangible reality he is non-existent. We might even call him a figment of her imagination. For Maniben however, he is as real as any other thing in the room. *For her the imagined reality becomes the perceived reality as well.* It is not as though there is actually a man extending a hand outside the T.V. set to accept the cup of water he has asked for. It is not even as though he is there talking to Maniben addressing her as Bibijaan and telling her about how his shop was looted and how he along with his five year old grand daughter Nafisa was burnt alive. All these details have probably emerged from the news that Maniban has been probably watching on the T.V. set or that she has been listening to from her son or the neighbours in the chawl. Using these details her mind has built up a world of its own in which she comfortably sits and chats with her Muslim visitor and together they sit unraveling memories of the past.

The use of memory is an important clue and the next equally important clue is that both Maniben and the Muslim man hail from the same small town of Porbander where Maniben had spent the first fourteen years of her life.

What is Actually Happening?

What do you think is actually happening here? Obviously a man cannot steps out of a T.V. set and assume life. The germ lies in Maniben's mind. Her mind has apparently wandered to the past. The same is corroborated by the writer who does mention that "these days, standing in her dark kitchen, she found herself thinking more and more about her maternal home in Porbander." She remembers the crooked neem tree, the open courtyard, the swing made from

her grandmother's blue and pink checked guddi. She also recalls how her elder sister Rama had jumped into the well on Dhanteras day. She even remembers the Muslim family that lived down the lane.

Memory is replacing physical reality here and Maniben has actually woven a reality around her that appears to be physical but is in fact based on hallucination. These hallucinations in turn are drawn from memories of the past.

Clinical Reasons

It is a well-known fact that "hallucinations occur when environmental or physical factors such as stress, medication, extreme fatigue or mental illness cause the mechanism within the brain, that helps distinguish conscious perception from internal, memory-based perception, to misfire." As a result hallucinations occur during periods of consciousness. In such a mental state "when the brain's representational apparatus may lose access to the sensory data that are ordinarily its most predictive and useful inputs, it begins to search for the next best alternative, usually images stored in the memory banks." Thus a model from memory becomes "real" for the time being.

Maniben's Hallucination

It is easy to understand why Maniben has felt the need to resurrect a man from the past and has allowed him entry into her present life. The author quite ingeniously places hints and clues that help us to understand what is actually happening here. In all probability Maniben has lived a very stifling married life in a household that "did not believe in listening to daughters-in-law." She has been a widow for the past thirty years and lives a lonely life, confined to just one room. Giving us a peep into her childhood, the author tells us that as a child of eight she had wanted to marry Gandhiji and used to write him long letters in her mind. The capacity to imagine and dream has been a part of her personality therefore. The ever present frown on her face however, signifies that not many of her dreams have been fulfilled. 'One should be grateful for what one gets' has been her way of compromising with her circumstances. She had wanted a daughter but got a son instead. She had wanted to name her son Ram but was not allowed. She had wanted her son to become a Professor but he became a schoolteacher. These are only a few of her unfulfilled dreams that the author mentions in passing. There may be many more about which we can only make a guess. The troubled times have only added to her stress. It is not as though she does not know what is happening outside or that her son is involved in the disturbances that are going on in the city. The author writes that Maniben's eyes filled with terrible shadows when the Muslim man questions her about it. She is obviously in a lot of pain. Her mental and emotional state therefore propels her towards building a world of her own in which without fear she can share her thoughts with someone and freely express her feelings.

The Connection between Dream and Reality

While we share Maniben's fantasy with her and listen to her conversation with the Muslim man, another set of details is being unravelled for us by the author. It is almost as though a jig-saw puzzle is being pieced together to help us understand the reasons why and how this fantasy has taken shape. The author has already told us that these days Maniben's mind often wandered to the past, to her hometown Porbander where she was born and spent the first fourteen years of her life. The fact that the Muslim man too mentions that he is from Porbander, immediately establishes a connection. Gradually other details emerge and over the next few days

she and the Muslim man unravel a lot of memories together. *Memories of the past are therefore an important link between Maniben and her fantasy*. She remembers the Muslim family that lived down the lane and how Rama, her sister, used to throw stones over their courtyard wall while passing by on her way to the temple. In all probability Rama might have been in love with a boy from that Muslim household which had probably been the reason for her suicide.

The Probable Explanation

In all probability the recent communal riots have made Maniben hark back to that time in her life when the two communities had lived in harmony with one another. The Muslim man in the T.V. set is probably from that Muslim family that used to live down the lane in her maternal neighbourhood. It is worth noting that in her fantasy this man has first appeared on the T.V. screen and thereafter assumed a life of his own. The explanation for this fantasy is simple and logical. She has probably watched the news coverage of the riots. She has even noticed and understood that her son has been part of that looting and arson and has brought the T.V. set home. The news being covered on T.V. has probably focused on various parts of the city where rioting has taken place giving all the gory details. Maniben has probably heard how the Muslim man's T.V. shop was looted and how he and his granddaughter have been burnt alive. This has been sufficient to spark off a chain of memories in her mind. Searching for some peace her mind has traveled back to the times when both communities had lived in harmony with one another. In her fantasy world, Maniben is able to rebuild that harmony. She chats comfortably with the Muslim man, offers him water, makes sheer khurma for him and relives a lot of her memories with him. Her fantasy is very real for her. Precisely for this reason her response to Manu's plans of marriage is lukewarm. Her first observation is that the house is too small for four members. In her mind she is thoroughly convinced that the Muslim man is an inhabitant of the same house.

Manu's instant reaction is of course to think that his mother has gone senile and could do with some help. It is for us to decide who actually needs help here. Is it the so called *sane* people like Manu who are targetting a section of people simply because they belong to a particular community? Is it the seemingly senile Maniben who in her fantasy has sought and found a solution to the widespread antagonism and acrimony around her? *In her fantasy world where she exists as Maniben as well as Bibijaan, there is harmony, there is tolerance, there is understanding and there is even empathy. Is it possible to find or create a harmonious world like this in factual reality?*

The Need for Fantasy

Fantasy author and scholar Jane Yolen states the importance and need for fantasy in very credible terms. She writes:

“In fantasy stories we learn to understand the differences of others, we learn compassion for those things ‘we cannot fathom, we learn the importance of keeping our sense of wonder. The strange worlds that exist in the pages of fantasy literature teach us a tolerance of other people and places and engender an openness towards new experience. Fantasy puts the world into perspective in a way that ‘realistic’ literature rarely does. It is not so much an escape from the here-and-now as an expression of each reader’s horizons.”

When the mind is free of all the fetters that society has placed on it, it knows no bounds. It is free to roam at will, without fear and without compulsions or inhibition. Thus in her fantasy

world Maniben welcomes the Muslim man into her home, her thoughts and her life and not only shares food and water with him but also grieves with him over the loss of his grandchild. The television becomes the medium through which this fantasy is given shape. (It is ironic that the television which is supposed to bring the facts to us right into our homes should become the medium for the creation of a fantastic world.) In the factual world such a possibility could have probably never occurred.

In her fantasy Maniben is able to point out the underlying reality that beneath it all we are all humans irrespective of caste, colour or creed and share the same hopes and sorrows. The question Maniben alias Bibijaan puts before us is a crucial one. *Is this oneness not possible in the real world or is the real world really too small to house all of us?* Only by transcending the real world can the human soul be truly explored.

Maniben's answer to Manu's act of looting and killing the old Muslim man is to welcome the same man into her house and help ease his pain.

Guidelines

Provided below are some guidelines for the exercises given in your textbook. You can build on these guidelines to write your answers to the questions.

Q.1. The writer is at great pains to give us the exact date (3rd March 2002) and place (Ahmedabad) in which the story is set. Why do you think they are significant?

Guidelines: The question has already been discussed in the course of our discussion about the story. The date 3rd March 2002 and the place Ahmedabad, are both significant because on that particular date, communal riots between Hindus and Muslims, had erupted in the city of Ahmedabad. The writer, is probably trying to give a realistic dimension to an otherwise fantastic story by making this choice.

[Realistic events have often been used as subject for stories, plays, films etc. Can you think of a few examples?]

Q.2. As a little girl Maniben wanted to marry Gandhiji. What does this tell us about Maniben?

Guidelines: It may sound foolish that Maniben wanted to marry Gandhiji when she was eight years old. Her desire however implies that she believed in Gandhiji's ideals and non-violence topped the list. Being a believer in non-violence, she can never accept her son's reactionary ways. Her empathy towards her Muslim countrymen is obviously not a sudden development.

Q.3. Who do you think her elder sister Rama wanted to marry? Do you think it has anything to do with her jumping into the well?

Guidelines: In a short story a lot has to be read between the lines. The writer may be including an innocuous looking detail but the implications of the same detail would reveal a lot to alert and discerning readers. In the story Maniben's eldest sister Rama is mentioned only twice. At first we are told that she had committed suicide by jumping into the well on Dhanteras day. A little later another detail is included which recounts how Rama would unfailingly throw stones over the compound wall of their Muslim neighbours, while passing by along with her sister. The implications of this minor detail can be many.

1) Rama obviously wanted someone in the house to know that she was passing by. 2) That someone had to be a boy because had it been a girl there would have been no secrecy in their meeting. 3) If it was a boy then Rama was probably in love with him and wanted to marry him. 4) It is a foregone conclusion that she was not allowed to do so which in turn probably became the reason for her suicide.

[Is the above explanation close to what might have happened or can you give another reason for Rama's act of throwing stones at her Muslim neighbour's wall?]

Q.4. Do you think that Maniben is deliberately obtuse? Why?

Guidelines: Maniben, the believer in non-violence, who had wanted to marry Gandhiji, is unable to face the harsh reality that her own son has become a reactionary and is indulging in all that Gandhiji had preached against. It is not as though she is dull-witted or is slow to understand. It is only that she is afraid to accept the fact and face the reality. She wards it off by making it seem as though she is not aware of what is happening. She feigns a disinterest in it too. When questioned by the Muslim man in her fantasy world, she looks away and her eyes, 'fill with terrible shadows...' We are told that she nervously plucks the hem of her Sari. The shadows in her eyes and her nervous actions are all indicative of the fact that she is not only aware but also in terrible pain because of the knowledge. She is pretending to be obtuse only to hide that pain.

Q.5. What is the reality about her son that Maniben does not want to face?

Guidelines: The answer to the above question is fairly simple. The reality about Manu that Maniben does not want to face is that he has become a part of that group of misguided people who in the name of religion and community, stoop to rioting, arson, looting and even killing.

Q.6. Maniben talks to a Muslim man in the television set, gives him water to drink and prepares sheer khurma for him every Thursday afternoon. Do you think she has lost her balance?

Guidelines: One needs a great deal of sensitivity to understand why Maniben acts the way she does. This is her way of saying that look, we are all human beings. No one less than the other. For those of us grounded in reality she might appear to have lost her balance. In behaving thus she is expressing her deepest sympathy towards those whom her son has helped to loot and murder.

Q.7. Do you think it is ironic that the man her son has helped to loot and murder should be brought back to life and into his house by Maniben?

Guidelines: In a piece of literary work nothing happens as an accident. Even minor details are included with a purpose. This is particularly so in a short story because the brevity limits the physical space available to the writer. Each word is chosen carefully and consciously. The fact that Maniben resurfaces and befriends the man her son has helped to loot and murder is not only ironic but is done with a purpose. It is almost as though she is trying to atone for her son's sins.

You can go back to the discussion of the story for further details.

Q.8. Do you think that the television set is used as a metaphor in this story? What purpose does it serve?

Guidelines: To understand this question you must first try and recall what a metaphor is. A **metaphor** is a literary device that is used to compare totally dissimilar things. It is different from a simile because it does not use any words of comparison such as 'like' or 'as'. A metaphor describes a thing in terms of another when it identifies one thing with another in the sense that the thing being compared assumes the attributes of the thing it is being compared to. The obvious attraction of the metaphor is that it is very vivid. Even abstract thoughts come to life when described in concrete terms.

The television set in the story does not remain merely an idiot box. In fact it assumes an identity of its own. At first it brings in the world of the harsh reality outside into Maniben's home. This was the reality that Maniben had been trying to evade but now it almost invades her home and her consciousness through the television set.

As a metaphor the television has more than one role to play. While on the one hand it brings in the reality on the other it becomes the vehicle for Maniben's fantasy as well. It almost assumes the identity of the Muslim man on its screen and then by extension it becomes the means for exploring the possibility of bringing different communities together. What begins essentially as an exploration of personal emotion becomes ultimately a huge statement about human experience; about possibilities that are only waiting to be explored and turned into realities.

[Metaphors work on multiple levels. Some guidelines for looking at the television as metaphor have been provided above. You may have some ideas of your own in this matter. Feel free to explore them but only after placing them within the context of the story]

The exercises on debate and writing should be attempted on your own.

UNDERSTANDING DRAMA

Her Name is Bharati

By Joydeep Bhattacharya

— Dr. Neeta Gupta

Introduction

Joydeep Bhattacharya has chosen the dramatic form to write his extremely disturbing and thought provoking piece. His choice of the form is quite apt as it jolts the reader from complacency into thinking about issues that many of us mistakenly think do not concern us at all.

Before moving on to an explanation of the issues in this short dramatic piece let us stop for a brief look at how drama is different from other literary genres and why it is an effective medium to put across issues. In the broadest sense drama is simply ‘play’ whereby a group of persons impersonate certain characters. It is commonly used to mean a work meant to be performed on stage by actors. Drama can be defined as ‘a rendering of a human action by human agents; as such it is the exploration of the potentialities of human action and an exploration of human character. It is the art concerned with the relationship of human character to human action, where even the author may not intrude to provide comments, analysis or explanations for certain behaviour. It may therefore be described as the art which depicts character in action.’

As is obvious from the explanation above, a playwright or a dramatist cannot step in to explain why a particular character is behaving in a particular manner. He cannot even intervene to place hints and clues for understanding the events or even provide us moral guidance to understand the theme or respond to it in a particular way. In a drama the reader/audience is on her own to interpret events and situations, to understand characters and finally to arrive at some understanding of the issues being put forth through the characters. The dramatist never comes on the stage to guide our responses. We can say that he never enters the world of his characters physically. Whatever he wants to say has to be done through the characters and thus the reader/audience has to be alert and intelligent to understand the issues.

The Theme

The thematic focus of Bhattacharya’s play is religion and the colour we give it to suit our own requirements or to satisfy our whims, fancies, desires or even to provide us an outlet to unleash the beast that lurks within most of us. The ‘Warm up’ exercises that prepare you for the play give a strong indication that this particular play is going to deal with the violence that is being practiced in the name of religion today. In a country where the major religions are pacifist and teach us to follow the path of peace one would expect the society to be largely peace-loving. It is surprising however, that a very wrong and perverted use of religion itself is leading to increasing violence in society. In fact, those who call themselves the custodians of morality and religion are more often than not the culprits who perpetuate violence in the name of religion.

What do you think is the reason for this increasing violence in society in the name of

religion? Is it fear, is it indifference, is it a lack of education or is it someone's political agenda or is it all of these together? You may want to stop for a while and think about the issue.

Joydeep Bhattacharya's play takes up this issue of violence and gives us a perspective on just such a situation that has been perpetuated in the name of religion. As we go through the play we are given multiple perspectives on the situation through various characters and the culmination of events takes us from the particular to the symbolic level. The woman who calls herself Bharati comes to symbolize the country itself. *From being a play about violence in the name of religion, it becomes in addition a play about violence against women and from then it moves to violence within one's own country.* How the country is being maimed by the various superstitions, dogmas, attitudes and vested interests that plague her and hinder her progress is explored in the play.

Detailed Explanation

The play 'Her name is Bharati' is set in Calcutta and the main players are from an upper middle class family residing in a fifth-floor apartment of a high-rise building. Within parenthesis the stage directions give us a brief introduction of the main characters. Anuttam and Mandira (with a nervous and harried look) have two children. Daughter Kuri is sixteen years old and son Bumba is just seven. Anuttam's mother also lives with them and is paralysed and confined to bed. The stage directions also briefly describe the situation that becomes the central concern of the play.

A woman being paraded naked and being brutalized by the mob is a situation with which many of us are familiar. Not in the sense of actually having witnessed it but in the sense of having read about such incidents in the newspapers, or having seen it on the news channels on television. In our play the woman is being kicked and beaten right in the street below the highrise in which Anuttam lives with his family. What happens next in the play is the various ways in which different characters react to this situation. These reactions can be categorized on the basis of class, gender and even age.

First Reactions

Mandira is the first to react and ask what's going on? Anuttam however is unable to give an answer for he too is just a spectator and knows only as much as Mandira does. The first reaction therefore is of curiosity. A very normal human reaction to anything out of the ordinary that attracts attention.

Kajol's Reaction

Kajol, the maid, has an answer to Mandira's query. Quite smugly she announces that the woman being beaten and paraded naked is from the other slum and will be burned alive or starved to death because she is wicked and has no morals. Even so, we ask whether such a heinous punishment is justified. There is however no questioning of the injustice of it all. Kajol's reaction is of acceptance. A few questions arise. Is Kajol's reaction of acceptance because she lacks education and therefore believes that a woman can be killed in this manner for having no morals or is there some additional reason as well? This additional reason could be a rivalry that has percolated from levels of religion and caste to the levels of small, demarcated geographical boundaries? We have been given a clue in her observation that 'she is from the other slum.' The two women may belong to the same class (both are slum-dwellers). Kajol can

be smug and sit in judgment and feel one-up, just because she is from the other slum. Being a woman one would have expected Kajol to have some compassion for the other but her unaware and uneducated mind is all too ready to accept the verdict and the punishment. Her reaction is not based on gender but on class. She may be from the other slum; she may be peering down from the fifth floor of the high rise building, yet, Kajol is one with the mob that surrounds and hounds the woman and finds nothing wrong in it.

Mandira's Reaction

Mandira's reaction is not only a reaction stemming from her upper-middle-class status but also from her gender. The upper-middle-class, smug in its cocooned existence, is depicted quite vividly in Mandira's observation that people in their apartment complex are hanging from their balconies 'like ripe fruit in summer' as though there is 'some kind of live show going on here!'

Do you think this is the normal reaction of people who are not directly involved in the situation? Is such a reaction determined to some extent by the fact that these people are not of the same social class? Kajol for instance is not directly involved in the situation but belongs to the same class as the woman being brutalized. Her reaction is therefore of acceptance. In all probability she too would have joined the mob had she been there physically. A question lurks at the back of the mind. Is there an element of fear somewhere? Fear of the mob? Fear of going against the dictate that declared the woman an offender?

Reaction of people like Anuttam, Subodh and to some extent Mandira is one of a spectator. They at first want to just look from a distance and not get involved. What is it that holds these people back from putting an end to the madness and the frenzy? Is it apathy, is it social snobbery or is it fear? The physical distance is maintained even though the spectacle does not fail to disturb.

Being a woman from the upper-middle-class segment of society, Mandira is obviously well educated and aware of the injustice and prejudices that prevail in our society against women in particular. She is horrified that *a woman* is being thus brutalized and no one is doing anything to stop the torture. She brings out the issue of gender into the picture and taunts her husband. She provokes him by calling him 'just another man getting his male pleasure from this sick violence!' Mandira's helplessness is magnified by the fact that she has no authority to control the violent situation and being a woman she is further dis-advantaged. The moment Anuttam agrees to go, Mandira's first thought is for his safety. All her rage and concern take a backseat and the primal instinct for self-preservation comes to the forefront. Mandira's reaction to the situation therefore is a complex one. It is based not just on class but on gender as well and also harks back to the most primitive reaction to fear. It is the most natural reaction to think of one's own safety first in a fearful situation.

Anuttam and Subodh

Anuttam and Subodh are the two men through whom we are given not only a class perspective but a male perspective as well. Belonging to the upper-middle-class, Anuttam's first reaction is to stay aloof as it doesn't concern him. On being provoked and prodded by his wife his next reaction is an expression of helplessness. What can he do alone against a mob of thousands? He is afraid of the frenzy and the madness and just wants himself and his family safe. Like an educated male quite characteristically he rationalizes and finds excuses. In fact, at one

point he almost indirectly accepts the situation saying that ‘we don’t know what actually happened.’ For Mandira however, no crime can justify such brutality. *The reason for such punishment lies in the male psyche where power over the woman is the most primal desire.*

Subodh, Anuttam’s friend, belongs to the middle class and brings in another male perspective on the situation. In fact he has observed the happenings from close quarters and almost takes sadistic pleasure in supplying the gory details of the torture the woman is being put through. His interest in the situation is not for the woman’s sake nor even for making an attempt to save her. He is merely a spectator who stands on the sides observing everything, at times getting vicarious pleasure from it. He brings the news about the sudden transformation that has taken the woman from being a criminal to a goddess! Quite characteristically neither Anuttam nor Subodh is interested in the welfare of the woman. What pre-occupies them is the repercussions of the situation and how it could lead to matters becoming tense and taking a different colour altogether. The reaction of both men is an expression of helplessness Annuttam does go to the police station only to come back with the news that his friend Dipankar, who could have helped, has been transferred. Subodh might have observed the situation from close proximity but comes back having done nothing to save the woman. Both men wryly express helplessness which is also the convenient reaction of a whole social class as well. But it is not helplessness alone. It is indifference as well. The event does not affect them directly so they choose to remain aloof.

Let us pause for a while and think about this attitude of indifference, of apathy and apparent helplessness of the middle classes. Isn’t this attitude responsible for many of the ills that plague our society today? *If we begin to take responsibility for situations and attempt to change them for the better rather than remaining indifferent spectators or merely expressing helplessness, we might be able to effect changes around ourselves.* These changes may be imperceptible at first but gradually the effect would snowball into changing society for the better. It is we, the people, who make a society. If the people are ready to change, societies would change automatically. The trouble is that somewhere along the line we have lost touch with the larger picture. Our thinking has become limited to just me and mine. We are not ready to look beyond that.

Are we a Civilized Society?

Mandira puts her finger on the crux of the problem when she says that nobody wants “a civilized solution” to the problem. What do you think she means by that? In a civilized society the weak and the defenceless are always protected. Might is not right as it is in the jungle. In a civilized society there are law enforcers, there are protectors for the weak. With the spectre of a frail woman being brutalized by a mob of thousands looming large, do we have a right to call ourselves civilized? Especially if not a single person has stepped forward to help her. Mandira’s comment also points towards a desensitization that has taken place in our society. She has very rightly observed that even intelligent and responsible men like Anuttam and Subodh merely sip their tea and share the gory details of the violence and the vicious assault. Their reasons for not doing anything to save the woman further underscores the point that we may call ourselves civilized but can watch the brutalization of a frail woman without any qualms.

A civilized solution to the problem could have saved the woman from the clutches of a mob- maybe by making the police or the local administration intervene. If that is not possible

then people who are merely onlookers should have got together in a sizeable number and try and reason with the tormenters. It is the indifference and the apathy of people like us, like Anuttam and Subodh, that strengthens the mob and give the police a chance to turn a blind eye as well. In the given situation we have no right to call ourselves a civilized society if such heinous crimes against the poor and defenceless can be perpetuated in full view of the public. What is most disturbing is the fact that even though the situation being presented here is a fictitious one yet it is not too far removed from reality. One can easily recall such instances having actually taken place in our country. If ‘lack of morals’ is not the issue then we have certainly heard of instances of Sati where women have been burned alive in full view of the public under the pretext of custom or religion. Even in such instances despite being in the know of things, the local administration had turned a blind eye to the whole event. We should really be ashamed to call ourselves a civilized society.

The Children’s Perspective

The dramatic form certainly provides for multiple perspectives on a single situation. With various characters responding differently to the same event we get to see the event from many angles. These various perspectives have emerged from the dialogues of the characters and nowhere has the playwright intervened to guide our responses. From what the characters speak we can gauge and then further interpret the situation and its repercussions back and forth. The children’s perspective is provided through Kuri, Bumba and Attri.

Kuri, the sixteen year old rebellious and defiant daughter of the Chaudharys reacts with curiosity at first especially because Mandira stops her from looking on. Her curiosity is roused further when her friend Attri tells her of the visit he and his friends had paid to the woman in the dark of the night. When Attri describes the incredible look in the women’s eyes Kuri’s curiosity gets the better of her and she agrees to go with him on his next visit to the women.

Meanwhile, a transformation of the woman has begun. From being a criminal to a victim she is fast assuming the status of a goddess. It is Kuri who makes an intelligent connection between the situation in hand and that in Satyajit Ray’s film *Debi*. The film *Debi* delineates a society very much like the one described in this play. *A society that denies women their basic humanity and yet puts them on a pedestal and worships them as goddesses.* This is a widely prevalent attitude in Indian society. Bharati, whose name will be revealed only at the end, is fast becoming a goddess even though she still bleeds from the wounds that have been inflicted on her. People are not ready to accept her as a human being with all her frailties but they are all ready to worship her just because she has been able to survive her near fatal injuries. It is almost as though she is indestructible and therefore immortal.

What is it that draws the children towards her? It might have been curiosity at first but that alone cannot account for their repeated visits in the dark of the night. Kuri, Attri and Bumba are not the only ones. We are told that a number of children have been going and visiting the woman, sneaking from their homes in the middle of the night without the knowledge of their parents. When caught and questioned by her father Kuri is not sure why she goes there. ‘Something compels me,’ she says. She sees nothing wrong in sneaking out in this manner and even taking her seven year old brother along. What compels these children? What motivates them? Is it a mesmerisation, a fascination with something that is an aberration in their normal course of life? The woman cannot hold them spell-bound because of something she says because she cannot even speak as her tongue has been cut-off. How is she then able to draw

these children to her night after night? In Kuri's words, 'It is a strange experience.' *The woman speaks to them with her eyes. She teaches them from example 'to learn and grow with pain; she gives them strength and resolve. Most importantly she urges them, 'to scratch the surface and look within, to introspect.*

Violence against Bharati has continued unabated. We learn from Kuri that even that particularl afternoon someone had stabbed and hacked her twice with a big knife. But she is still alive! A part of the children's fascination also orginate from the fact that this frail woman has been able to defy all attempts to kill her and finish her off. She refuses to die. She may have been maimed, she may have been silenced with her tongue cut-off, but her eyes still speak! She still smiles and seems more alive than ever before. Children as young as Bumba who have been exposed to violence through the virtual medium, through films and television find her to be a living embodiment of the violence human beings can inflict on one another for no reason whatsoever. Her bleeding and maimed body is a reminder to these children that this violence is a physical reality. Yet her resilience, her refusal to give in to her tormentors, her presence itself provides courage to the children and teaches them how to counter this violence. *The symbolic overtones become palpable in Kuri's final words when she urges her mother to realize that Bharati is not just a victimized woman. In fact she is there in every woman, in every human being in their own 'fears and contradictions.' She is also the one who urges them to summon up enough courage to cross the line of comfort, of complacency, of indifference and take responsibility. She forces us to introspect, to look within and find solutions to problems that have been largely created by ourselves.*

Symbolic Overtones

Bumba's sudden revelation of her name immediately make these symbolic overtones resonate with patriotic fevour. *She comes to symbolize India, the country as it is popularly visualized and portrayed.* The image of 'Mother India' is the stereotypical image of our country. In this image she is depicted as feminine, protective and motherly. The children who visit her at night may have experienced all these attributes of her. Yet this image is confined to literature and fine arts only. It is a far-cry from reality. It is doubly ironic that in a country which itself is visualized as a woman, women are subjected to victimization and torture on the slightest of pretexts. Even the popular myths and legends inculcate such ideas in impressionable minds. Sita is made to go through a test by fire; Draupadi is played for in a game of chess and is lost; a minor character Ahilya is turned to stone.

For some of us illiteracy and lack of education keeps the mind in shackles and we are afraid to even murmur a protest. For some others it is hard to give up the cover of false respectability within which we have cocooned ourselves. Bharati therefore continues to be in chains symbolically.

Violence Inherent in our Society

The play can even be seen as a play about the violence inherent in our society. The victimized and the brutalized woman Bharati, is the major vehicle to put this point across. Along with her however, there are other characters and instances that highlight this point further. Bumba, the seven year old son of Anuttam and Mandira, loves to play the role of Mogambo, the screen villain. He is forever toting a toy pistol and loves playing out scenes of kidnapping and ransom. It is quite chilling to hear him proudly say: "Mogambo knows that his hands don't

shake when it is time to kill!” Mimicking the screen villain he laughs aloud warning his sister not to act smart for ‘when Mogambo gets angry he likes to pull the trigger.’ It is unfortunate that a child as young as Bumba has been exposed to such a chilling level of violence through a popular film. Even television can be held equally responsible for this unmonitored exposure of children to various forms of violence.

What, we may ask, are the values being inculcated in our children through their wide exposure to media. Bumba does not hesitate to pull the trigger on his father when he is caught sneaking into the house. Probably pulling a trigger is the only solution he knows to the situation he is in. Of course he is frightened but refuses to answer any of Anuttam’s questions. His resolve angers Anuttam further and he loses his control and begins beating his son. Bumba continues in his stoic resolve—neither crying nor yelling which again points towards a certain hardening of the child’s core. He might have announced the woman’s name in a throw away fashion but it immediately puts another perspective on the situation. Not only does it indicate Bumba’s power of observation which has led him to the discovery, it also indicates his interest in her. No one forces him to go there. He goes because he wants to. From screen violence he has now witnessed violence as a physical reality. One can only wonder how his impressionable mind is going to deal with it.

The Grandmother

The grandmother who is paralyzed and confined to her bed seems to have a role to play as well. Without uttering a word she is yet able to convey her concern for the woman and also her relief at being informed about her survival. Bharati’s physical condition almost works as a barometer for the physical condition of the grandmother. Since the time the situation unfolded, the grandmother hasn’t slept for a second! As the days progress her condition deteriorates. In fact Anuttam tells his children that their grandmother ‘is dying.’ Yet when Kuri comes and tells her that Bharati has survived yet another attack and continues to live, her eyes relax and the crisis is over. The grandmother, Mandira and Kuri all share the same concern for Bharati which originates from the fact that they are all women. This concern cuts across age barriers. Had Kajol dared to go against the well toed line, she too would have shared this concern.

Guidelines

Provided below are guidelines for attempting the questions in your textbook under Reading Comprehension. Most of the ideas have already been discussed in the explanation above. You may have some additional ideas or a different view point. Please feel free to express them but only after placing them and having explored them in the context of the play.

Reading Comprehension

Guidelines to the 1st question

1. In our detailed explanation of the play it has already been discussed how ‘social class’ does condition the reactions of different people of the woman being ‘paraded naked.’ You may read the relevant sections again for attempting this question. Anuttam and Mandira’s reactions are also determined to a large extent by gender considerations and the point has been discussed above. Kajol and Kuri however do not react to the woman based on their gender. Kajol’s reaction is determined by her social class whereas Kuri reacts with the curiosity of a teenager first and then

with a mind unfettered by either class or gender considerations. She is thus able to bring out the significance of Bharati and what one can learn from her pain, her suffering and her resilience.

2. Granny, Mandira and Kuri are three women belonging to three different generations. They all share a concern for Bharati yet differ in their expression of it. Granny who is almost dying herself, cannot sleep a wink till she is sure that Bharati will survive. Her concern is a humanitarian one as Mandira's concern is on the grounds of injustice as well as gender and class. No crime according to her can justify such a punishment. The punishment becomes even more heinous because it is being meted out to frail and defenceless woman. Yet the moment she realizes that intervention means trouble for her husband or her family, Mandira's first reaction is to run for self-protection.

Kuri, bold, fearless and rebellious brings with her all these qualities of the third generation woman. She is actually able to go down there and sit with the woman face to face and understand her silence. She is able to point out to her parents how much Bharati can teach them all and how she lives within us all too.

3. The play is about the violence inherent in our society. The main event in the play is of course for the violent brutalization of a woman. At the same time the play is a comment on the violence in television and films to which children are constantly exposed; it talks about the violence that can creep into a frustrating situation as it does when Anuttam starts beating his son; it comments on the violence in the minds of people like Subodh who can take pleasure in recounting the gory details of the woman's torture.
4. Bharati, the hounded woman, is ultimately deified and worshipped as a goddess by some for the simple reason that she is resilient enough not to succumb to her injuries. This outcome of her suffering is enough to place her on the pedestal as a goddess. People are ready to worship her as a goddess but are not ready to accept her as a human being along with all her frailties. It is entirely correct to stay that Bharati is indeed a victim of such an attitude in society that is 'desperate to put its women on a pedestal and treat them as goddesses while denying them their basic humanity.'
5. The other women in the play can be seen as victims only to the extent that being women they have to contend with the fact that their status in society is subservient to the male. Moreover the grandmother can be seen as a victim of her age and her physical circumstances; Mandira as a victim of her situation (she feels helpless at not being able to help Bharati); Kajol is a victim not only because she is a woman but also because she is from a lower social class. Kuri is the only one who refuses to be a victim. She blazes forth and revolts and gets what she wants. Her parent's attempts to control her are all futile. She seems to have quite an independent mind.
6. Indian society can be divided into groups but not just these three mentioned by Subodh. In addition to these three we do have a group of concerned women like Mandira and the social activists are just a step away. Then we have a group of people, may be few in number, who would actually want to treat Bharati like the human being she is. This group of people has some understanding of the basic

humanity shared by all. In the play this group is represented by the children who visit Bharati at night and understand her silence.

Question 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 have been amply discussed in the explanation of the play. You may refer to the relevant sections for guidelines to these questions.

The question on Debate and Writing are for self-attempt.