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# UNIT 1 : SAROJINI NAIDU'S 'THE BANGLE SELLERS'

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## Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Introduction to the writer, Sarojini Naidu
  - 1.2.1 Education
  - 1.2.2 Governor of United Provinces
- 1.3 "The Bangle sellers", Poem
- 1.4 Interpretation of the poem
- 1.5 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Check your Progress

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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The objectives of this unit IS to enable you

- To examine the development of imagery in the poem and
- To establish the link between the different parts of the poem.
- By the end of this unit you should be able to understand well, the poems taught in this unit and also have a fair understanding of Sarojini Naidu as a poet. You should also be able to read her poems and appreciate her language, imagery and form.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we would deal with a poem "Bangle Sellers". This poem throws light on Sarojini Naidu's conception of Indian womanhood. According to her, the lives of women should be radiant, the lustrous tokens of which are the delicate bright rainbow-tinted bangles. The first duty of a woman is to be happy, since her happiness radiates happiness to those who come into contact with her. To be a happy daughter and wife is the goal to which Indian women ought to aspire.

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## 1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE WRITER, SAROJINI NAIDU

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Sarojini Naidu (née Chattopadhyay; 13 February 1879 – 2 March 1949) was an Indian political activist and poet. A proponent of civil rights, women's emancipation, and anti-imperialistic ideas, she was an important figure in India's struggle for

independence from colonial rule. Naidu's work as a poet earned her the sobriquet Nightingale of India.

Born in a Bengali family in Hyderabad, Naidu was educated in Chennai, London and Cambridge. Following her time in England, where she worked as a suffragist, she was drawn to Indian National Congress' movement for India's independence from British rule. She became a part of the Indian nationalist movement and became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and his idea of swaraj. She was appointed the President of the Indian National Congress in 1925 and later became the Governor of the United Provinces in 1947, becoming the first woman to hold the office of Governor in the Dominion of India.

Naidu's poetry includes both children's poems and others written on more serious themes including patriotism, romance, and tragedy. Published in 1912, "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" remains one of her most popular poems. She was married to Govindarajulu Naidu, a general physician and had five children with him. She died of a cardiac arrest on 2 March 1949.

When the First World War broke out England faced one serious problem. Though it was otherwise powerful, the empire suffered from a lack of manpower to fight the war. The kingdom needed millions of soldiers to fight powerful enemies like Germany. So the queen of England sent a request to the people of India to help with soldiers for fighting the war. This call of the empire divided India into two schools of thought. Revolutionary leaders like Subash Chandra Bose argued that the cruel British government should not be given any soldiers. They even argued that this was a good opportunity to get independence by not cooperating with the empire. If we didn't give soldiers, the empire was sure to get defeated in the war. A weakened Britain would be forced to give independence to India at an earlier date.

But Mahatma Gandhi was strongly against this school. He argued that it was our duty to help the empire in this critical juncture. We are Hindus and we can act only in according to our dharma. Gandhi strongly believed that we should not abandon the empire in such a critical situation because we are also subjects of the British Empire. Gandhi didn't believe in doing a wrong thing even for achieving a good result. According to Gandhi it was not only the end but also the means that was important. Finally the Gandhian school won the argument and Indians enlisted in the Royal army in large numbers. Sarojini Naidu's poem 'The Gift of India' describes this great contribution of Mother India towards the British Empire. According to Mrs. Naidu, India always had the tradition of giving to others. We never believed in receiving. India always gave rich gifts of raiment, grain or gold to the Europeans. Mother India is the narrator in the poem. Mother India proudly acknowledges that she had flung to the Eastern world and the Western world priceless treasures torn from her breast. When the empire needed soldiers, Mother India even gave away the sons of India taken out of her wounded womb. The womb of Mother India is described as wounded because of the already pathetic and poverty-stricken condition of the country.

A large number of Indian soldiers died in the war because the cruel British government deployed the Indian soldiers for dangerous duties nearer to the enemy ranks. Mother India was distressed to hear about the death of her children. Their dead bodies lied like pearls in their alien graves in Persia, Egypt and France. Their bodies were scattered like blossoms cut down by chance. According to Hindu traditions, the dead bodies of Indians should not be buried in foreign soil. They must be brought to India and all the rituals and poojas have to be performed according to the age old religious practices. After that the body has to be burned in a pyre by the eldest son of the dead soldier. But the selfish British empire gave no attention to these Indian beliefs. They simply dragged all the Indian dead bodies into mass graves and buried them underground without performing any Hindu rituals of samskara. The Empire gave a different type of treatment to the dead bodies of the British soldiers. Each and every one of the white bodies were respectfully collected from the warfronts and taken home by chartered flights of the British Airways. Once in England, they were given a ceremonial welcome and the burial ceremony was conducted according to the proper Christian practices.

England and its allies emerged victorious in the First World War. The empire started celebrating the victory and flags and banners were displayed everywhere. But Sarojini Naidu describes them as “torn red banners of victory”. They are torn because the victory was really a mockery for the Indians. They are red in colour because of the blood of Indians sacrificed for the victory of the British empire in the war. In the fourth and last stanza of the poem, Sarojini Naidu makes a request to the British Empire. She wants the empire to remain thankful for the sacrifice done by the dead Indian soldiers. Indians fought the war with equal or higher courage compared to their English counterparts. So Mother India wants the empire to remember the sacrifice done by the sons of India for the success of the empire. She wants the empire to honour the dead soldiers along with the honours going to be given for the British martyrs. But what happened in the end? The dead British soldiers were celebrated as war-heroes. Their widows were summoned to the Buckingham Palace and posthumous awards were presented in honour of their dead husbands. Their children were given reservation for higher studies in prestigious military academies and even future employment was guaranteed to them. But, in the case of the dead Indian soldiers, no such consideration was given. They were not given the status of martyrs because they were all poor and black Indians. All that their relatives received was a telegram from the war office informing the death of their near ones in the war.!

[https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Sarojini\\_Naidu](https://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/Sarojini_Naidu)

### **1.2.1 Education**

Sarojini Naidu was born in the house of Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, a Bengali Brahmin who was the principal of the Nizam's College in Hyderabad. Sarojini was born in a Bengali Hindu family in Hyderabad. Her parental home was at Brahmangaon in Bikrampur (in present-day Bangladesh). Her father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, with a doctorate of Science from Edinburgh University, settled in

Hyderabad, where he administered Hyderabad College, which later became Nizam College in Hyderabad. Her mother, Barada Sundari Devi Chattopadhyay, was a poet and used to write poetry in Bengali.

She was the eldest of the eight siblings. Her brother Virendranath Chattopadhyay was a revolutionary, and another brother Harindranath was a poet, a dramatist, and an actor. Their family was well-regarded in Hyderabad, not only for leading the Nizam College of Hyderabad, but also as Hyderabad's most famous artists in a time of British rule. Being an artist in the era of British rule in India was considered a risky career, yet with their progressive values, they pursued them anyway.

Sarojini Naidu, having passed her matriculation examination from the University of Madras and took a four-year break from her studies. In 1895, H.E.H. the Nizam's Charitable Trust founded by the 6th Nizam, Mahbub Ali Khan who gave her the chance to study in England, first at King's College, London and later at Girton College, Cambridge.

Sarojini met Paidipati Govindarajulu Naidu, a physician, and at the age of 19, after finishing her studies, she married him. At that time, Inter-caste marriages were not as common as they are today, but both their families approved their marriage. In addition, at that time, inter-regional marriage was also uncommon and looked down upon. As Sarojini was from Bengal, while Paidipati Naidu was from Andhra Pradesh, this was an inter-regional marriage of East and South India, with two opposing cultures. The couple had five children. Their daughter Paidipati Padmaja also joined the independence movement and was part of the Quit India Movement. She was appointed the Governor of the State of Uttar Pradesh soon after Indian independence

Naidu joined the Indian independence movement in the wake of partition of Bengal in 1905. She soon met other such leaders as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi and was inspired to work towards attaining freedom from the colonial regime and social reform.

Between 1915 and 1918, Naidu travelled to different regions in India delivering lectures on social welfare, emancipation of women and nationalism. She also helped to establish the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917.

Later in 1917, Naidu also accompanied her colleague Annie Besant, who was the president of Home Rule League and Women's Indian Association, to present the advocate universal suffrage in front of the Joint Select Committee in London, United Kingdom.

Naidu again went to London in 1919 as a part of the All India Home Rule League as a part of her continued efforts to advocate for freedom from the British rule. Upon return to India in 1920, she joined Gandhi's Satyagraha Movement.

Congress president and increased involvement in the Independence movement Naidu presided over the 1925 Annual Session of the Indian National Congress at Cawnpore (now Kanpur). She was the first Indian woman and second woman overall (after

Annie Besant) to do so. Naidu said in her address, "In the battle for liberty, fear is one unforgivable treachery and despair, the one unforgivable sin".

Naidu was arrested, along with other Congress leaders including Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Madan Mohan Malaviya for participating in 1930 Salt March. The Indian National Congress decided to stay away from the First Round Table Conference that took place in London owing to the arrests.

In 1931, however, Naidu and other leaders of the Congress party participated in the Second Round Table Conference headed by Viceroy Lord Irwin in the wake of the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

Naidu was one of the major figures to have led the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement led by Gandhi. She faced repeated arrests by the British authorities during the time and even spent over 21 months in jail.

### **1.2.2 Governor of United Provinces**

Following India's independence from the British rule in 1947, Naidu was appointed as the governor of the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh), making her India's first woman governor. She remained in office until her death in March, 1949.

Naidu began writing at the age of twelve. Her play, Maher Muneer, written in Persian impressed the Nawab of Hyderabad.

In 1905, her first collection of poems, named *The Golden Threshold* was published. The volume bore an introduction by Arthur Symons. Her poems were admired by prominent Indian politicians like Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

Naidu poem "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" was published as a part of *The Bird of Time* with her other poems in 1912. "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" was well received by critics, who variously noted Naidu's visceral use of rich sensory images in her writing.

*The Feather of The Dawn* which contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu was edited and published posthumously in 1961 by her daughter Padmaja Naidu

Naidu died of cardiac arrest at 3:30 p.m. (IST) on 2 March 1949 at the Government House in Lucknow. Upon her return from New Delhi on 15 February, she was advised rest by her doctors, and all official engagements were cancelled. Her health deteriorated substantially and bloodletting was performed on the night of 1 March after she complained of severe headache. She died after collapsing following a fit of cough. Naidu was said to have asked the nurse attending to her to sing to her at about 10:40 p.m. (IST) which put her to sleep. The last rites were performed at the Gomati River.

Analysing her political legacy, English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley wrote, "It has been our good fortune, while in Bombay, to meet Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the newly elected President of the All-India Congress and a woman who combines in the

most remarkable way great intellectual power with charm, sweetness with courageous energy, a wide culture with originality, and earnestness with humour. If all Indian politicians are like Mrs. Naidu, then the country is fortunate indeed.”

Golden Threshold in 2015

The Golden Threshold is an off-campus annexe of University of Hyderabad. The building was the residence of Naidu's father Aghornath Chattopadhyay, the first Principal of Hyderabad College. It was named after Naidu's very first collection of poetry. Golden Threshold now houses Sarojini Naidu School of Arts & Communication of University of Hyderabad.

During the Chattopadhyay family's residence, it was the centre of many reformist ideas in Hyderabad, in areas ranging from marriage, education, women's. Empowerment, literature and nationalism. Specifically, the reformist ideas included more power for women in a time where politics in India, especially regional politics, was dominated by men. It also included ideas for involvement for women in the arts field. There were also many restrictions on marriage during this time period that persist to this day, such as inter-regional and inter-caste marriages. These ideas were progressive for the era, but brought change in India in slow ways over time.

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### **1.3 “THE BANGLE SELLERS”, POEM**

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Bangle-seller are we who bear  
Our shining roads to the temple fair  
who will buy these delicate, bright  
Rainbow-tinted circle of lights?  
Lustrous tokens of radiant lines,  
for happy daughters & happy wives. ,  
Some are meet for a maiden's wrist,  
Silver and blue as the mountain-mist,  
Some are flushed like the buds that dream  
On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream;  
Some are aglow with the bloom that cleaves  
To the limpid glory of new-born leaves.  
Some are like fields of sunlit corn,  
Meet for a bride on her bridal morn;  
Some, like the flame of her marriage fire;

Or rich with the hue of her heart's desire,  
Tinkling, luminous tender, and clear  
Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear.  
Some are purple a gold-flocked grey,  
For her who has journeyed through life midway,  
Whose hands have cherished, whose love has blest  
And cradled fair sons on the faithful breast,  
Who serves her house-hold in fruitful pride,  
And worships the Gods at her husband's side.

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## 1.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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'Bangle-Sellers' as you can see is a poem of 4 stanzas of 6 lines each rhyming aa bb cc. This poem throws light on Sarojini Naidu's conception of Indian womanhood. According to her, the lives of women should be radiant, the lustrous tokens of which are the delicate bright rainbow-tinted bangles. The first duty of a woman is to be happy, since her happiness radiates happiness to those who come into contact with her. To be a happy daughter and wife is the goal to which Indian women ought to aspire. Marriage to an Indian woman means much more than to a man since the woman is in most cases economically dependent. It is therefore a turning point in her life. Sarojini symbolizes the heart's desire of a bride with the rich red colour of her bangles.

The would-be bride responds to the laughter of the intimate companions of her girlhood as they tease her about her coming marriage. She sheds tears as she leaves, her father's house for her husband's. Hence Sarojini Naidu speaks of the bridal laughter and the bridal tears which like the bangle she wears are, tinkling, luminous, tender and clear. 'Bangle Sellers' confines itself to the different stages in a woman's life, relating each stage to the bangles appropriate to it. Thus the "rainbow-tinted circles of light" carried by the bangle sellers to the temple fare are 'Lustrous tokens of radiant lives for happy daughters and happy wives'. The focus here is only on the radiance and not on the desolation at all. Sarojini Naidu mingles description with reflection in 'Bangle Sellers'. It is beautifully executed and shows her descriptive skill with sustained thought.

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## 1.5 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS

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<b>FAIR:</b>	carnival
<b>RAINBOW TINTED:</b>	multi-coloured like a rainbow
<b>CIRCLES OF LIGHT:</b>	brightly shining

<b>RADIANT:</b>	glowing brightly with joy
<b>MAIDEN:</b>	young unmarried girl
<b>FLUSHED:</b>	blush - to go red in the face
<b>TRANQUIL:</b>	peaceful
<b>AGLOW:</b>	glowing
<b>BLOOM:</b>	healthy fresh appearance
<b>CLEAVES:</b>	sticking together
<b>LIMPID:</b>	clear
<b>HUE:</b>	shade of color
<b>LUMINOUS:</b>	glowing with light

## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we try to deal with the cultural societal aspect in Indian context. The very beauty of “bangle seller” her this poem throws light on Sarojini Naidu's conception of Indian womanhood. According to her, the lives of women should be radiant, the lustrous tokens of which are the delicate bright rainbow-tinted bangles. The first duty of a woman is to be happy, since her happiness radiates happiness to those who come into contact with her. To be a happy daughter and wife is the goal to which Indian women ought to aspire. Marriage to an Indian woman means much more than to a man since the woman is in most cases economically dependent. It is therefore a turning point in her life. Sarojini symbolizes the heart's desire of a bride with the rich red colour of her bangles.

## 1.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) How does the poem 'The Bangle Sellers' throw light on Sarojini Naidu's conception of Indian Women?

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2) Justify the title of the poem 'The Bangle Seller'?

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3) In which persona is the poem written?

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## **UNIT 2 : A.K. RAMANUJAN’S “OBITUARY”**

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### **Structure**

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 About the poet, A.K. Ramanujan
  - 2.2.1 Education
  - 2.2.2 Career
  - 2.2.3 Contributions to Indian subcontinent studies
  - 2.2.4 Controversy regarding his essay
- 2.3 “Obituary”, the poem
- 2.4 Interpretation of the poem
- 2.5 Ramanujan's Place in Contemporary Indo-English Poetry
- 2.6 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 2.7 Let us Sum Up
- 2.8 Check your progress

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### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After having read this unit you will be able to:

- Appreciate the development of imagery in the poems, and establish the links between its different parts.
- By the end of this unit you should be able to understand well the poems taught in this unit and also have a fair understanding of A.K. Ramanujan as poets.
- You should also be able to read their poems with an understanding of their use of language, imagery and form.

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit you would be able to get a clear frame of the son, who does not show any strong feelings for the father’s death which may be due to the Hindu custom or his irritation with his father. Now, everything is different. Understandably, the mother is changed; her husband has died. Despite the displeasure with his father voiced by the narrator, he still respectfully wants to have the paper with the father’s obituary.

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### **2.2 ABOUT THE POET, A.K. RAMANUJAN**

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Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (16 March 1929 – 13 July 1993) popularly known as A. K. Ramanujan was an Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature who wrote in both English and Kannada. Ramanujan was a poet, scholar, professor, a

philologist, folklorist, translator, and playwright. His academic research ranged across five languages: English, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit. He published works on both classical and modern variants of this literature and argued strongly for giving local, non-standard dialects their due. Though he wrote widely and in a number of genres, Ramanujan's poems are remembered as enigmatic works of startling originality, sophistication and moving artistry. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 1999 for his collection of poems, *The Selected Poems*.

Ramanujan was born in Mysore City on 16 March 1929. His father, Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami, an astronomer and professor of mathematics at Mysore University, was known for his interest in English, Kannada and Sanskrit languages. His mother was a homemaker. Ramanujan also had a brother, A.K. Srinivasan who was a writer and a mathematician.

### **2.2.1 Education**

Ramanujan was educated at Marimallappa's High School, Mysore, and at the Maharaja College of Mysore. In college, Ramanujan majored in science in his freshman year, but his father, who thought him 'not mathematically minded', persuaded him to change his major from science to English. Later, Ramanujan became a Fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958–59 and a Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University in 1959–62. He was educated in English at the University of Mysore and received his PhD in Linguistics from Indiana University.

### **2.2.2 Career**

Ramanujan worked as a lecturer of English at Quilon and Belgaum; he later taught at The Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda for about eight years. In 1962, he joined the University of Chicago as an assistant professor. He was affiliated with the university throughout his career, teaching in several departments. He taught at other US universities as well, including Harvard University, University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, and Carleton College. At the University of Chicago, Ramanujan was instrumental in shaping the South Asian Studies program. He worked in the departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, Linguistics, and with the Committee on Social Thought. A.K. Ramanujan is a well known writer in Indian writing in English. He wrote all his poetry in America but the heart of his poetry is India and Indian culture. His experiences about the American lifestyle seems to affect very little in his verses. He has written his earlier poems in Kannada like "Vachans" from [[Kannada]] in *Speaking Shiva* and some of the love lyrics. In 1976, the Government of India awarded him the Padma Shri. and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship (Shulman, 1994). In 1983, he was appointed the William E. Colvin Professor in the Departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, of Linguistics, and in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the same year, he received a MacArthur Fellowship. As an Indo-American writer

Ramanujan had the experience of the native as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems such as the "Conventions of Despair" reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the east and the west. He was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1999 for his Collected Poems.

A. K. Ramanujan died in Chicago, on 13 July 1993 as result of adverse reaction to anaesthesia during preparation for surgery.

### **2.2.3 Contributions to Indian subcontinent studies**

A. K. Ramanujan's theoretical and aesthetic contributions span several disciplinary areas. In his cultural essays such as "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1990), he explains cultural ideologies and behavioral manifestations thereof in terms of an Indian psychology he calls "context-sensitive" thinking. In his work in folklore studies, Ramanujan highlights the inter-textuality of the Indian oral and written literary tradition. His essay "Where Mirrors Are Windows: Toward an Anthology of Reflections" (1989), and his commentaries in *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1967) and *Folktales from India. Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991) are good examples of his work in Indian folklore studies.

### **2.2.4 Controversy regarding his essay**

His 1991 essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" courted controversy over its inclusion in the B.A. in History syllabus of the University of Delhi in 2006. In this essay, he wrote of the existence of many versions of Ramayana and a few versions that portrayed Rama and Sita as siblings, which contradicts the popular versions of the Ramayana, such as those by Valmiki and Tulsidas.

The comments written by A K Ramanujam were found to be derogatory by some Hindus and some of them decided to go to court for removal of the text from the Delhi University curriculum. ABVP, a nationalist student organisation opposed its inclusion in the syllabus, saying it hurt the majority Hindu sentiment, who viewed Rama and Sita as incarnations of gods and who were husband and wife. They demanded the essay be removed from the syllabus. In 2008, the Delhi High Court directed Delhi University to convene a committee to decide on the essay's inclusion. A four-member committee subsequently gave its 3-1 verdict in favor of its inclusion in the syllabus.

The academic council however, ignored the committee's recommendation and voted to scrap the essay from its syllabus in Oct 2011. This led to protests by many historians and intellectuals, accusing Delhi University of succumbing to the diktat ("views") of non-historians.

Indian poetry in English, suffers from certain in-built drawbacks. It's essentially hybrid nature imposes upon its difficulties both of subject matter and expression

which very few among the accepted poets have been able to overcome. The authenticity of the sensibility reflected in it, and the genuineness of its language are both doubtful. Faced with these difficulties, the Indian poet in English often resorts to devices, in the choice of theme, and in his manner, which may be termed gimmicky. He is sometimes compelled to have recourse to syntax and lexis in order to give an appearance of originality and cleverness to what he writes.

There is often a deliberate attempt on his part to startle the reader by the use of an unusual phrase - an "Indianism" or an idiom from an Indian language or complexity of imagery. The Indian poets' handling of the English idiom is self-conscious and, to that extent, defeats the purpose for which idiomatic language may be put. One even has the suspicion at times that some of these poets have 'outlandish' words and expressions at hand which find their way into their work to give it a false appearance of profundity. A few of them seek refuge in "private" myths. One even has the uneasy feeling that it is not merely the diction which has to be glossed but also the underlying idea. There is a surfeit of intellection, and the resulting lack of emotional depth is sought to be neutralised by the adoption of a spurious ironic mode, and an elitist superciliousness. In a situation like this it is often the bi-lingual poet who comes through best. The true poets among Indo-Anglians seem to be those who write in English as well as in their own language. They are poets in their own right who have something significant to say, and know how to say it, both in English and their native tongue. They are not out to sell their poetry through a skilful manipulation of words and the employment of sophisticated techniques. To this small group of genuine Indian poets writing in English today, belongs A.K. Ramanujan. He, too, is a bi-lingual, in fact a tri-lingual writer. His success lies in his not disowning his Indian inheritance, and not falling a prey to what has been called a feeling of alienation, despite his long sojourn abroad. He has, by and large, steered clear of the pitfalls which have been listed and the result is an unmistakable authenticity of tone and treatment.

A.K. Ramanujan was born in 1929 in Mysore. He is a tri-lingual writer, who shows his mastery equally in English, Tamil and Kannada. While English is the language of his creative works, Tamil and Kannada are the mellinums of his translation. He has two volumes of verse: *The Striders* (1966) and *Relations: Poems* (1971). The former immediately establishes Ramanujan as a poet of striking imagery and perfect language. His poetic voice tends to be vigorous and his sensibility remains essentially modern. His poetry shows a marked sophistication born of an urban surrounding. Feini a Professor of Linguistics, Ramanujan remains scrupulous about the fine and subtle use of language and expressions. He has successfully forged an oblique, elliptical style of his own. In his creative use of the English language, he has been able to extend its resources and add a peculiar pungency to it by Indianising it at places. After having looked into Ramanujan as a poet, it is pertinent to take stock of two of his best poems in order to see the poet at practice. The selection of these poems here does not indicate in any way that Ramanujan's other poems are not

worthy of attention; on the contrary this merely indicates that these selected one's are definitely his gems.

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### 2.3 “OBITUARY”, THE POEM

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

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

As before, easily  
and at both ends,  
left his eye coins  
in the ashes that didn't  
look one bit different,  
several spinal discs, rough,  
some burned to coal, for sons  
to pick gingerly  
and throw as the priest  
said, facing east  
where three rivers met  
near the railway station;  
no longstanding headstone  
with his full name and two dates  
to hold in their parentheses  
everything he didn't quite  
manage to do himself,  
like his caesarean birth  
in a brahmin ghetto  
and his death by heart-  
failure in the fruit market.

But someone told me

he got two lines  
in an inside column  
of a Madras newspaper  
sold by the kilo  
exactly four weeks later  
to street hawkers

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

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

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## 2.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM

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Obituary” written by A.K. Ramanujan reminiscences his father’s death, and the merit and meaning in the speaker’s family-life. The opening lines enumerate the list of things the father left behind as legacy: his table heaped with newspapers full of dust, debts and daughters. The speaker carps that the father left them only with trials and tribulations. The newspapers are just stale pieces of past news, and the father of his own has not contributed much in terms of creativity or productivity. Daughters are considered to be a source of burden in India, not lesser than debts. Parents are entrusted with the responsibility of “marrying them off” with adequate dowry to suit their status. In a conversational tone, reminiscent of Philip Larkin, he talks about the Grandson named after the father, who had the incorrigible habit of urinating in bed. This highlights that the poet’s father left behind nothing but only memories in the form of debris. He claims that the Grandson was named after his father “by chance” literally meaning ‘luckily’; however, signifying the opposite.

Added to the legacy is a dilapidated house. The poet mentions that the decrepit house leant on the coconut tree through their growing years. The deterioration in their quality of life is apparent, from the metaphor of the house. Furthermore, it may also signify that the family had to live a parasitic life borrowing from others (the way the house leans on the coconut tree). The poet utters that his father being ‘the burning

type' burnt properly at the cremation. The phrase may connote the features of the father, his physicality being dried and parched. It may also refer to his wry temperament. Further, it verges on the meaning that the person was a chain smoker, if we observe the following lines:

he burned properly  
at the cremation  
as before, easily  
and at both ends,

His eyes appeared as coins in the funeral pyre, and were not any different and came across as they always did. This amounts to the fact that they did not have any feeling in them even while he was alive. They are coin-like in their metallic stare. Again, a person's eye balls reflect whatever he looks at. Perhaps the speaker indicated that his father's eyes were always on money. He also left some half-burnt spinal discs that were half-burnt that the priest advised the children to pick 'gingerly' or carefully and immerse in the Thriveni, the confluence of the three rivers where the bones of the dead are immersed as per the Hindu rites. No conspicuous or insignificant tombstone was erected for the dead person bearing dates of his birth and death. Therefore, neither was his birth of much consequence nor was his death. He is deemed so incapable, that even his birth is a Caesarean one for which, he did not have to put in much effort. His death also came easily to him in the form of heart failure at the fruit market. All he gained in his life worth mentioning, is that he managed to get two lines of obituary inserted in some newspaper in Madras. The paper was sold to hawker, who in turn sold it to a grocer from whom the poet occasionally bought provisions. This underlines the triviality of whatever the father has achieved. The poet states that earlier on, he used to read the papers which had groceries like salt and jaggery wrapped up in it. However, nowadays he does it for the reason that someday he may succeed in finding those lines relating to his father's obituary. Thus the poet attempts to discover some meaning of his father's existence in his life: this is the significance of the quest in the end.

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

When the father was cremated, coins were placed on the body's eyes. In keeping with the Hindu custom of swift cremation, bodies are cremated within 24. After the cremation, the sons dug through the ashes to find hot coals to throw in an eastward fashion into the river. The father would have no headstone with the dates of his birth and death. To the son, the dates are parentheses encapsulating the time of the father's life. From his birth to his death, the son feels that his father did many things incorrectly or incompletely:

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

He hears that his father's obituary took two lines in a local newspaper four weeks after his cremation. The son often bought sugar cane placed in one of these newspapers shaped like a cone. In the beginning, the son says that he looks for the paper for fun, and then he says he would like to have the obituary. Since the narrator is the oldest son, he will be responsible for any ancient rituals that the culture requires. There is little mourning when a Hindu dies because they believe that once a person is born he or she never dies. Often there is little crying. The son does not show any strong feelings for the father's death which may be due to the Hindu custom or his irritation with his father. Now, everything is different. Understandably, the mother is changed; her husband has died. Despite the displeasure with his father voiced by the narrator, he still respectfully wants to have the paper with the father's obituary.

Our little Sammy's gone,  
His tiny spirit's fled;  
Our little boy we loved so dear  
Lies sleeping with the dead.  
A tear within a father's eye,  
A mother's aching heart,  
Can only tell the agony  
How hard it is to part.

Daughters are considered as a source of burden in India, not lesser than debts. Parents are entrusted with the responsibility of "marrying them off" with adequate dowry to suit their status. In a conversational tone reminiscent of Philip Larkin, he talks about the Grandson named after the father, who had the incorrigible habit of urinating in bed. This highlights that the poet's father left behind nothing but only memories in the form of debris. He claims that the Grandson was named after his father "by chance" literally meaning 'luckily'; however, signifying the opposite. Added to the legacy is a dilapidated house. The poet mentions that the decrepit house leans on the coconut tree through their growing years. The deterioration in their quality of life is apparent, from the metaphor of the house. Furthermore, it may also signify that the family had to live a parasitic life borrowing from others (the way the house leans on the coconut tree). The poet utters that his father being 'the burning type' burnt properly at the cremation. The phrase may connote the features of the father, his physicality being dried and parched. It may also refer to his wry temperament. Further, it verges on the meaning that the person was a chain smoker, if we observe the following lines:

he burned properly at the cremation as before, easily  
and at both ends,  
Ere sin has seared the breast,  
Or sorrow waked the tear,  
Rise to thy throne of changeless rest,  
In yon celestial sphere!

A society is created by the blocks of family units. Stronger the blocks, stronger the building of the society. Families are the strongest blocks on which the society rests. Without family there would be no society and to maintain a good society, a woman plays a pivotal role, whether she is a sister, wife or mother. The family is the most important unit of social organization. The family unit – primarily a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace – is and always will be an essential social organization or unit of any society. This relationship alone provides equilibrium in a sexual, emotional, intellectual and social way as no other can. The role of the family is to give a praiseworthy example, so that others within the society can follow as a model, resulting in the building of the society. The most respected and commendable member of the family is the Father. Fatherhood is truly a vocation that builds the foundation on which families and society rests.

A.K. Ramanujan's poetry is mainly based on the familial relationships. He recalls his past memories through the medium of poetry. His poetry is exceptional, realistic and sociably applicable. He has a style of lyrical sensitivity that embraces extraordinary distinctive poetry, infancy recalls, ideology, patients, reverent proficiency and a broad kind of human conditions. In the poem "Obituary" Ramanujan has ironically presented the image of his father.

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## **2.5 RAMANUJAN'S PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY INDO-ENGLISH POETRY**

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Ramanujan happens to be a linguist, an anthropologist, a translator, and a poet all at once. It is, however, as a poet that his fame is likely to last. He is a poet of talent and promise. According to Dr. Iyengar, he has "stabilised as one of the most talented of the 'new' poets." (Indian Writing in English, p.671). At a time when we find around us a mushroom growth of poets in Indo-English writing, Ramanujan is definitely a redeeming feature. For his works, he can be ranked with Nissirn Ezekiel, Kamala Das, Pritish Nandi and Keki Daruwalla. His poetry is a beautiful blend of emotion and reason, heart and head. Memory and desire, personal affiliations and literary reminiscences, childhood and age, India and America coalesce in it. He is, at times a victim of cultural ambivalence and personal dilemma; however, it is gratifying to note that he has not naturalised the Western themes and traditions so much as Indian ones, and that he has stood his ground and proved his mettle without shifting his allegiance. His Indianness has an irresistible charm for all readers.

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## 2.6 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS

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<b>OBITUARY:</b>	a notice of a death, especially in a newspaper, typically including a brief biography of the deceased person.
<b>BEDWETTING:</b>	involuntary urination at night.
<b>CAESAREAN:</b>	of or effected by caesarean section. (Caesarean section: surgical delivery of the baby).
<b>CREMATION:</b>	the disposal of a dead person's body by burning it to ashes, typically after a funeral ceremony.
<b>SEARED:</b>	fried quickly at a high temperature so as to retain its juices in subsequent cooking.
<b>CELESTIAL:</b>	positioned in or relating to the sky, or outer spaces as observed in astronomy.
<b>HAWKERS:</b>	a person who travels around a city selling street food, typically advertising them by shouting.

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## 2.7 LETS US SUMUP

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In this unit we dealt with the families are the strongest blocks on which the society rests. Without family there would be no society and to maintain a good society, a woman plays a pivotal role, whether she is a sister, wife or mother. The family is the most important unit of social organization. The family unit – primarily a man and a woman living together in harmony and peace – is and always will be an essential social organization or unit of any society. This relationship alone provides equilibrium in a sexual, emotional, intellectual and social way as no other can. The role of the family is to give a praiseworthy example, so that others within the society can follow as a model, resulting in the building of the society. The most respected and commendable member of the family is the Father. Fatherhood is truly a vocation that builds the foundation on which families and society rests.

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## 2.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1) Is the title 'Obituary' justified?

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2) In which persona is the poem written?

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3) Write a short note on the Indian cultural aspect with respect to this poem?

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## UNIT 3 : JAYANTA MAHAPATRA’S ‘GRANDFATHER’

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Introduction to Jayanta Mahapatra
  - 3.3.1 Indian Poets Trio
  - 3.3.2 Early Life and Education
  - 3.3.3 Literary Works
  - 3.3.4 Awards, Recognition & Legacy
- 3.4 Works of Jayanta Mahapatra
  - 3.4.1 Outside India
  - 3.4.2 Poetry
  - 3.4.3 Prose
  - 3.4.4 Poetry in Odia
  - 3.4.5 Translations into English
  - 3.4.6 Awards
  - 3.4.7 Appearances in the following poetry Anthologies
- 3.5 Grandfather the Poem
- 3.6 Interpretation of the Poem
- 3.7 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 3.8 Let us Sum Up
- 3.9 Check Your Progress

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### 3.1 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you would be able to find out:

- The cultural and socio-politico aspects of Odisha during the rule of British Empire.
- Analyse the consequences of famine that happened to take place during the time of Jayanta Mahapatra’s grandfather.
- Know about the compulsive conversion to Christianity under the threat of “Hunger”

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### 3.2 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we have dealt with the notion of culture, societal, political aspect. The concept of referring to “Grandfather” itself shows the age old tradition and its history that got word to be expressed through the voice of the poet. The precarious condition of the Grandfather the prevalence of famine worsened the situation to such a degree

that the under the threat of Hunger they even had to chew “dry leaves of Tamarind” this shows the deplorable condition of the people .The situation took turn under the name of forceful conversion to Christianity which guaranteed them food but were ostracised from the society.

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### 3.3 INTRODUCTION TO JAYANT MAHAPATRA

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**Jayanta Mahapatra** (born 22 October 1928) is a major Indian English poet. He is the first Indian poet to win Sahitya Akademi award for English poetry. He is the author of popular poems such as Indian summer and Hunger, which are regarded as classics in modern Indian English literature. Jayanta Mahapatra was awarded Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian honour in India in 2009. However, he returned the Padma award in 2015 to protest against the rising intolerance in India.

□

#### 3.3.1 Indian Poets Trio

Besides being one of the popular Indian poets of his generation, Mahapatra was also part of the trio of poets who laid the foundations of Indian English Poetry. He shared a special bond with A. K. Ramanujan, one of the finest poets in the IEP tradition. Mahapatra is also different in not being a product of the Bombay school of poets besides R. Parthasarathy. Over time, he has managed to carve a quiet, tranquil poetic voice of his own—distinctly different from those of his contemporaries. His wordy lyricism combined with Indian themes put him in a league of his own. In one of his interviews, Mahapatra says, "Meeting with A D Hope, especially in his warm home in Canberra, and with his charming wife, Penelope, is an unforgettable happening in my life. The man's humility was amazing, it humbled me. It was a lesson. I wrote a sort of editorial piece on him in the magazine I was editing—Chandrabhaga, and I'd like you to read what I had said. This appeared in the journal in 1979."

The Captive Air of Chandipur on Sea is a fine nature poem by Jayanta Mahapatra. The poet stands at the seashore at Chandipur and he experiences the sadness in the atmosphere. When he listens the mystic song of the sea, he states that the sweet pleasant music of the sea is finished with the cries of fishermen, who didn't returned from the sea. The poet mourns for the glory of nature in the past.

The Abandoned British Cemetery at Balasore is a fine poem by Jayanta Mahapatra. Once he visited the British Cemetery at Balasore. During that visit he was influenced due to ruins of stones and marbles. The poets anguish is caused not by the sight of ancient graves of unknown people but by the morbid thought of countless lives that continue to be needlessly lost in their prime. The poem is full of beautiful and unusual images.

### 3.3.2 Early Life and Education

Born into a prominent Odia Christian family, Mahapatra went to Stewart School in Cuttack, Odisha. He completed his M. Sc. in Physics from Patna University, Bihar, India. He began his teaching career as a lecturer in Physics in 1949. During his professional life, he taught Physics at various government colleges in Odisha including Gangadhar Meher College, Sambalpur, B.J.B College, Bhubaneswar, Fakir Mohan College, Balasore and Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. He superannuated at the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack (now Ravenshaw University) and retired from his government job as the Reader in Physics in 1986. He began his writing career very late already in the late sixties. His short stories as well as poems were initially rejected by several publishers. Then his poems got published in international literary journals such as *Critical Inquiry*, the *Sewanee Review*, the *Kenyan Review*, and the *New Yorker*. His poems were also published in other poetry magazines in India. He received many literary awards for his published poems. He was invited to participate in the International Writing Program (IWP) at Iowa among twenty two selected international poets. This gave him an opportunity to go out of India and acquire international exposure.

### 3.3.3 Literary Works

Mahapatra has authored 27 books of poems, of which seven are in Odia and the rest in English. His poetry volumes include *Relationship*, *Bare Face* and *Shadow Space*. Besides poetry, he has experimented widely with myriad forms of prose. His published books of prose include *Green Gardener*, an anthology of short stories and *Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs*. Mahapatra is also a distinguished editor and has been bringing out, for many years, a literary magazine, *Chandrabhaga*, from Cuttack. The magazine is named after Chandrabhaga, a prominent river in Odisha. His poems appeared in many prestigious poetry anthologies like *The Dance of the Peacock: An Anthology of English Poetry from India*, published by Hidden Brook Press, Canada.

He began writing poems only when he was in his forties. The publication of his first book of poems, *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, in 1971 was followed by the publication of *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*. One of Mahapatra's better remembered works is the long poem *Relationship*, for which he became the first Indian English poet to win the Sahitya Akademi award in 1981.

Mahapatra has also translated from Odia into English simultaneously while he was composing his original poems in English and Odia. He has translated poems of senior as well as young writers of Odisha, of Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Some of his translations are published in the bi-monthly literary magazine titled *Indian Literature* published by the Central Sahitya Akademi of India and some are in his own magazine titled *Chandrabhaga*. Some anthologies of his translations have been published by different publishers of India.

### 3.3.4 Awards, Recognition & Legacy

In 1981 Jayanta Mahapatra won Sahitya Akademi award for his book "Relationships". He is also a recipient of the Jacob Glatstein memorial award conferred by *Poetry* magazine, Chicago. He was also awarded the Allen Tate Poetry Prize for 2009 from *The Sewanee Review*, Sewanee, United States. He received the SAARC Literary Award, New Delhi, 2009. He was conferred with the Padma Shri award in 2009 by the president of India and was awarded an honorary doctorate by Ravenshaw University on 2 May 2009. He was also awarded D. Lit. Degree by Utkal University, Odisha in 2006.

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## 3.4 WORKS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

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### 3.4.1 Outside India

- University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1976
- University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 1976
- University of the South, Sewanee, 1976
- East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1976
- Adelaide Festival of Arts, Adelaide, 1978
- P.E.N. Centre, Sydney, 1978
- Australian National University, Canberra, 1978
- International Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1980
- Asian Poets Conference, Tokyo, 1984

### 3.4.2 Poetry

- 1971: *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*, Calcutta: Dialogue Publications<sup>1</sup>
- 1971: *Svayamvara and Other Poems*, Calcutta: Writers Workshop
- 1976: *A Father's Hours*, Delhi: United Writers
- 1976: *A Rain of Rites*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press
- 1979: *Waiting*, Samkaleen Prakashan
- 1980: *The False Start*, Bombay: Clearing House
- 1980: *Relationship*, Greenfield, New York: Greenfield Review Press

### 3.4.3 Prose

- 1997: *The Green Gardener*, short stories, Hyderabad: Orient Longman
- 2006: *Door of Paper: Essay and Memoirs*, New Delhi: Authrospress
- 2011: *Bhor Moitra Kanaphula*. In Oriya. Bhubaneswar, Paschima

### 3.4.4 Poetry in Odia

- 1993: *Bali (The Victim)*, Cutack: Vidyapuri
- 1995: *Kahibe Gotiye Katha (I'll Tell A Story)*, Arya Prakashan

- 1997: *Baya Raja (The Mad Emperor)*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri
- 2004: *Tikie Chhayee (A Little Shadow)*, Cuttack; Vidyapuri
- 2006: *Chali (Walking)*, Cuttack: Vidyapuri<sup>1</sup>
- 2008: *Jadiba Gapatie (Even If It's A Story)*, Cuttack: Friends Publishers
- 2011: *Smruti Pari Kichhiti (A Small Memory)*, Cuttack: Bijayini

### 3.4.5 Translations into English

- 1973: *Countermeasures: Poems*, Calcutta. Dialogue
- 1976: *Wings of the Past: Poems*, Calcutta. Rajasree
- 1981: *Song of Kubja and Other Poems*, New Delhi. Samkaleen
- 1994: *I Can, But Why Should I Go: Poems*, New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi
- 1996: *Verticals of Life: Poems*, New Delhi. Sahitya Akademi
- 1998: *Tapaswini: a Poem*, Bhubaneswar. Orissa Sahitya Akademi
- 2001: *Discovery and other Poems*, Kolkata. Writers Workshop
- 2003: *A Time of Rising (Poems)*, New Delhi. Har-Anand

### 3.4.6 Awards

- Kanhaiya Lal Sethia Award for Poetry - 2017 (Jaipur Literature Festival)
- RL Poetry Lifetime Achievement Award for Poetry, 2013, Hyderabad.
- Second Prize – *International Who's Who in Poetry*, London, 1970.
- Jacob Glatstein Memorial Award – Poetry, Chicago, 1975.
- Visiting Writer – International Writing Program, Iowa City 1976–77.
- Cultural Award Visitor, Australia, 1978.
- Japan Foundation – Visitor's Award, Japan, 1980.

### 3.4.7 Appearances in the following poetry Anthologies

- *A New Book of Indian Poems In English* (2000) ed. by Gopi Kottoor and published by Poetry Chain and Writers Workshop, Calcutta.
- *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (1976) ed. by R. Parthasarathy and published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Like A.K. Rarnanujan and Nissim Ezekiel, Jayant Mahapatra is indisputably a major poet on the contemporary scene of Indian English poetry, The Indian poets commading a large audience at home and abroad. A teacher of physics, Mahapatra veered towards poetry quite late in life. Born in 1928, he published his first two volumes of verse simultaneously in 1971. Now he is the author of nine volumes of verse. His poetry has a unique quality of being ardored in the soil of Orissa. Since he has lived all along in Cuttack, his poetic sensibility has, been shaped by the cultural heritage of Orissa in particular and India in general. Hence his poetry is not infected by the growing malady of alienation noticeable in the writings of some of the avant-garde Indian English poets such as Ezekiel, Ramanujan, and Dom Moraes etc. Far

from being academic it is the poetry of daily life forcefully expressed through the imagery, diction and communication of deep perceptions, in a language simple but forceful. Besides, it has a remarkable spontaneity which indicates that poetry comes naturally to him. The range of his subject matter is wide. His themes are characterised by the private and the public, the religious and the metaphysical, the national and the universal, revealing a contemplative centrality of vision. But then Mahapatra's poetry like any great poets', has certain limitations as well. He is prone to thematic repetitiveness, jumbling up numerous ideas in a poem to the detriment of its structure and the occasional inelegant patterning of images. However, these demerits notwithstanding, Mahapatra's poetry both in quality as well as quantity, is impressive and outstanding.

The following are the volumes of verse which Jayanta Mahapatra has to his name:

- 1) Close the Sky, Ten by Ten
- 2) Svayanvara & other Poems
- 3) A Rain of Rites
- 4) Father's Hours
- 5) Waiting
- 6) The False Start
- 7) Relationship
- 8) Life Signs
- 9) Burden of Waves & Fruit.

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### **3.5 'GRANDFATHER', THE POEM**

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The yellowed diary's notes whisper in vernacular.  
They sound the forgotten posture,  
the cramped cry that forces me to hear that voice.  
Now I stumble back in your black-paged wake.

No uneasy stir of cloud  
darkened the white skies of your day; the silence  
of dust grazed in the long afternoon sun, ruling  
the cracked fallow earth, ate into the laughter of your flesh.

For you it was the hardest question of all.  
Dead, empty tress stood by the dragging river,  
past your weakened body, flailing against your sleep.  
You thought of the way the jackals moved, to move.

Did you hear the young tamarind leaves rustle  
in the cold mean nights of your belly? Did you see  
your own death? Watch it tear at your cries,  
break them into fits of unnatural laughter?

How old were you? Hunted, you turned coward and ran,  
the real animal in you plunging through your bone.  
You left your family behind, the buried things,  
the precious clod that praised the quality of a god.

The imperishable that swung your broken body,  
turned it inside out? What did faith matter?  
What Hindu world so ancient and true for you to hold?  
Uneasily you dreamed toward the centre of your web.

The separate life let you survive, while perhaps  
the one you left wept in the blur of your heart.  
Now in a night of sleep and taunting rain  
My son and I speak of that famine nameless as snow.

A conscience of years is between us. He is young.  
The whirls of glory are breaking down for him before me.  
Does he think of the past as a loss we have lived, our own?  
Out of silence we look back now at what we do not know.

There is a dawn waiting beside us, whose signs  
are a hundred odd years away from you, Grandfather.  
You are an invisible piece on a board  
Whose move has made our children grow, to know us,

carrying us deep where our voices lapse into silence.  
We wish we knew you more.  
We wish we knew what it was to be, against dying,  
to know the dignity

that had to be earned dangerously,  
your last chance that was blindly terrifying, so unfair.  
We wish we had not to wake up with our smiles  
in the middle of some social order.

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### **3.6 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM**

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Grandfather is a poem reflecting nostalgia. The poet is bursting with questions as to why his grandfather embraced Christianity and to seek answers he turns to his long

dead grandfather and his diary; diary which is stained yellow by the dye of time. In this poem Jayanta Mahapatra reveals the struggle of his wounded psyche to come out of its cocoon. The speaker is haunted by the invisible spirit of his grandfather he calls his grandfather a board that has helped him and his children to grow and move ahead. He asks his grandfather what were his conditions at that time how afraid and hungry was he; how coward was he to leave his own family behind who stayed in the blurred part of his heart. He asks about the nature the rivers the trees the wind the animals and compares how all those images were empty just like his own stomach. Mahapatra seems to have grasped the intensity and dimensions of the terrible crisis faced by grandfather. The poem questions validity of religion. Is religion more necessary than food? Is religion or god more important than life of a living being? The poet reconstructs this imaginary debate in the mind of the grandfather and the reader. Poem is critique to some state imposed social order which feeds people but at the cost of their lives.

‘A country’ is one of Mahapatra’s overtly political poems in which he suggests that suffering is universal, no matter what the social or political order may be. Poet says that even if the countries are separated by boundaries the economic and socio-political conditions can be similar. In the very first stanza the poet sounds like he is mocking the ritual of spreading ashes because they are just polluting the air and it’s like a burden. He mocks the boundaries because the people of one country can be a mirror image to the people of other country beside the geographical distance. He sees the country dying and its sons vanishing because of baseless and meaningless wars. He gives example of 1972; the extreme leftist naxalite movement which was violently crushed in west Bengal. He says that it will be no use trying to change minds by forcing and provoking but we should understand ourselves and not continue the old age myths and practices of rituals that don’t do anybody any good.

Mahapatra’s poetry continuously engages with the past and its loss through a sensitive recounting of events and episodes from the history of Orissa and through the multiple references to local myths, legends, rituals, traditional practices and sites of religious and social significance. He uses images and symbols drawn from nature; numerous temples and their ruins surround the towns in Orissa. Mahapatra’s poetry is suggestive rather than national; to him his Oriya identity is most important and he reflects it in his poetry.

Reference:

<https://englishhonthelp.wordpress.com/tag/indian-poetry-analysis/>

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### 3.7 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS

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**IMPERISHABLE:** never to be forgotten, lasting.

**FLAILING:** a long-handled tool that was used in the past for beating wheat so that the grain is separated from the wheat

**TAUNT:** to say insulting things to (someone) in order to make the person angry or annoyed.

**LAPSE:** to stop for usually a brief time.

**STUMBLE:** to hit your foot on something when you are walking or running.

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### **3.8 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we dealt with Mahapatra's Grandfather which seemed to be reverberating with emotion and even showed the true face of people who normally wait for an opportunity of a person's deplorable situation and gets a way of availing the best possible damage they do to the psyche of the person concerned. The issue of ostracisation, the very sternness regarding caste and its rituals is vividly portrayed in the poem concerned.

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### **3.9 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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1) Write the socio-political background concerning this poem?

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2) Write a short note on the forceful conversion to Christianity?

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## UNIT 4 : NISSIM EZEKIEL'S 'NIGHT OF THE SCORPION'

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Life of Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004)
  - 4.2.1 His Career
  - 4.2.2 Ezekiel as an editor
  - 4.2.3 His death
- 4.3 Night of the Scorpion, the poem
- 4.4 Interpretation of the poem
- 4.5 Irony in the poem
- 4.6 Indian colour
- 4.7 Style and technique
- 4.8 Glossary of Difficult Terms
- 4.9 Let us Sum Up
- 4.10 Check your Progress

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall study about the poet, Nissim Ezekiel. After reading this unit we shall be able to:

- learn about life and works of Nissim Ezekiel.
- analyse Ezekiel's poem Night of the Scorpion.
- Analyse the writing style of Ezekiel.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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**Nissim Ezekiel** (16 December 1924 – 9 January 2004) was an Indian Jewish poet, actor, playwright, editor and art critic. He was a foundational figure in postcolonial India's literary history, specifically for Indian Poetry in English.

He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983 for his poetry collection, "*Latter-Day Psalms*", by the Sahitya Akademi, India's National Academy of Letters.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel has been applauded for his subtle, restrained and well-crafted diction, dealing with common and mundane (simple) themes in a manner that manifests both cognitive profundity, as well as an unsentimental, realistic sensibility, that has been influential on the course of succeeding Indian English poetry. Ezekiel

enriched and established Indian English language poetry through his modernist innovations and techniques, which enlarged Indian English literature, moving it beyond purely spiritual and orientalist themes, to include a wider range of concerns and interests, including mundane familial events, individual angst and skeptical societal introspection.



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## 4.2 LIFE OF NISSIM EZEKIEL

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### 4.2.1 His Career

Ezekiel's first book, *The Bad Day*, appeared in 1952. He published another volume of poems, *The deadly man* in 1960.<sup>[11]</sup> After working as an advertising copywriter and general manager of a picture frame company (1954–59), he co-founded the literary monthly *Jumpo*, in 1961. He became art critic of *The Times of India* (1964–66) and edited *Poetry India* (1966–67). From 1961 to 1972, he headed the English department of Mithibai College, Bombay. *The Exact Name*, his fifth book of poetry was published in 1965. During this period he held short-term tenure as visiting professor at University of Leeds (1964) and University of Pondicherry (1967). In 1969, Writers Workshop, Ezekiel published his *The Damn Plays*. A year later, he presented an art series of ten programmes for Indian television. In 1976, he translated Jawaharlal Nehru poetry from English to Marathi, in collaboration with Vrinda Nabar, and co-edited a fiction and poetry anthology. His poem *The Night of the Scorpion* is used as study material in Indian and Colombian schools. Ezekiel also penned poems in 'Indian English' <sup>[16]</sup> like the one based on instruction boards in his favourite Irani café. His poems are used in NCERT and ICSE English textbooks.

Nissim Ezekiel is often considered the father of Modern Indian English poetry by many critics.

He was honoured with the Padmashri award by the President of India in 1988 and the Sahitya akademi cultural award in 1983.

### 4.2.2 Ezekiel as an Editor

He edited *The Indian P.E.N.*, the official organ of P.E.N. All-India Centre, Bombay from The Theosophy Hall, New Marine Lines, Bombay now Mumbai and encouraged poets and writers.

### 4.2.3 His Death

After a prolonged battle with Alzheimer's disease, Nissim Ezekiel died in Mumbai, on 9 January 2004 (aged 79) as doyen of Indian English poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel is one of the pioneers of Modern English poetry in India. He not only guided other poets and set new standard for them; he also made poetry central to his life. However, his significance lies more in his personal Indian English Poets

contribution as a poet. Bruce King rightly said, “Other wrote poems, he wrote poetry”. He is a poet who is morally and spiritually concerned with living in the modern world and made poetry out of his personal experience. Such modern characteristics as irony, multiplicity of tones and artistic distancing of emotions through a persona are among his contributions to Indian English poetry. Frequent use of dramatic mode in his poetry is perhaps due to his interest in theatre.

Nissim Ezekiel belongs to a Bene-Israel family which generations ago had migrated and settled down in Bombay in India. Both of his parents were teacher. His father Moses Ezekiel was a Professor of Botany at Wilson College, Bombay and his mother principal of a school. Born a Jew and raised as a secular rationalist by his scientific father made him outsider to dominant Hindu-Muslim culture. It is his very outsidership and marginality which made him a representative voice of the urbanized western educated India. Nissim Ezekiel was born in 1924 in Bombay and was educated at Antonia D’Souza High school and Wilson College, Bombay. He topped the list of MA English Examination of Bombay University in 1947 and from 1947 to 48 worked as a lecturer of English at Khalsa College, Bombay. It was during this period that some of his literary articles were published in various magazines and journals. Next stage of his life came when he departed in November 1948 to England for his higher studies where he stayed for three and half years and studied Philosophy and Psychology at Birbeck College, London under professor C.E.M.Joad. However, he showed greater inclination towards literature. It was during his stay in London that Fortune Press, London published his first poetic collection *A Time to Change* in 1952. The year 1952 is a remarkable date for him also because the same year he returned from London and married a Jewish girl Daisy Jacob. Similarly the year 1953 too was an important year in Ezekiel’s life because the same year his second poetic collection *Sixty Poems* was published and he joined the well-known periodical *The Illustrated Weekly of India* as an assistant editor. For the next ten years, he broadcast articles on art and literature for All India Radio. From 1954 to 59 he worked as an advertising copywriter and general manager of Shipping advertising company. His third collection of poems *The Third* was published in 1959 and the forth *The Unfinished Man*, a year after. From 1961 to 1972, he headed the department of English of Mithibai College, Bombay. During this period his sixth poetic collection *The Exact Name* was published in 1965. He also worked as an art critic of *The Times of India* from 1966 to 67. For short period he also served as visiting professor at the University of Leeds (1964) and the university of Chicago (1964).

In 1976 he wrote *Hymns of Darkness* and also translated Marathi poems into English. His *Latter-Day Psalms* (1982) was selected for the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1983. He was also awarded the Padma Shri in 1988. He edited *Indian P.E.N*, *Quest*, *Imprint* and *Poetry India*. Ezekiel has also written plays, art criticism and reviews. His play *Don’t Call it Suicide* (1993) was published more than two decades after his *Three Plays* (1969). His selected prose edited by Adil Jussawalla in 1992 shows that he was not only a poet but also one of the best literary critics India has

ever produced. Ezekiel's prose is a model of clarity and lucidity enlivened by touches of wit. After a prolonged battle with a serious disease Alzheimer, Nissim Ezekiel finally passed away in Mumbai in January 9, 2004 at the age of seventy-nine. Now find out for yourself how well you have read the biographical note on Nissim Ezekiel with the help of an exercise.

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### 4.3 NIGHT OF THE SCORPION, THE POEM

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A poem of human interest, 'Night of the Scorpion' has a delicate family situation as its setting. The poet's mother stung by a scorpion is given multiple treatment, bringing in its sweep the world of magic and superstition, science and rationality and material affection. Let us begin by reading the poem.

#### Text

I remember the night my mother  
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him .  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.  
Parting with his poison - flash  
of diabolic tail in the dark room -  
he risked the rain again.  
The peasants came like swarms of flies  
and buzzed the name of God a hundred times  
to paralyze the Evil One.  
With candles and with lanterns  
throwing giant scorpion shadows.  
on the sun-baked walls  
they searched for him: he was not found  
They clicked their tongues.  
With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in mother's blood, they said.  
May he sit still, they said.  
May the sins of your previous birth  
be burned away tonight, they said.  
May your suffering decrease  
the misfortunes of your next birth, they said.  
May the sum of evil  
balanced in this unreal world ,  
against the sum of good  
become diminished by your pain, they said.  
May the poison purify your flesh  
of desire, and your spirit of ambition,  
they said, and they sat around  
on the floor with my mother in the centre,

the peace of understanding on each face.  
More candles, more lanterns, more neighbours,  
more insects, and the endless rain.  
My mother twisted through and through  
groaning on a mat.  
My father, sceptic, rationalist,  
trying every curse and blessing,  
powder, mixture, herb and hybrid.  
He even poured a little paraffin  
upon the bitten toe and put a match to it.  
I watched the flame feeding on my mother.  
I watched the holy man perform his rites  
to tame the poison with an incantation.  
After twenty hours  
it lost its sting.  
my mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children. .

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#### **4.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE POEM**

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Though Ezekiel is a poet of the city, in this poem he gives a living truthful rural picture. The scene of a mother stung by a scorpion on a rainy night in the village brings in its wake the two worlds of superstition and scientific temperament into focus. The neighbours swarming like flies and trying to mitigate her pain by various methods reveal the essence of community life. The father embodies the sceptic, rational approach. A telling effect is achieved in the last lines when the mother heaves a sigh of relief on her children being spared. The experience is distinctly Indian and the imagery vivid and sensitive.

The neighbours concern for a speedy recovery is expressed through lines that are incantatory in effect. 'Night of the Scorpion' evokes superstitious practices we haven't still outgrown. It depicts an impressive ritual in which the mother's reaction, towards the end, to her own suffering ironically cancels out earlier responses, both primitive and sophisticated. The interrelationship between the domestic tragedy and the surrounding community is unobtrusively established. The poem also demonstrates the effective use of parallelism.

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#### **4.5 IRONY IN THE POEM**

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Two kinds of irony are seen to operate in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel: one closely allied to satire, where the poet stands at a distance from the object looked at; the other, closely allied to compassion where the poet examines the experience as if from within. Examples of the first kind are more numerous among his early writings; they

are less common in the later period. In the middle poems, the two kinds of irony appear to co-exist. The early poems are greatly influenced by British poets, Eliot, Auden and Empson. The taut line, the tell-tale imagery, the finished stanza.

'Night of the Scorpion', in which Ezekiel evokes the ritual milieu, illustrates the operation of a kind of irony. Here we have a situation in which the speaker moves among other characters. For all the humour at the expense of the peasants, there is also an involvement in the situation on the part of the speaker.

My mother only said  
Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children.

The shift from the speaker to the mother is significant. The return to the mother is a celebration of the liberation from foreign influence.

In the poem, Evil is represented by 'Flash of.. . .room'. Then the world of ritualistic incantation performed by the holy man to tame the poison is brilliantly evoked in the following lines;

May he sit still ..... next birth they said.

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## **4.6 INDIAN COLOUR**

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In his poem Nissim Ezekiel has done a tremendous job in depicting across a vigilant critique of the Indian 'Night of the Scorpion' involves one entire community in a case of scorpion biting.

The mother is senseless. A big preparation goes on. Each one in his manner prepares to cure "the Evil one". The methods of superstitious practices are the main aim of the poet. But the poet never forgets to describe the plight of the victim. "My mother twisted. ...." However the mother's statement cannot be overlooked. Being

a typical Indian mother she wishes all kinds of problems off from her children.

"Thank God.. . . children."

Thus we see a kind of faithful description of the immediate situation by Ezekiel. He has an eye for details and paints them without distortion. With his simple diction, Nissim Ezekiel gives stress on his ironical statements. It is difficult to miss the Indian smell and the concealed statements in his poetry.

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## **4.7 STYLE AND TECHNIQUE**

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The engrossing narration and description of the poem are made effective also through the free verse about which you read in detail in Unit . This poem is much more relaxed and open-worked than Ezekiel's formal poetry, with a new quality of natural colloquialism in diction and tone:

I remember the night my mother  
was stung by a scorpion. Ten hours  
of steady rain had driven him  
to crawl beneath a sack of rice.

We notice in the poem the abandonment of capitals at the start of each line, the dramatic casualness of the crisis, the long paragraph set off abruptly from the three-line climax, all of which give 'Night of the Scorpion', a new feel, a new appearance, a sense of unhurried lucid progression through time. And yet the poet is only partially able to escape old habits. On closer inspection we hear behind the arrays of free verse regular iambic lines insisting upon their own pattern. The casual flow of the newly-loosened sound is several times violated and made awkward as the metrical pulse appears and tries to assert itself:

They clicked their tongues. ,  
With every movement that the scorpion made  
his poison moved in mother's blood, they said.  
I watched the holy man perform his rites  
to tame the poison with an incantation.

Of the thirty-eight lines, fifteen are fairly regular tetrameters and seven are pentameters. Now Ezekiel achieves the maturity to allow the regular iambic metre to remain only in the form of an undercurrent. "Night of the Scorpion" is an interesting poem, containing a fascinating tension between personal crisis and mocking social observation, but the discrepancies of the poem confuse the tone, which swings between the natural and colloquial reporting of experience and a more removed literary formality. The poem finds a happy conclusion in the last lines where the typical Indian mother expresses satisfaction in the fact that her children were spared.

My mother only said

“Thank God the scorpion picked on me  
and spared my children.”

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## 4.8 GLOSSARY OF DIFFICULT TERMS

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<b>DIABOLIC TAIL:</b>	the sting of the scorpion which is devilish and wicked.
<b>RISKED THE..... AGAIN:</b>	again disappeared in the rain scared perhaps by the presence of enemies around.
<b>SWARMS:</b>	groups.

**NAME OF GOD .....DEVIL ON:** the peasants started chanting the name of God to drive away the evil represented by the scorpion.

**PARALYSE:** make immobile;

**GIANT SCORPION SHADOWS:** the shadows of the peasants in the dim light of the candles and lanterns.

**CLICKED THEIR TONGUES:** felt defeated understanding on each face: exhibiting an understanding of the situation; a wisdom par excellence.

**SCEPTIC:** doubting attitude

**RATIONALIST:** a person who believes in the doctrine that all knowledge is expressible; the doctrine of human reason.

**HERBS:** plant of medicinal value.

**HYBRID:** a mixture of medicines drawn from different sources.

**PARAFFIN:** kerosene

**INCANTATION:** chanting of words having magical powers

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## 4.9 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we dealt with Nissim Ezekiel's Night of the Scorpion. Here we were able to explore the unfathomable love of mother and the very Indianness of the culture. We tried to get a clear cut Indian culture, its rituals, the very Indianness has been portrayed by the poet. Here after going through the different style, irony of the content you would be able to imagine a true picture of motherliness and the unfathomable love and care shown in this context.

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## 4.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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1) In what sense was Nissim Ezekiel an Indian English poet?

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2) Who was the Nissim Ezekiel's father and what did he do?

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3) What made the poet a representative voice of the western educated India?

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4) Name the magazines and periodicals he edited?

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5) Was Ezekiel only a poet?

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6) Name his important Collections of Poems?

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7) What was the apparent cause of his death?

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8) What are some of the contrasts present in the poem 'Night of the Scorpion'?

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