

LITERARY RUMINATIONS

II Semester

BCom/BBM/BCA/BSW

Davangere University

Please note that this is a dummy textbook for review purposes only.



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POETRY





1. Silence

Marianne Moore

ABOUT THE POET AND TEXT

Marianne Moore (1887–1972) was an American poet, translator, critic and editor. Her first poems appeared in print in 1915. Writing after the advent of free verse, Moore was encouraged to dabble in a variety of forms and metres. She believed that strict adherence to metre and other technicalities while writing was not as important as delight in language and precise, heartfelt expression. Her poetry is noted for its innovative diction, irony and wit.

The following text is entirely a report of her father's views on what 'superior people' are defined by, with almost no commentary of her own giving her response or opinions about her father's worldview. The poem talks about how people with depth appreciate solitude and are self-reliant, requiring privacy and silence to engage in their meditations.

My father used to say,

“Superior people never make long visits,

have to be shown Longfellow's grave

or the glass flowers at Harvard.

Self-reliant like the cat—

that takes its prey to privacy,

the mouse's limp tail hanging like a shoelace from its mouth—

they sometimes enjoy solitude,



and can be robbed of speech

by speech which has delighted them.

The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence;

not in silence, but restraint.”

Nor was he insincere in saying, “Make my house your inn.”

Inns are not residences.

GLOSSARY

superior: here, people with above average tastes and sensibilities

Longfellow: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), one of America’s most loved poets

limp: hanging loosely

solitude: the state of being alone

restraint: here, unemotional dispassionate behaviour; self-control

inn: a place providing lodging facilities, usually with food and drink, to travellers

COMPREHENSION



A. Answer the following in a word, phrase or sentence each.

1. What kind of visits do superior people make?
2. Which animal does the speaker's father compare superior people to?
3. Why are superior people sometimes silent?
4. How do the deepest feelings show themselves?
5. Why does the speaker's father compare his house to an inn?
6. What are the values the speaker's father prizes?
7. What does the speaker's father referring to his house as an 'inn' connote?

B. Annotate the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. Superior people never [...] have to be shown Longfellow's grave/or the glass flowers at Harvard.
2. they [...] can be robbed of speech/by speech which has delighted them.
3. The deepest feeling always shows itself in silence;/not in silence, but restraint.
4. Nor was he insincere in saying, "Make my house your inn."/Inns are not residences.

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. How is the father portrayed in the poem?
2. Explain 'silence' as a value, using examples from the poem to illustrate.



2. Sonnet— TO PAIN

Anne Blanchard

ABOUT THE POET AND TEXT

Anne Blanchard was a British Romantic poet who lived and wrote during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Her poems are collected and published in an anthology titled *Midnight Reflections and Other Poems* (1822). Like several other writers of that period who were not independently wealthy, this volume was published with the help of subscribers. It appeared to have done reasonably well; there were two editions of the book. Blanchard's poems tend to have a Neoclassical slant with regard to both her choice of themes, form and style.

The following text is written in the first person, and speaks of her experiences with pain. The speaker is initially deeply affected and suffers greatly, but prolonged suffering gives her patience and strength to endure pain with stoicism.

Yes, yes I know thee well; 'too long hast thou
Been my attendant: yet I like thee not,
 Though habit has accustomed me to feel
With suffering less acute thy presence now
Than I did once; nor is the time forgot
 When I have met thy terrors with a tear.
 But now I've learned to bear thy frowns severe
With calmness, and almost without a sigh.
 I've learn'd at Resignation's shrine to kneel,



And now no more a tear shall dim my eye:
But I will patiently await the hour
That will e'er long bid every sorrow cease;
Soon the cold hand of death will bring me peace,
And free me from thy fierce, tyrannic power.

GLOSSARY

attendant: here, companion

accustomed: used to

acute: severe; intense

frown: a facial expression which indicates disapproval or distaste

sigh: a long deep exhalation, expressing tiredness or suffering

resignation: the acceptance of something undesirable, yet inevitable

cease: stop

tyrannic: exercising power in a cruel, arbitrary way

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a word, phrase or sentence each.

1. How has the speaker gotten to know pain well?
2. Why does the speaker not suffer as much as she did before?



3. How has the speaker's reaction to pain changed over time?
4. What virtues has the speaker gained from her experience?
5. What does the speaker consider her ultimate release?

B. Annotate the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. 'too long hast thou/Been my attendant: yet I like thee not,
2. nor is the time forgot/When I have met thy terrors with a tear.
3. I've learn'd at Resignation's shrine to kneel,
4. But I will patiently await the hour/That will e'er long bid every sorrow cease;

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. How is pain both an enemy and a friend to the speaker in the poem?
2. Analyse the rhyme scheme of the poem.



3. **Anthem for Doomed Youth**

Wilfred Owen

ABOUT THE POET AND TEXT

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918) was an English poet and soldier. He is regarded as one of the finest poets of the First World War. Born into a middle-class family and having had a comfortable childhood, Owen enlisted into the army in 1915. He was profoundly impacted by a number of traumatic experiences during his first stint in the army, and soon after his commissioning as second lieutenant, was diagnosed with shell shock (what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and sent on medical leave. He began writing poetry at this time, influenced by another famous war poet of the time, Siegfried Sassoon. Owen's verse is in stark contrast to the patriotic poetry of the time, and reveals the horrific realities and futility of war.

This poem is one of his best-known works, and was first published in 1917. It employs the form of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet, but uses the rhyme scheme of an English sonnet. It speaks of the futility of war, with especial reference to the deaths of several young soldiers in the First World War.

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?

— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;

Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—



The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?

Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

GLOSSARY

monstrous: frighteningly evil

stuttering: (here) a series of short, sharp sounds produced in quick succession

orisons: prayers

demented: crazed

shells: containers filled with explosives, which are then fired from a gun or hurled by hand after being lit

shires: rural provinces

pallor: an unhealthy pale appearance

pall: a cloth spread over a coffin or a tomb



COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a word, phrase or sentence each.

1. Why does the poet call the anger of the guns 'monstrous'?
2. What substitutes for church bells at the soldier's funeral?
3. What do 'wailing shells' remind the poet of?
4. Why are the shires 'sad'?
5. What does 'pallor of girls' brows' refer to?
6. What ceremony does the poem refer to?

B. Annotate the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
2. [...] in their eyes/ Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
3. The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
4. And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. How does the poet bring out the tragedy and horror of war in this poem?
2. Justify the title 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.



4. In Broken Images

Robert Graves

ABOUT THE POET AND TEXT

Robert Graves (1895–1985) was an English poet, novelist and critic. He also was a prominent translator of Classical Latin and Ancient Greek texts. He produced more than 140 works during his lifetime, and has since never been out of print. His most popular works span an astounding variety of genres—*I, Claudius* (1934) is a historical novel; *Lawrence and the Arabs* is a biography, *The Golden Ass* (1950) and *The Twelve Caesars* (1957) are translations from Latin; *The White Goddess* (1948) is a critical study on poetic myth-making.

The following text compares the thought processes of two different individuals. One of the pair is able to think quickly and clearly, while the other thinks slowly and ‘in broken images’. The former’s apparent advantages become a disadvantage to him because he grows complacent and unable to think outside the box anymore, while the latter individual, unsure and underconfident of his mental faculties, works harder on them and is thus able to become a better thinker.

He is quick, thinking in clear images;

I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;

I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images,

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;

Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.



Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact,
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

GLOSSARY

relevance: suitability; the degree to which something is useful or appropriate

assume: take something to be the truth without proof

senses: the faculty by which we perceive the outside world, through sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a word, phrase or sentence each.

1. How are the two individuals in the poem different?
2. Why does the first person 'become dull'?
3. How does the second person learn to question everything?
4. What helps the second person sharpen his senses?



B. Annotate the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact,
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.
2. He continues quick and dull in his clear images;/ I
continue slow and sharp in my broken images.
3. He in a new confusion of his understanding;/ I in a new
understanding of my confusion.

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Trace how each individual's thought process
influences his personality, as illustrated in the
poem.
2. How can this poem be read as a metaphor for
human civilisation in general?



5. Nature's Fountainhead

Sukirtharani

ABOUT THE POET AND TEXT

Sukirtharani is a teacher and a prominent Tamil poet, who has five publications to her credit. She describes her poetry as Dalit-feminist, and uses her writing to draw attention to the plight of women and those oppressed by the caste system. She is presently working on a novel on Dalit life.

The following poem strikes a defiant note against the many kinds of oppression women face, from being objectified to having their voices silenced. It speaks directly to the oppressor, saying that the oppressed woman cannot and will not be silenced, and will rise again and again, no matter how many times she is put down.

Say you bury me alive.

I will become a green grass-field
and lie outspread, a fertile land.

You may set me on fire;
I will become a flaming bird
and fly about in the wide, wide space.

You may wave a magic wand
and shut me up, a genie in a bottle;
I will vaporise as mercury
and stand upright towards the sky.

You may dissolve me into the wind
like water immersed into water;



from its every direction
I will emerge, like blown breath.

You may frame me, like a picture,
and hang me on your wall;
I will pour down, away past you,
like a river in sudden flood.

I myself will become
earth
fire
sky
wind
water.

The more you confine me, the more I will spill over,
Nature's fountainhead.

Translated by Lakshmi Holmström

GLOSSARY

vaporise: cause a liquid to turn into a gas

mercury: a heavy silver-white metal, which is liquid at ordinary temperatures

immersed: dipped completely into a liquid

confine: restrict someone or something within certain limits



COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a word, phrase or a sentence each.

1. What happens when the speaker is buried?
2. How does the speaker escape when shut up like a genie in a bottle?
3. Explain the intent behind dissolving the speaker 'like water immersed into water'.
4. What is the speaker's reaction to being restrained?
5. What does the speaker identify with?

B. Annotate the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. I will become a green grass-field/and lie outspread, a fertile land.
2. I will vaporise as mercury [...]
3. I will emerge, like blown breath.
4. You may frame me, like a picture,/and hang me on your wall;

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Illustrate how artificiality and mechanical actions are juxtaposed with a natural state of being in the poem. Why do you think the poet does this?
2. What images does the word 'fountainhead' conjure up? What other imagery does the poem use reinforce this?





PROSE





1. A Defence of Nonsense

G. K. Chesterton

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TEXT

G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936) was a British writer and art critic, best known for his detective stories starring the priest-detective Father Brown. He wrote around 80 books, several hundred poems, 4000 essays and several plays, besides also contributing to newspapers and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Chesterton's writing was notable for its wit, humour and employment of paradox, which he cleverly used to comment on serious subjects like politics and theology.

In this text, Chesterton discusses the importance of nonsense verse as a separate art form in itself. Nonsense literature deliberately avoids elements which characterise 'good' literature, like a coherent theme and plot, and also any connection with reality. It playfully mixes together elements which make sense and those which don't, in order to create a light-hearted, whimsical and humorous text. Chesterton mentions some practitioners of this art form, like Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, and defends nonsense verse as not merely 'art for art's sake', but also as having a utilitarian value—it offers an escape from regimented life, while also mirroring life exactly as it is, in that it is often confusing and bewildering.

There are two equal and eternal ways of looking at this twilight world of ours: we may see it as the twilight of evening or the twilight of morning; we may think of anything, down to a fallen acorn, as a descendant or as an ancestor. There are times when



we are almost crushed, not so much with the load of the evil as with the load of the goodness of humanity, when we feel that we are nothing but the inheritors of a humiliating splendour. But there are other times when everything seems primitive, when the ancient stars are only sparks blown from a boy's bonfire, when the whole earth seems so young and experimental that even the white hair of the aged, in the fine biblical phrase, is like almond-trees that blossom, like the white hawthorn grown in May. That it is good for a man to realize that he is 'the heir of all the ages' is pretty commonly admitted; it is a less popular but equally important point that it is good for him sometimes to realize that he is not only an ancestor, but an ancestor of primal antiquity; it is good for him to wonder whether he is not a hero, and to experience ennobling doubts as to whether he is not a solar myth.

The matters which most thoroughly evoke this sense of the abiding childhood of the world are those which are really fresh, abrupt and inventive in any age; and if we were asked what was the best proof of this adventurous youth in the nineteenth century we should say, with all respect to its portentous sciences and philosophies, that it was to be found in the rhymes of Mr. Edward Lear and in the literature of nonsense. 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose,' at least, is original, as the first ship and the first plough were original.



It is true in a certain sense that some of the greatest writers the world has seen—Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne—have written nonsense; but unless we are mistaken, it is in a widely different sense. The nonsense of these men was satiric—that is to say, symbolic; it was a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth. There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser's moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind. We incline to think that no age except our own could have understood that the Quangle-Wangle meant absolutely nothing, and the Lands of the Jumblies were absolutely nowhere. We fancy that if the account of the knave's trial in 'Alice in Wonderland' had been published in the seventeenth century it would have been bracketed with Bunyan's 'Trial of Faithful' as a parody on the State prosecutions of the time. We fancy that if 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose' had appeared in the same period everyone would have called it a dull satire on Oliver Cromwell.

It is altogether advisedly that we quote chiefly from Mr. Lear's 'Nonsense Rhymes.' To our mind he is both chronologically and essentially the father of nonsense; we think him superior to Lewis Carroll. In one sense, indeed, Lewis Carroll has a great advantage. We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he



was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life in earth and in dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back of nonsense—the idea of escape, of escape into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear-trees, and any odd man you meet may have three legs. Lewis Carroll, living one life in which he would have thundered morally against any one who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue, was, by his very divided nature, his one foot on both worlds, a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His Wonderland is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were Professors and Doctors of Divinity enjoying a mental holiday. This sense of escape is certainly less emphatic in Edward Lear, because of the completeness of his citizenship in the world of unreason. We do not know his prosaic biography as we know Lewis Carroll's. We accept him as a purely fabulous figure, on his own description of himself:

'His body is perfectly spherical,
He weareth a runcible hat.'



While Lewis Carroll's Wonderland is purely intellectual, Lear introduces quite another element—the element of the poetical and even emotional. Carroll works by the pure reason, but this is not so strong a contrast; for, after all, mankind in the main has always regarded reason as a bit of a joke. Lear introduces his unmeaning words and his amorphous creatures not with the pomp of reason, but with the romantic prelude of rich hues and haunting rhythms.

'Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live,'

is an entirely different type of poetry to that exhibited in 'Jabberwocky.' Carroll, with a sense of mathematical neatness, makes his whole poem a mosaic of new and mysterious words. But Edward Lear, with more subtle and placid effrontery, is always introducing scraps of his own elvish dialect into the middle of simple and rational statements, until we are almost stunned into admitting that we know what they mean. There is a genial ring of commonsense about such lines as,

'For his aunt Jobiska said "Every one knows
That a Pobble is better without his toes,"'

which is beyond the reach of Carroll. The poet seems so easy on the matter that we are almost driven to pretend that we see his



meaning, that we know the peculiar difficulties of a Pobble, that we are as old travellers in the 'Gromboolian Plain' as he is.

Our claim that nonsense is a new literature (we might almost say a new sense) would be quite indefensible if nonsense were nothing more than a mere aesthetic fancy. Nothing sublimely artistic has ever arisen out of mere art, any more than anything essentially reasonable has ever arisen out of the pure reason. There must always be a rich moral soil for any great aesthetic growth. The principle of art for art's sake is a very good principle if it means that there is a vital distinction between the earth and the tree that has its roots in the earth; but it is a very bad principle if it means that the tree could grow just as well with its roots in the air. Every great literature has always been allegorical—allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The 'Iliad' is only great because all life is a battle, the 'Odyssey' because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle. There is one attitude in which we think that all existence is summed up in the word 'ghosts'; another, and somewhat better one, in which we think it is summed up in the words 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' Even the vulgarest melodrama or detective story can be good if it expresses something of the delight in sinister possibilities—the healthy lust for darkness and terror which may come on us any night in walking down a dark lane. If, therefore, nonsense is really to be the literature of the future, it must have its own version of the Cosmos to offer; the world must not only be the tragic, romantic, and religious, it



must be nonsensical also. And here we fancy that nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the 'wonders' of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from that other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two.

This is the side of things which tends most truly to spiritual wonder. It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. 'Hast Thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?' This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial



definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense. Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that 'faith is nonsense,' does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.

GLOSSARY

twilight: the time of day when the sun is about to rise, or has just set; an in-between state

acorn: a nut produced by the oak tree

primal: relating to an early stage in human development

antiquity: of or belonging to the ancient past

ennobling: lend greater dignity to someone or something

evoke: bring to mind

portentous: of great significance

satiric: critical and mocking

exuberant: full of energy and enthusiasm

capering: skipping or dancing in a lively way

Kaiser: the German Emperor



Quangle-Wangle...Land of the Jumbies: Both of these are references to Edward Lear's nonsense lyrics

don: a senior university professor at Oxford or Cambridge

pedant: a person who is excessively concerned with minor details and rules

Philistine: a person who is hostile or indifferent to art and literature

masquerade: disguise

emphatic: expressing something forcefully and clearly

prosaic: commonplace and dull

amorphous: without a clearly defined shape or form

prelude: introduction

placid: calm and peaceful

effrontery: impolite and impertinent behaviour

indefensible: not justifiable

aesthetic: concerned with beauty and its appreciation

allegorical: symbolic representation of a real-life event

melodrama: a sensational dramatic piece intended to appeal to the emotions of the audience

exult: show or feel immense joy or triumph

prodigious: remarkably large



infidel: here, a person who does not believe in Christianity

conjunction: two or more events or concepts brought together side by side

syllogism: a form of deductive reasoning, wherein one arrives at a conclusion taking into consideration two separate, but related premises; such as *All mammals are four-legged* and *All dogs are mammals*, therefore *All dogs are four-legged*.

Leviathan: a large sea monster referenced in the Old Testament

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a single word, phrase or sentence each.

1. What are the two ways of looking at the world?
2. What, according to the author, is the most abiding proof the nineteenth century has to offer that the world is in its childhood?
3. Why does the author call ancient writers like Aristophanes 'widely different' from the nonsense writers of the nineteenth century?
4. Who is the father of nonsense verse, according to the author?
5. What made Lewis Carroll the perfect type of the position of modern nonsense?
6. What conditions are necessary for a work of great aesthetic worth to emerge?
7. What, according to the author, characterises every great work of literature?



8. What are the two supreme symbolic assertions of truth?

B. Answer the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. Why does the author describe the world and ways of looking at it as ‘twilight’?
2. How does the author portray nonsense verse as a uniquely nineteenth-century phenomenon?
3. Contrast Lewis Carroll’s real-life personality with that which comes across in his writing.
4. How is nonsense verse an allegory for life?

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Compare the personas of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, as portrayed in this essay.
2. How does an understanding and acceptance of nonsense contribute to faith?



2. Emotion and Discipline

Bertrand Russell

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TEXT

Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) was a British writer, mathematician, philosopher and political activist. He contributed extensively to all these disciplines through essays, pamphlets, articles and public letters, published over an impressively long writing career. Russell is regarded as one of the founders of analytic philosophy, a school of philosophy characterised by argumentative clarity and precision. He was also an influential pacifist, and spoke out strongly against war and nuclear armament. He received the Order of Merit, Britain's highest civilian honour, in 1949, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.

This essay was first published in *Education and the Social Order*, a book in which Russell discussed his ideas on how education shapes society. In this essay, he talks about how different psychological approaches to bringing up a child can produce different results. In particular, he focuses on behaviourism, a school of psychology which states that all behaviour is a response to external stimuli in one's environment, and discusses its pros and cons. He then puts forth his own approach for raising healthy, well-adjusted children who will grow up to be individualistic, but also productive members of society.

Education has at all times had a twofold aim, namely instruction and training in good conduct. The conception of good conduct



varies with the political institutions and social traditions of the community. In the middle ages, when there was a hierarchical organisation proceeding from the serf by gradual stages up to God, the chief virtue was obedience. Children were taught to obey their parents and to reverence their social superiors, to feel awe in the presence of the priest and submission in the presence of the Lord of the Manor. Only the Emperor and the Pope were free, and, since the morality of the time afforded no guidance to free men, they spent their time in fighting each other. The moderns differ from the men of the thirteenth century both in aim and in method. Democracy has substituted co-operation for submission and herd instinct for reverence; the group in regard to which herd instinct is to be most operative has become the nation, which was formerly rendered unimportant by the universality of the Church. Meanwhile propaganda has become persuasive rather than forceful, and has learnt to proceed by the instilling of suitable sentiments in early youth. Church music, school songs, and the flag determine, by their influence on the boy, the subsequent actions of the man in moments of strong emotion. Against these influences the assaults of reason have but little power.

The influence of political conceptions on early education is not always obvious, and is often unconscious on the part of the educator. For the present, therefore, I wish to consider education in behaviour with as little regard as possible to the social order, to which I shall return at a later stage.



When it is sought to produce a certain kind of behaviour in a child or animal, there are two different techniques which may be followed. We may, on the one hand, by means of rewards and punishments cause the child or animal to perform or abstain from certain precise acts; or we may, on the other hand, seek to produce in the child or animal such emotions as will lead, on the whole, to acts of the kind desired.

By a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments, it is possible to control a very large part of overt behaviour.

Usually the only form of reward or punishment required will be praise or blame. By this method boys who are naturally timid can acquire physical courage, and children who are sensitive to pain can be taught a social endurance. Good manners, if not imposed earlier, can be learnt in adolescence by means of no worse punishment than the contemptuous lifting of an eyebrow. What is called 'good form' is acquired by almost all who are exposed to it, merely from fear of the bad opinion incurred by infringing it. Those who have been taught from an early age to fear the displeasure of their group as the worst of misfortunes will die on the battlefield, in a war of which they understand nothing, rather than suffer the contempt of fools. The English public schools have carried this system to perfection, and have largely sterilised intelligence by making it cringe before the herd. This is what is called making a boy manly.



As a social force, the behaviourist method of ‘conditioning’ is therefore very powerful and very successful. It can and does cause men to act in ways quite different from those in which they would otherwise have acted, and it is capable of producing an impressive uniformity of overt behaviour. Nevertheless, it has its limitations.

It was through Freud that these limitations first became known in a scientific manner, though men of psychological insight had long ago perceived them in an intuitive way. For our purposes, the essential discovery of psychoanalysis is this: that an impulse which is prevented, by behaviourist methods, from finding overt expression in action, does not necessarily die, but is driven underground, and finds some new outlet which has not been inhibited by training. Often the new outlet will be more harmful than the one that has been prevented, and in any case the deflection involves emotional disturbance and unprofitable expenditure of energy. It is therefore necessary to pay more attention to emotion, as opposed to overt behaviour, than is done by those who advocate conditioning as alone sufficient in the training of character.

There are, moreover, some undesirable habits in regard to which the method of rewards and punishments fails completely, even from its own point of view. One of these is bed-wetting. When this persists beyond the age at which it usually stops, punishment only makes it more obstinate. Although this fact has



long been known to psychologists, it is still unknown to most schoolmasters, who for years on end punish boys having this habit, without ever noticing that the punishment does not produce reform. The cause of the habit, in older boys, is usually some deep-seated unconscious psychological disturbance, which must be brought to the surface before a cure can be effected.

The same kind of psychological mechanism applies in many less obvious instances. In the case of definite nervous disorders this is now widely recognised. Kleptomania, for example, is not uncommon in children, and, unlike ordinary thieving, it cannot be cured by punishment, but only by ascertaining and removing its psychological cause. What is less recognised is that we all suffer, to a greater or less degree, from nervous disorders having an emotional origin. A man is called sane when he is as sane as the average of his contemporaries; but in the average man many of the mechanisms which determine his opinions and actions are quite fantastic, so much so that in a world of real sanity they would be called insane. It is dangerous to produce good social behaviour by means which leave the anti-social emotions untouched. So long as these emotions, while persisting, are denied all outlet, they will grow stronger and stronger, leading to impulses of cruelty which will at last become irresistible. In the man of weak will, these impulses may break out in crime, or in some form of behaviour to which social penalties are attached. In the man of strong will,



they take even more undesirable forms. He may be a tyrant in the home, ruthless in business, bellicose in politics, persecuting in his social morality; for all these qualities other men with similar defects of character will admire him; he will die universally respected, after having spread hatred and misery over a city, a nation, or an epoch according to his ability and his opportunities. Correct behaviour combined with bad emotions is not enough, therefore, to make a man a contributor to the happiness of mankind. If this is our criterion of desirable conduct, something more must be sought in the education of character.

Such considerations, as well as the sympathetic observation of children, suggest that the behaviourist method of training character is inadequate, and needs to be supplemented by a quite different method.

Experience of children shows that it is possible to operate upon feeling, and not only upon outward behaviour, by giving children an environment in which desirable emotions shall become common and undesirable emotions rare. Some children (and some adults) are of a cheerful disposition, others are morose; some are easily contented with any pleasure that offers, while others are inconsolable unless they can have the particular pleasure on which their hearts are set; some, in the absence of evidence, regard the bulk of human beings with friendly confidence, while others regard most people with terrified



suspicion. The prevalent emotional attitude of the child generally remains that of the adult, though in later life men learn to conceal their timidities and grudges by disguises of greater or lesser effectiveness. It is therefore very important that children should have predominantly those emotional attitudes which, both in childhood and subsequently, will make them happy, successful, and useful, rather than those that lead to unhappiness, failure, and malevolence. There is no doubt that it is within the power of psychology to determine the kind of environment that promotes desirable emotions, and that often intelligent affection without science can arrive at the right result. When this method is rightly used, its effect on character is more radical and far more satisfactory than the effect to be obtained by rewards and punishments.

The right emotional environment for a child is a delicate matter, and of course varies with the child's age. Throughout childhood, though to a continually diminishing extent, there is need of the feeling of safety. For this purpose, kindness and a pleasant routine are the essentials. The relation with adults should be one of play and physical ease, but not of emotional caresses. There should be close intimacy with other children. Above all, there should be opportunity for initiative in construction, in exploration, and in intellectual and artistic directions. The child has two opposite needs, safety and freedom, of which the latter gradually grows at the expense of the former. The affection given by adults should be such as to



cause a feeling of safety, but not such as to limit freedom or to arouse a deep emotional response in the child. Play, which is a vital need of childhood, should be contributed not only by other children, but also by parents, and is essential to the best relation between parents and children.

Freedom is the most difficult element to secure under existing conditions. I am not an advocate of absolute freedom, for reasons which we considered in an earlier chapter; but I am an advocate of certain forms of freedom which most adults find unendurable. There should be no enforced respect for grown-ups, who should allow themselves to be called fools whenever children wish to call them so. We cannot prevent our children from thinking us fools by merely forbidding them to utter their thoughts; in fact, they are more likely to think ill of us if they dare not say so. Children should not be forbidden to swear—not because it is desirable that they should swear, but because it is desirable that they should think that it does not matter whether they do or not, since this is a true proposition. They should be free entirely from the sex taboo, and not checked when their conversation seems to inhibited adults to be indecent. If they express opinions on religion or politics or morals, they may be met with argument, provided it is genuine argument, but not if it is really dogma: the adult may, and should, suggest considerations to them, but should not impose conclusions.



Given such conditions, children may grow up fearless and fundamentally happy, without the resentment that comes of thwarting or the excessive demands that are produced by an atmosphere of hothouse affection. Their intelligence will be untrammelled, and their views on human affairs will have the kindliness that comes of contentment. A world of human beings with this emotional equipment would make short work of our social system, with its wars, its oppressions, its economic injustice, its horror of free speech and free inquiry, and its superstitious moral code. The toleration of these evils depends upon timidity in thought and malevolent feeling due to lack of freedom. Dr. Watson, who minimises the congenital aspects of character, nevertheless allows, as one of the unlearnt reactions of infants, rage at any constriction of the limbs. This instinctive emotion is the basis of the love of freedom. The man whose tongue is constricted by laws or taboos against free speech, whose pen is constricted by the censorship, whose loves are constricted by an ethic which considers jealousy a better thing than affection, whose childhood has been imprisoned in a code of manners and whose youth has been drilled in a cruel orthodoxy, will feel against the world that hampers him the same rage that is felt by the infant whose arms and legs are held motionless. In his rage he will turn to destruction, becoming a revolutionary, a militarist, or a persecuting moralist according to temperament and opportunity. To make human beings who will create a better world is a problem in emotional psychology:



it is the problem of making human beings who have a free intelligence combined with a happy disposition. This problem is not beyond the powers of science; it is the will, not the power, that is lacking.

GLOSSARY

conception: (here) idea; way of thinking about something

hierarchical: arranged in order of rank

serf: a term used in feudal England to refer to an agricultural labourer who was tied to a lord's estate

reverence: treat with great respect

herd instinct: an inclination to think and act like the majority, without thinking consciously for oneself

propaganda: information tailored to subtly support a political cause or point of view

abstain: refrain; voluntarily stop oneself from indulging in something

overt: done or shown openly

timid: showing a lack of courage or confidence

contemptuous: scornful; showing disapproval of someone or something

infringing: encroaching upon



sterilise: to disinfect. Here, it means to render thinking absolutely uniform, and free of ideas and behaviour which go against the majority.

cringe: shrink in fear

Freud: Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the founder of an influential school of thought in psychology called psychoanalysis

intuitive: instinctive; based on what one feels to be true without conscious reasoning

inhibited: prevented from acting in a relaxed and natural manner

deflection: transferring attention away from a painful or stressful situation onto something else

obstinate: stubborn

kleptomania: a mental disorder in which one feels an irresistible urge to steal

ascertaining: finding out; making sure of

tyrant: a cruel and oppressive ruler

bellicose: aggressive and easily provoked to fight

epoch: a long period of time in history; an age or era

morose: moody and ill-tempered

grudges: resentment owing to past insults or injury

malevolence: the state of wishing to harm others intentionally



advocate: here, supporter

taboo: prohibited or restricted due to social custom

dogma: a set of beliefs laid down by an authority as unquestionably true

thwarting: obstructing

hothouse: a temperature-controlled building in which delicate or non-native plants are grown

untrammelled: not deprived of freedom of action or expression

Dr. Watson: John B. Watson (1878–1958), an American psychologist who established the school of behaviourism

congenital: present from birth

constriction: obstruction

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a single word, phrase or sentence each.

1. What are the aims of education?
2. Which was the chief virtue in the Middle Ages?
3. Why did the freemen in the Middle Ages fight amongst themselves so frequently?
4. What qualities are valued in modern times?
5. What factor does the author pinpoint as the cause of changed values in modern times?
6. What is the usual form in which reward and punishment are administered to children?



7. What is the chief social benefit of a behaviourist education?
8. Why is it important to cultivate a cheerful, optimistic temperament in children?
9. What are the chief needs of a child?
10. How can adults create the perfect environment for a child to grow up in?

B. Answer the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. How has education changed to reflect changing social values over time? Discuss with examples from the text.
2. What are the social and personal effects of a behaviourist education?
3. How does a behaviourist education harm one's psyche?
4. What kind of environment is ideal for a child to grow up in?
5. What are Russell's thoughts on the kinds of freedom a child must be given?
6. How can we create a world free of social oppression?

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Critique the behavioural model as a system of education.
2. How is the education one receives a form of propaganda? You may use examples from both the text and real life to substantiate your answer.



3. The Journey

Indira Goswami

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TEXT

Indira Goswami (1942–2011), also known by her pen name Mamoni Raisom Goswami, was an Assamese scholar, professor and writer. Goswami struggled with depression all her life, and took to writing in order to give herself a reason to go on living. She wrote thirteen novels, besides several poems, short stories and works of non-fiction. In 1983, she won the Sahitya Akademi Award, and the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary honour, in 2001. Goswami is also well-known for her efforts to bring about peace in the troubled state of Assam, by acting as a mediator between the government and the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

The story 'The Journey' is exemplary for Goswami's style, and is one of her best-known works. It depicts two travellers who are stranded on a highway when their car breaks down, and must take refuge with an impoverished couple who run a tea stall. While they are there, they observe how life has taken its toll on the old couple. Through this story, Goswami depicts the plight of common people in Assam who face the myriad troubles of natural disasters, a hostile and repressive state, and militancy.

This area falls in the territory of the militants. It is entirely covered by thick forest. Professor Mirajkar and I were returning after a visit to the Kaziranga National Park. Both of us work in Delhi University in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies and had to come to attend a conference organized by the students of Assam. We were



anxious to reach Guwahati before dark. Mirajkar was not afraid of wild animals, he said, but he was definitely afraid of terrorists. One of his best friends had been killed by the extremists in Punjab. He kept asking me, "Have you been able to control terrorism in this beautiful land of yours?" I really did not know what to tell him especially since on our way we crossed quite a few checkpoints where we were examined and had torches shone on our faces.

I sat in the car, looking out of the window, trying to imagine myself back on the verandah of the Kaziranga tourist lodge, listening to the wind rustling the thick clumps of bijuli bamboo, as if it were muga silk. I remembered the moon spotlight a huge owl that sat on a chatyan tree, its head disproportionately large, like that of a newborn baby. Mirajkar sat worrying about terrorists. Someone had told him that terrorists owing allegiance to Babbar Khalsa and the JKLF had managed to infiltrate the jungles of Assam to join local groups of extremists.

We were speeding along the National Highway. On either side were distant hills. The paddy fields were a riot of brilliant colours, flaunting gold; then they would grow modest and hide in Buddhist ochre, or shrink and fold into darkness. Every now and then Mirajkar would jump up, straining his ears for the sound of gunfire. Then he'd lapse into a reverie again, looking gloomily out of the window at the fields or at forests that teemed with cotton, khaira, sisoo, holong, poma, bogipoma,



bokul and teak trees. Evening wrapped the teak in shreds of silk that the stippling sun seemed to turn magically into deer skin.

The driver broke the silence. “Last year, this road was smeared with blood. There was always crossfire of machine guns, exploding grenades. Now it’s all quiet. No one is seen with a gun anymore. Yes, no guns.” As if a soft carpet covered it all – the blood stains, the dumps of arms and ammunitions, the smell of gunpowder.

Mirajkar said, “Maybe we can’t see firearms, but didn’t the officer of the forest department at Kaziranga, Mr. Ahmed, say that the poachers were carrying foreign arms – 303s, 500 double barrels and 470 US carbines; that some smugglers had been caught at Mori Diphu; that two poachers were shot dead?”

Mirajkar had made a serious study of firearms and now started telling us stories about the First World War. Ramakanta, the driver, also became eloquent with various tales of poachers from the bordering areas. He was a middle-aged man with a Nepali cap to protect his balding head from the sun. He was sturdy and short with a neck that disappeared into his shirt collar. He had small eyes, like the other Bodos of the valley, and a thin moustache. He was a good driver; he rarely used the brake or the clutch.

But my mind was elsewhere and I did not pay any attention to the talks of the guns and terrorists. I was watching the forest flit past outside the car window. I saw the grand veloe trees draped



in moss that grew like hair on the legs of long-tailed monkeys. There were many different trees, some with wild creepers twining themselves around trunks of muga silk. Some trees looked like majestic ruins dressed in shimmering gossamer. All around was monochromatic green, ranging from the richly succulent to those that reminded me of puthi, the tiny fish. Some leaves were round, like the heavy silver coins with Queen Victoria emblazoned on them. And the birina trees were smothered in white blossoms that looked like clouds flirting with the earth.

Mirajkar was still staring through the window. The sound of gunfire here? No, impossible! Compared to Delhi, this was heaven! Delhi, ah, who can live there any more? The bountiful Yamuna of the Afghan and Turk Poets has turned into a stinking sewer. Sadar Bazar, with its teeming crowds, is a battlefield.

Gently, almost invisibly, the sun's rays turned mild, as if a huge python had shed its glistening skin and was slipping away into the darkness.

...Hrr, hrr, kut, kut, krrr! The car jerked to a halt in front of a thatched shop by the wayside. Ramakanta jumped out of the car. He opened the bonnet and then came to tell us that the radiator was leaking and all the water in it had evaporated. Nothing else to do but take the car to a garage.



Mirajkar and I got down from the car to walk towards two small dimly-lit shops that sold tender coconuts and tea. Mirajkar said, “It’d have been terrible if the car had broken down in the forest. Look how dark it is already.” I nodded in agreement, while Ramakanta paced up and down and in and out of the small roadside shops making enquiries about a garage.

All of a sudden a scrawny figure came out of a shop a little further down the National Highway. He held a kerosene lamp in his hand and wore a loose kurta and a dhoti that stopped at his knee. I couldn’t make out if he wore slippers. He came up to our car and stopped. He looked old and feeble. Raising his lantern he said, “You have a breakdown? The workshop is seven miles away. Wait I’ll stop a car for you. The driver can go and fetch a mechanic, while you will sit in my shop and have a cup of hot tea – maybe some betel-nuts, too?”

He stood right in the middle of the road swinging his lantern, his hairknot loose on his shoulders. In the flickering light he looked spectral.

Mirajkar and I walked into his shop. One hurricane lamp hung from a bamboo pole. Its chimney was cracked and dirty. Under a wooden bench we could see an old stove, some rusted tins. On the mud wall was a calendar with a picture of a white woman smoking a cigarette.



We sat on the bench. An old woman emerged from the room inside holding a lamp. She said, “The whole of today went by as if we were fishing at sea...not a soul in sight.”

“No customers?” I asked, surprised. She said, “There are many shops now on either side of the road. They know how to attract customers. They even play music!” She sidled up to me and whispered. “They sell evil stuff. But we are Bhakts. Even that picture there. My husband and I had a bitter quarrel with our children about it.”

She then took a kettle and shuffled out of the room to fetch water for our tea. In the light of her lantern we could see her torn blouse. She was wearing a cotton mekhala and an old embroidered chaddar stained with betel-juice. She came back and lit the stove. Perhaps it had no kerosene and soon a pungent smell filled the room.

I felt bad when I saw the old woman arranging the glasses and pouring the tea and the milk with quivering hands.

“Grandma,” I said, “Is there no one to help you?”

“My daughter-in-law used to, my elder son’s wife. He died during the floods last year, of some unknown disease. We couldn’t get any medicine for him. The doctors have turned dacoits. She was pregnant when he died and now she has a son. She’s very weak...can’t even stand on her own feet!”

“Is there no one else?”



“I have two sons and a daughter. They used to go to school. Once. Ah, things are different now. The girl fell in love with a soldier in the Indian army which had to come here to flush out the terrorists. The local boys beat her up. She’s limping back to normal health. The last seven years have been hell, daughter! The treacherous river had eaten our land. Now there is no rice to...”

The old man returned, still holding on to his lantern. Perhaps he had been successful in stopping a car and sending the driver to fetch a mechanic. He called out to his wife from where he stood. “Ai, mother of Nirmali, don’t bore the guests with your sad tales. They’re tired. Get some tea...”

The old woman got up abruptly on seeing him. She went to him and whispered, “Manohar and some others have seen him near the railway tracks today.”

The old man froze for a second. Then, “Last time too, some people said they’d seen him near the railway tracks. Don’t listen to such rubbish!” he said. “Go and get the tea for our customers. They’re returning from Kaziranga and must be very tired. Are there some biscuits?”

“Biscuits? All the money went into buying sugar and tea leaves last week.”



Mirajkar and I cried out together, “No, no don’t bother. Even black tea will do.”

The old woman mumbled to herself as she prepared the tea, “God alone knows how I run this shop. Over the last seven years, the river has swallowed up so much land. That Flood Relief Committee set up their office by the roadside and stopped the mouths of us people with a mere one hundred rupees.”

The old man shouted, "Hold your tongue, you old woman!"

She continued as if he had not spoken, "This old man feels ashamed to touch the feet of those officials, who have gobbled up the money sanctioned by the government for flood relief. Oh! What hasn't happened to this family in the last seven years and this man struts around, his head stuffed with past glories. So what if there was a Borbarua in the family who went about with a gold-tipped walking stick and an umbrella with a silver handle, who sat on a magnificent couch...so what? I prod him constantly yet can't get him to go see the government officials...and so we've been suffering for seven years... Please tell the government about our pitiable condition. When you..."

The old man looked angrily at her. Turning to us he said, "Please ignore her. She starts babbling whenever she sees customers. She'd rather have tourists go see the wretched flood-affected people who live like animals than go to Kaziranga." He



glared at her. "Go, get the tea, fast. Don't forget to add crushed ginger. If there's no ginger, put in one or two cassia leaves."

It was at that moment that I caught sight of a dotara, hanging from the wall. I had not noticed it till then because it was behind the bench on which we sat. I was surprised to see it in the midst of other odds and ends like sacks, tins and coconut shells. The traditional two-stringed instrument had carvings on it and looked well cared for.

"Who plays this dotara, dada?"

A beatific smile spread on the face of the old man. I couldn't have imagined a little while ago that he could smile like that. He said, "All the people visiting the Namghars on the bank of the Dipholu were familiar with this instrument of mine. Alas, the river has swallowed up many of the Namghars on its bank – Arimrah, Holapar, Kohara, Mihimukh...people in all these places knew my dotara. Why, even the people of Behali, beyond the Brahmaputra, appreciated my songs."

The old woman had finished crushing the ginger. She said peevishly, "The old man will now start bragging about the carved and mirror-studded palanquin.... The lad has been gone for two months now and might be waiting near the railway tracks, hungry and emaciated. This fossil doesn't want to hear about that!"



The old man snarled. "Shut up, you old hag. Taking eons to make two cups of tea!"

Professor Mirajkar spoke up. "I'd like to hear you play the dotara."

"Sure," said the old man as if he'd been waiting for such a request. "Your mechanic will take some time to some. All those who come here for tea listen to my songs."

"Customers? No one's come here for the last many days, though so many cars went past," grumbled his wife. She turned to the old man and said, "While I give tea to the customers, go to the railway tracks with the lamp for a look. God knows you won't get up if you sit down to gossip and sing."

"I've heard this story before. Some months back, didn't we hear the same rumour?" The old man mumbled as he took the two glasses from his wife and handed them over to us respectfully. Then he said in a relaxed tone, "Have your tea, please. I'll sing now." Suddenly a young girl entered the room, limping, she could walk only with the help of a stick. She had long silky hair. It was unattended. Seeing her the old couple shouted, "Why have you come here, you bitch!" We could at once guess that this was the girl who had an affair with the soldier from the Indian army, who had come to flush out the militants from this area.

The tea was excellent. The old man brought the dotara. As he started turning it, he said, "Did you have a chance to see tigers



in Kaziranga? People say there were only twenty tigers there in 1966. Now there are about sixty. Rhinos have grown in number from three hundred to one thousand and five hundred. There are some five hundred elephants too."

"We saw some elephants," I said. "Do they come here, ever?"

"Not these days, because of the traffic. Earlier, before the floods, they would descend on our paddy fields and all of us farmers would work together to drive them away. But tigers do come. Do you know what happened just the other day?"

Dimuiguria Mahanta's elephant was tied to a tree beside a roadside pond. The elephant is very gentle. Whenever he's taken for a bath in the Dipholu, he plays with the boys and girls there. He was lying by the pond that day when a tiger jumped on him and tore away a whole chunk of flesh from his back!"

"Oh God!" We cried out in horror. "And then?"

"Elephants are omniscient creatures. Did you know that the Moamaria revolution where the Vaishnavites fought against the Ahom kings started because of an elephant?"

"An elephant?"

"Yes. A thin and tottering elephant. It happened during the time of King Lakshminath Singha who came to the throne only in his old age. He was very friendly with his minister, Kirtinath Borbarua. Two friends. Now, among the Ahom kings, Lakshminath and Gaurinath Singha were the most ugly. Opium eaters, they could barely keep their eyes open. Gaurinath



fancied a fisherwoman who lived on the banks of the Dipholu. His palanquin would wait and wait outside her place while..."

"What about the elephant?" I asked.

"Kirtinath the Borbarua had a tussle with the Moamaria mahantas. There was this law that said that the mahantas must make a present of elephants to the royal court as tribute every year. Once these mahantas gave an old, sick elephant to Borbarua. A mahanta went with this tottering elephant to the Borbarua. When he saw the rickety old animal the minister was wild with rage. He cut off the mahanta leader's ear."

The old woman interrupted him impatiently. "Lopping off ears indeed! Old man, for God's sake, take the lamp and have a look around. The boy might be lying somewhere, hit by military bullets."

The old man continued as if she had not spoken. "In this month of Aghon, nine thousand Moamaria soldiers made Kirtinath a prisoner while he was on his way to Rongpur. And all because of a deformed elephant, as I said!"

We sat there sipping tea and listening to the old man.

Ramakanta dropped in for a while, had his tea and left. He said, "It'll take at least one and half hours to finish the work. The mechanic has taken the radiator to the workshop."



The old woman approached me. "Only a couple of customers have come today. Daughter, take one more glass of tea each. There's sugar and tea leaves."

We asked for two more cups of tea. Meanwhile the old man was tightening the two strings of the dotara. "I barely managed to save this dotara from the flood. There's no one in this area who can make a dotara like this anymore."

The old woman prodded him once more. "I'll look after the customers. Take the lamp. Go to the railway tracks. Who knows... who knows."

The old man explained, "I've gone almost blind and this woman wants me to go in the dark looking for the boy. The other day I fell down near the railway tracks when I went searching for him and my knees are still aching and bruised. My chest hurts too.... Listen daughter, we weren't always like this. It's the floods. It's a pity that we have had to take shelter by the highway and wait for customers day after day! We were respectable people. We had two granaries, full of paddy. Even strangers were sure of a meal with scented rice and kaoi fish. We come from a Borbarua family who had the power to punish criminals by crushing their kneecaps. But my father was kind-hearted. If this had been daytime, I could have taken you to my house and shown you the ceremonial hat which I have managed to hold on to, his umbrella and silver vessel; a decorated couch, the silver betelnut holder. But our paddy fields, which were as dear to me as



my own flesh and blood, producing gold and pearls, are no more.”

The old woman was furious. “Why are you digging up those old graves? I’ll myself go to the railway tracks to see...”

“Shut up, old woman. How many times have we heard this talk of his coming back? But nothing! He didn’t come back or show his face to us. These two good people have come to my shop today. I must serve them well, make them feel comfortable.”

The old man started to sing a song composed by Padmapriya the Vaishnavee:

This world is futile
Like drops of water
on a lotus leaf
Fate will make us
a heap of ashes...
This life, this youth
is all a fleeting dream...

I could see the crisscrossing lines under his eyes. His teeth were missing, his cheeks sunken, making his nose look longer than it actually was. He sang as if the songs would never come to an end. After Padmapriya’s composition he sang several other songs composed by the Vaishnava saints. I felt as if I was sitting on the bank of the Dipholu, watching the moon playing in the waters.



We listened to his song for about an hour, punctuated by his wife's restlessness. She sat muttering, "People came to say that he was seen near the railway tracks.... Even if the lad falls a prey to army bullets, he won't care."

Suddenly the old man stopped singing. Mirajkar hastily pulled out some money from the pocket of this coat and placed it in the betel-nut tray in front of the old man. "O mother of Nirmali," the old man called out. "Keep what you charge for the tea and return the rest." Turning to Mirajkar he said, "Why did you give so much money, my dear sir. My songs are an echo of the songs of the saints. It hurts me if anyone pays me money for it. No one understands my feelings! No one!"

The old woman was staring at the money. She didn't touch it. She didn't speak.

At that moment, we heard a big bang from outside, as if a bomb had exploded! We felt as if we were being thrown violently to the ground. From the shadow of a tree nearby someone emerged and walked slowly towards the shop to stand before us. Everything had happened in a fraction of a second and seeing his face now my throat went suddenly dry.

He was a young boy. Across his cheek ran a deep gash, from eye to lip – made by a bullet or a sharp knife. There was blood and pus in it. The flesh under his lip looked as if it had been ripped open and we could see his teeth in the quivering light.



I went to the old woman and took her hand in mine, gripping it tightly. We were both shivering. The boy was wearing black jeans and a khaki jacket. And what was that in his hand? A revolver? Even in the smokey light of the kerosene lamp the barrel shone. The old woman burst into a hysterical cry.

"Oh my Kanbap, my son! I told your father a thousand times to bring you from the railway track. Oh my son, what has happened to you? Why are you bleeding like this?"

Suddenly the boy's eye fell on the girl. Sitting in the corner and trembling with fear. He sped like a bullet towards the girl and grabbing her hair, rained blows and kicks on her stomach, shouting: "I will smash your womb! I will kill the bastard child of that soldier you are carrying.... Making love with an Indian soldier, dirty bitch! Phooh! Phooh!"

He kicked her viciously on the stomach

"Oh my, Oh my! He will kill the girl...." The old parents tried to pull away the enraged youth. The boy didn't even look at his mother. He stared at the money lying before the old man. He pounced on it like a vulture.

The old man shouted. "This is not my money, son. Give it back to our revered customers...."

The boy ignored his father's words. He spoke as if to himself. "Those poachers are selling a US carbine. It's an old gun, but sturdy. With this money..."



He had come like a cyclone. He disappeared as swiftly, like a flash of lightning in a dark, still night. While wiping of the blood running out of the wounds of the girl, something like a smile hovered on the lips of the old man. I had never seen such a painful smile in my life...

Mirajkar and I resumed our journey towards Guwahati. Neither of us spoke. It was as if we were travelling through a dark tunnel, endlessly.

Translated from Assamese by M. Asaduddin

GLOSSARY

extremists: people who hold extreme political or religious views, especially those who advocate violent or illegal action

checkpoint: a designated spot, usually on highways or border areas, where checks are performed on vehicles

clumps: thick bunches

muga silk: a variety of silk produced only in Assam

Babbar Khalsa: a militant organisation which seeks the creation of a separate state for Sikh people

JKLF: a political organisation which seeks independence for Jammu and Kashmir

infiltrate: to move into an organisation or country stealthily, in order to gain secret information or acquire and occupy illegal territory

riot: here, an impressively large and varied display

ochre: a pale brownish yellow colour

reverie: lost in one's thoughts; daydream

shreds: small strips

stippling: an artistic process by which a surface is marked with numerous small dots or specks of colour

poachers: people who catch and kill animals illegally, sometimes for food, but more usually for their horns, hide, etc.

eloquent: fluent, clear and persuasive

moss: a very small green or yellow plant that grows on damp surfaces, like rocks and walls, and resembles a carpet when grown

gossamer: light, thin and filmy substance or material, resembling cobwebs

monochromatic: containing only one colour

succulent: here, having thick, fleshy leaves

emblazoned: inscribed clearly, with a large design or pattern

sewer: an underground drain for carrying off waste water

spectral: having a shadowy form, like that of a ghost

sidled: walk up to someone in a timid unobtrusive manner, especially sideways



cloth draped over a blouse

pungent: having a strong smell

quivering: trembling

treacherous: here, presenting hidden or unpredictable dangers

struts: walks in a stiffly erect and arrogant manner

babbling: talk rapidly and continuously in a foolish way

cassia: a kind of tree bark, closely resembling cinnamon

peevishly: showing irritation; in a bad mood

emaciated: extremely thin and weak, due to illness or a lack of food

eons: a very long time

opium: an addictive drug made from the poppy plant

tottering: moving in a feeble, unsteady way

rickety: very old; likely to collapse

lopping: cutting off

gash: a deep cut or wound

carbine: a light automatic rifle



COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a single word, phrase or sentence each.

1. Why was the narrator visiting Assam?
2. Why was Mirajkar so afraid of terrorists?
3. What does the narrator focus on, while Mirajkar and Ramakanta talk of firearms and terrorists?
4. Why did the narrator and Mirajkar have to take refuge in the tea shop?
5. Why do the local boys beat up the old woman's daughter?
6. What sight catches the narrator by surprise in the tea shop?
7. Why is the old man reluctant to go look for his son near the railway tracks?
8. What was the law the mahantas had to follow?
9. How did the war between the Moamarias and Ahoms come about?
10. What is the first thing the old couple's son does when he returns to his parents' house?
11. What does the old couple's son need money for?

B. Answer the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. Describe the landscape through which the narrator passes.
2. Contrast the characters of Mirajkar and the narrator, with their roles as the 'mainlander' and the 'native' respectively.
3. Describe the characters of the old couple.



4. The character of Nirmali is a poignant portrait of the violence women face in Assam. Discuss.

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. The narrator begins the story by seeing Assam as an idyllic place. Describe how this idyll is shattered by the end of the story.
2. The narrator portrays herself as a 'native' of Assam, but is revealed to be as much a 'tourist' as Mirajkar is. How does the story depict this?



4. The Wedding Suit

Ismat Chughtai

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TEXT

Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991) was an eminent Urdu writer and feminist who was considered the ‘Grand Dame’ of Urdu fiction. Her work often explored gender inequality, female sexuality and middle-class gentility, along with other issues that were cropping up in the modern Muslim world. Because of the themes she explore in her work, Chughtai was a controversial figure, and was once summoned to court on the charge of obscenity for her short story ‘Lihaaf’. She won this case, and ‘Lihaaf’ is today her best-known work.

‘The Wedding Suit’ (*Chauthi ka Jora*) is a poignant account of a poor family of three women, trying to get the older daughter married. As in most families, the girl’s mother has been preparing for her wedding almost since the day her daughter was born, setting aside jewellery and fine cloth whenever possible. When a possible suitor for the girl arrives, the family goes beyond their means to ensure he is well-treated, and in the process, endure humiliating degradations. Chughtai’s story, though written nearly fifty years ago, remains relevant in a country where women are treated as the ‘second sex’, for whom marriage remains the ultimate goal.

A clean sheet was spread, once again, on the chauki, the wooden board, that day. Sunlight filtered in through the chinks of the tiled roof making odd patterns in the courtyard. The women of the neighbourhood were sitting around silently with awed anticipation as though a momentous event was going to unfold. Mothers clasped their babies to their breasts. Only some sickly, irritable infant was occasionally heard crying.



‘No, no, my darling,’ the scrawny mother would say, letting the baby lie on her knees and bouncing him as though she were shaking a winnowing tray. The baby, after a few hiccups, would fall silent.

That day many expectant eyes were riveted on the thoughtful face of Kubra’s mother. The two short pieces of cloth had been strung together, but no one would dare to apply the scissors at this point. As far as cutting and measuring cloth was concerned, Kubra’s mother’s skill was undisputed. No one knew how many dowries she had prepared with her shrunken hands, how many suits she had stitched for new mothers and their babies, and how many shrouds she had measured and ripped. Whenever someone in the mohalla ran short of fabric while stitching and all her efforts at measuring and cutting bore no fruit, the case was brought to Kubra’s mother. She would smoothen the edge of the fabric, break the starch in it, arrange the fabric sometimes in the form of a triangle, sometimes in the shape of a square.

Then, her imagination fiercely at work with her scissors, she would measure the cloth in a final glance and break into a smile.

‘Well, the sleeve and the hem will come out of this. For the lapels, take some snippets from my sewing box.’ And thus the crisis would come to a resolution. She would cut the cloth and hand over the bundle of snippets to the woman.

But that day the piece of cloth was smaller than usual, and everyone was sure that Kubra’s mother would fail to show her wizardry this time round. That is why they were all looking at her intently, holding their breath. Kubra’s



mother's face bore a resolute look without any trace of anxiety. She scrutinized the four-finger-long piece of fabric. The sunlight reflected on the red twill and lit up her bluish-yellow face which suddenly brought to light the deep wrinkles on her face, like darkening clouds. It was as though a forest had caught fire. She smiled and picked up the scissors.

A deep sigh of relief rose from the crowd of women. Babies were separated from breasts and laid on the ground, eagle-eyed virgins leapt to thread the needles and newly-wed brides put on their thimbles. By that time Kubra's mother's scissors were running along the fabric.

At the far end of the seh-dari, the veranda, Hamida sat thoughtfully on a couch, her chin resting on her palm, her feet dangling.

When lunch was over, Bi Amma would settle down on the chauki in the seh-dari, open her sewing box and spread out her multicoloured array of snippets. Sitting on the stone mortar and scrubbing utensils, Kubra would observe the red-coloured snippets and a tinge of red would flush her pale, muddy complexion. As Bi Amma spread the network of design made of silver sequins on her knees with her delicate hands, her wilted face would suddenly brighten up with hope. Golden flowerets would glow like tiny candles against her deep, moat-like wrinkles. At every stitch, the golden embroidery sparkled and the candles fluttered.

No one knew when the sequins for the muslin dupatta were first made and put into the depths of the heavy, coffin-like wooden box. The edges of the sequined network had faded, so had the gilt border; the spools of gold thread



wore a forlorn look. But there was no sign of Kubra's wedding party yet.

When one suit of clothes meant to be worn on chauthi got old, it was set aside with the remark that the bride would wear it on her second or later visits to her parents and preparations on a new suit would start, raising new hopes. After a careful search, a new bride would be selected for the first snip and the sheet would be spread on the chauki in the seh-dari. The women of the mohalla gathered with babies at their breasts and paandaans in hands, their anklets tinkling.

'The border of the underwear can be taken off this, but there won't be enough for the bodice.'

'Well, sister! Just listen to her! Are you going to use the twill for the bodice, surely not?' Everyone looked worried. Like a silent alchemist, Kubra's mother measured the length and width with her eyes while the women whispered jokes among themselves about undergarments and broke into guffaws. While someone burst into a wedding song, another, now emboldened, lustily sang a number about wicked in-laws. This led to dirty jokes and giggles. At this juncture the unmarried girls were ordered to leave the scene, to cover their heads and sit somewhere near the tiling. As another burst of laughter rang out, the girls would heave deep sighs and long for the day when they would be allowed to join in the laughter.

Far away from this hustle and bustle, Kubra, overcome by shyness, sat in the mosquito-infested room, her head bent low. Meanwhile, the sartorial process would reach a delicate point. Some gusset would be cut against the



grain and the women would be at their wits' end. Kubra would watch nervously from a chink in the door.

That was the problem! Not a damned suit could be stitched without some hassle or the other. If a gusset was cut on the reverse, there was sure to be some trouble arising out of the gossip of the naain, the barber woman. Either the groom would be found to have a mistress or his mother would provide a hurdle by demanding solid gold bracelets. If the hem got warped, it meant that the marriage would fall through due to disagreement on mehr, or there would be a scuffle over the bedstead with legs covered with silver work. The omens associated with the suit of chauthi were indeed portentous. In case of any mishap, all of Bi Amma's resourcefulness and practice would be in vain. No one knew why, at the critical moment, some trivial problem would crop up and hamper progress.

Kubra's mother had started to prepare her dowry at an early stage. Even if a small snippet was left, she would immediately stitch the cover of a bottle with it, decorating it with lace of gold thread, and then put it away. There's no telling about a girl—she grows up by leaps and bounds, as a cucumber grows. When the marriage took place, such farsightedness would pay off.

However, after Abba's death, even such foresight came to no avail. At that moment Hamida was reminded of her father. Abba was tall and frail, like Muharram's aalam. If he bent down once, it was difficult for him to straighten up. At the crack of dawn he would break a neem twig to brush his teeth, and seating Hamida on his knees, he would get lost in his world of thought. As he brushed absent-mindedly, sometimes a small splinter from the



twig would find its way into his gullet, and he would start coughing. Hamida would get down from his knees in a huff. She didn't like her father shaking all over with the cough. Her father would laugh at her childish pique, and the phlegm would get stuck in his chest, making him writhe like a slaughtered pigeon. Then Bi Amma would come to his rescue and thump his back.

‘God forbid! What sort of laughter is this?’

In the midst of the choking, Abba would lift his bloodshot eyes and smile helplessly. The coughing would stop after sometime, leaving him panting.

‘Why don't you take some medicine? I've asked you time and again to do so.’

‘The doctor at the main hospital says that I'll need injections. He also advises me to take a litre of milk and fifty grams of butter daily.’

‘Shame on them, these doctors! The cough is already there, and on top of it he's advising you to take fat. Won't it create more phlegm? Show yourself to some hakeem.’

‘I will.’ Abba would draw on the hookah and choke once again.

‘A curse on this hookah! It's because of this that you've got the cough. Do you ever think of your grown-up daughter?’

Abba would cast a pitiful look at Kubra's youth. Kubra had grown up to be a young woman. Whoever said that she had ‘become’ a young woman? It was as though right from the day of her bismillah ceremony she had heard



intimations of her approaching youth and had been cowering back from it. What kind of youth was it that fairies never danced before her eyes, nor did curled ringlets play coquettishly with her cheeks? She did not experience any storm raging in her breast, neither did she impetuously ask the monsoon clouds the whereabouts of her beloved. Adolescence crept up on her unawares, with silent steps, as it were, and left her no one knew when! Sweet years gave way to sour ones, and finally they became bitter.

One day Abba stumbled on the threshold and fell on his face. Neither a hakeem's prescription nor a doctor's could get him on his feet again.

After that, Hamida gave up making demands for sweet roti, and Kubra's marriage proposals somehow lost their way. It was as if no one ever knew that behind the sack-cloth curtain someone's youth was at its last gasp. And there was another whose youth was raising its head like a serpent's hood.

But Bi Amma's routine did not change. She would spread the colourful snippets in the same way on the seh-dari and continue her doll game.

During the month of Shab-e-baraat, scrounging and economizing, she somehow managed to buy a crêpe dupatta that cost her seven and a half rupees. She just had to buy it. A telegram had arrived from Kubra's maternal uncle saying that his eldest son Rahat was coming to stay with them during his police training. Bi Amma began to drive herself mad with worry. It seemed as though it was not Rahat but a veritable baraat that had arrived on the threshold. And she had not yet chipped the gold



leaf for the bride's hair-parting! Too nervous to do anything by herself, she sent for Bundu's mother who was her moohboli behn, her adopted sister. The message was: 'Sister, may you find me dead if you don't come immediately.'

Then the two women began their hushed whispers. Once in a while they would glance at Kubra who, sitting on the veranda, would be winnowing rice. She knew well what these whispers were about.

Bi Amma pulled out the clove-shaped earrings weighing four massas from her ears and handed them over to her adopted sister so that she could buy a tola of fettered gold, six massas of gold leaf and stars, and a quarter yard of twill. The room in the front was swept and dusted clean. A little lime was brought, and Kubra painted the walls with her own hands. The walls became sparkling white but the skin of her palm came off because of the lime, and that is why when she sat down to grind spices that evening, her head began to spin and she fell. She kept tossing and turning all night long, partly because of her palms, and partly because Rahat was to arrive by the morning train.

'Oh God, dear God! Let Aapa be blessed with good fortune this time. Oh God, I shall say a hundred voluntary prayers in Your exalted presence,' Hamida prayed after her fajr namaaz, the dawn prayers.

By the time Rahat arrived, Kubra had already hidden herself in the mosquito-infested room. Rahat helped himself to the breakfast of sewaiyaan and parantha and retired to the sitting room. Then Kubra came out from the

room with halting steps like a newly-wedded bride and picked up the used dishes.

‘Bi Aapa, let me wash them for you,’ Hamida said mischievously.

‘No.’ Kubra became bashful and lowered her head.

Hamida kept teasing while Bi Amma smiled and stitched the gold lace on the dupatta. The gold flowerets, the cockades and the silver anklets went the way of the clove-shaped earrings. And finally the bangles, too, which Manjhle Maamu had given her on the day marking the end of her mourning after Abba’s death. Eating simple food herself, she would fry paranthas, kofta and meat pulao for Rahat every other day. The aroma of kofta and meat pulao filled the air. She would swallow her dry morsels with water but feed her would-be son-in-law rich meat dishes.

‘These are hard times, my child,’ she would try to pacify Hamida who would go into a sulk seeing her mother’s behaviour. ‘So we have to starve to feed the “son-in-law”,’ Hamida thought. Bi Aapa would get up at the crack of dawn and begin doing her chores like a machine. Taking just a glass of water herself, she would fry paranthas for Rahat and keep the milk on the boil until a thick layer of cream formed over it. If she could, she would have cut some fat out of her own body and stuffed it in the parantha. And why not? After all, one day he was going to be her very own. Whatever he earned, he would pass on to her. Who does not water a plant that gives fruit? And, when flowers would blossom and the fruit-laden branch would bend low, then all the back-biting women would be shamed. This thought

made my Bi Aapa's face glow with bridal anticipation. The sound of the shehnai rang in her ears as she swept Rahat's room to keep it spotless. She would arrange his clothes lovingly, as though they talked to her. She washed his dirty socks, his stinking vests and handkerchiefs filled with mucous. And on his oil-smearred pillow cover she embroidered 'Sweet Dreams'. But things did not progress quite as expected. Rahat stuffed himself with eggs and paranthas at breakfast and went out. On his return he ate kofta and went to sleep. Bi Amma's adopted sister whispered her disappointment.

'Poor boy! He's very shy,' Bi Amma offered the alibi.

'That's all right. But we should get some hints from his gestures or looks.'

'God forbid that my daughters exchange glances with anyone! No one has ever seen as much as her pallu,' said Bi Amma with pride.

'Oh dear, no one's asking her to come out of purdah.' Considering Bi Aapa's swollen pimples, she had to admire Bi Amma's foresight. 'Dear sister, you're really a simpleton. I'm not suggesting that at all. This wretched younger one—when will she be of use, if not now?' She would look at me and break into a laugh.

'You good-for-nothing girl! You must chat and share jokes with your brother-in-law, you crazy child.'

'But what do you want me to do, Khala?'

'Why don't you chat with Rahat Mian?'

'I feel shy.'

'Just look at her! He won't eat you up, will he?' Bi Amma said angrily.



‘Oh no . . . but . . .’ I could not say anything. They pondered over the issue. After much thinking, kababs were made with mustard seeds. That day, Bi Aapa also smiled quite a few times. She whispered to me, ‘Look, don’t start laughing. That’ll ruin the whole game.’

‘I won’t,’ I promised.

‘Do take your meal, please,’ I said as I lowered the tray of food on the stool. Rahat took out the water-tumbler from under his bed and while washing his hands he looked at me from top to toe. I immediately took to my heels. My heart was beating wildly. Oh my God, what piercing eyes he had!

‘You wretched girl, just go and see how he reacts. You’re going to spoil the fun.’

Aapa looked at me. There was pleading in her eyes. One could see there images of departing wedding parties and the sadness of old wedding clothes. I lowered my head, returned to Rahat’s room and stood there leaning against the pillar.

Rahat ate quietly without looking at me. Seeing him eating those mustard-seed kababs I should have laughed and made fun of him. ‘Are you enjoying these mustard-seed kababs, dear brother-in-law?’ I should have teased, but it was as though someone had clutched at my throat.

Bi Amma got angry and called me back, cursing me under her breath. How could I tell her that the wretched fellow, far from telling the difference, seemed to be enjoying the food!

‘Rahat Bhai, how did you like the kofta?’ I asked, tutored by Bi Amma.

There was no reply.

‘Hey girl, go and ask him properly,’ Bi Amma nudged me.

‘Please say something.’

‘You brought them and I ate. They must be good.’



‘What a stupid boy!’ Bi Amma could not restrain herself. ‘Why, you couldn’t make out that the kababs you ate were made of mustard seeds.’

‘Mustard seeds? But I eat the same stuff everyday. I’ve got used to eating mustard seeds and hay.’

Bi Amma’s face fell. Bi Aapa could not lift her eyes. The following day she sewed twice her normal measure.

In the evening when I took his meal to him, Rahat said, ‘Tell me what you have brought today? Paranthas made of sawdust?’

‘Don’t you like the food here?’ I asked, stung by his remark.

‘Not exactly. It seems somewhat strange. If it is mustard-seed kababs someday, on other days it is curry that tastes like hay!’

I boiled with rage. We ate dry rotis so as to provide him with plentiful food and stuff him with paranthas dripping with ghee. My Bi Aapa could not buy jushanda for herself while she must get him milk and cream. I walked away in a huff.

Bi Amma’s adopted sister’s scheme worked, and Rahat began to spend a greater part of the day at home. Bi Aapa was always busy at the hearth, Bi Amma occupied herself with stitching the jora for chauthi, and Rahat’s filthy eyes stung my heart like arrows. He would tease me for nothing while eating, saying that he wanted some water or a pinch of salt. And he would make suggestive remarks. Embarrassed, I would go and sit beside Bi Aapa. I felt like asking her point blank whose goat he was and who would supply him with fodder! Dear sister, I won’t be able to noose this bull for you. But Bi Aapa’s tangled hair was covered with flying ash from the hearth . . . Oh no! My heart missed a beat. I picked up a strand of her hair that had become



grey and tucked it into her plait. A curse on this cold! The poor girl's hair had begun to turn grey.

Rahat called me once again on some pretext.

'Hunh!' I was stung. But Bi Aapa looked at me with the gaze of a slaughtered chicken and I had to go.

'Are you angry with me?' Rahat grabbed my wrist as he took the water tumbler. I was scared out of my wits. I snatched my hands away and ran from there.

'What was he saying?' Bi Aapa asked in a voice smothered with modesty. I stared at her mutely.

'He was saying—'Who cooked the food? Simply delicious! I could go on eating . . . devouring the hand that cooked the food . . . Oh no! What I mean is . . . kissing the hand,' I blurted out hurriedly and clasped Bi Aapa's rough hand reeking of turmeric and coriander. I was in tears. 'These hands,' I thought 'that remain busy, like bonded slaves, from morning till night grinding spices, drawing water, chopping onions, laying the bed, cleaning shoes. When will their slavery end? Will there be no buyers for them? Will no one ever kiss them lovingly? Will henna never adorn them? Will they never be perfumed with the bridal attar?' I wanted to scream out.

'What else was he saying?' Bi Aapa's hands were rough, but she had such a sweet and lilting voice that if Rahat had ears . . . but he had neither ears nor nose . . . only the hell of a stomach.

'Well, he was saying—"Tell your Bi Aapa not to work so hard ... and to take jushanda for her cough."'

'You're lying!'

'Not me. It's he who is a liar. Your . . .'

'Silly girl!' she shut me up.



‘Look, I’ve completed knitting the sweater. Please take it to him. But you must promise that you won’t mention my name.’

‘No, Bi Aapa, no. Don’t give him the sweater. Your body which is just a bag of bones needs it badly,’ I wanted to tell her, but couldn’t bring myself to do so.

‘Aapa Bi, what will *you* wear?’

‘Come on, I don’t need it really. It’s always scorching hot near the hearth.’

Seeing the sweater, Rahat puckered up one of his eyebrows mischievously and said, ‘Did *you* knit it?’

‘No!’

‘Then I can’t wear it.’

I felt like scratching his face. ‘Villain! A lump of clay! This sweater was knitted by hands that are living slaves. Woven in each of its stitches are the longings of an ill-fated woman. The hands that knitted it are meant to rock the cradle. Clasp these hands, you ass! They will serve as oars and save your lifeboat from the tumultuous storms. They may not play musical notes on the sitar, may not show the Manipuri or Bharatnatyam mudras; they have not been trained to dance on the keyboard of a piano, nor have they learnt how to arrange flowers, but these are the hands that toil from morning to evening to provide you sumptuous food, and mend your clothes; they remain soaked in soap and soda water, bear the flames of the hearth. They wash your filth so that you can maintain your dazzling image of a hypocrite. Hard work has bruised them. Glass bangles have never tinkled on them. No one has ever held them lovingly!’

But I stayed mute. Bi Amma says that my friends have vitiated my mind with their new-fangled ideas—frightening thoughts about death, hunger and famine, about throbbing hearts being silenced forever.



‘Why don’t *you* wear this sweater? Your shirt looks so flimsy.’

Like a wild cat I scratched his face, nose and shirt-front and pulled his hair. Then I ran back to my room and fell on the bed. Bi Aapa put the last roti on the tawa, washed her hands hurriedly, wiped them on her pallu and then came to sit by me.

‘What did he say?’ she could not resist asking, her heart beating fast.

‘Bi Aapa, Rahat Bhai is not a good person.’ I resolved to tell her everything today.

‘Why?’ she smiled.

‘I don’t like him. Look, all my bangles have been smashed to bits,’ I said tremulously.

‘He’s so mischievous!’ she said, blushing coyly.

‘Bi Aapa . . . Please listen to me. Rahat is not a good person,’ I said angrily. ‘I’ll tell Bi Amma today.’

‘What is it?’ asked Bi Amma as she was spreading the prayer mat.

‘Just look at my bangles, Bi Amma!’

‘Rahat has smashed them?’ Bi Amma chirped joyfully.

‘Yes.’

‘Good! You pester him endlessly! And why are you complaining so much? As though you’re made of wax and would melt at his touch!’ Then she comforted me: ‘Take your revenge on the chaauthi ceremony. Tease him as much as you can so that he doesn’t forget it, ever.’ Saying this, she began her prayers.

Once again, there was a conference between Bi Amma and her adopted sister, and seeing that the matter was proceeding fruitfully towards the desired goal, they smiled happily.



‘Silly girl, you’re no use at all! I tell you, we used to make life miserable for our brothers-in-law.’

And then she proceeded to describe how to tease brothers-in-law. She recounted how two of her maternal uncle’s daughters for whom there was no prospect of marriage at all were married merely by the inventiveness of teasing and mischief.

‘One of the grooms was Hakeemji. When young girls teased him he would become bashful and have nervous fits.

Eventually he sent word to the uncle saying that he would consider it an honour to become his son-in-law. The second one was a clerk in the viceroy’s secretariat. The moment girls came to know that he had arrived in the house they would begin to play pranks on him. Sometimes they stuffed hot chillies in the paan; sometimes they fed him sewaiyaan with salt rather than sugar . . . But, can you believe it, he began to come everyday. Rain or thunderstorm, he would arrive unfailingly. Eventually, he approached an acquaintance to arrange his marriage in the family. When asked, ‘Which girl?’ he said, ‘With either one’. God is my witness that I am telling no lies—if you looked at the elder sister, you would think of an approaching banshee. About the younger one, the less said the better. If her one eye faced east, the other one faced west. Her father gave fifteen tolas of gold in dowry and arranged a job for the groom in the Burra Saheb’s office.’

‘Well, if one can afford to give fifteen tolas of gold as dowry and a job in the Burra Saheb’s office thrown in, there should be no dearth of suitable boys.’

‘That is not the point, sister. Nowadays, the hearts of marriageable boys are like eggplants on a plate—you can tilt them anyway you like.’



Rahat was not an eggplant, but a mountain. I could be crushed under his weight, I thought. Then I looked towards Aapa. Sitting quietly in the veranda, she was kneading dough and listening to everything. Had it been in her power, she would have split the bosom of the earth and vanished underneath along with her curse of spinsterhood.

Did my sister hunger after men? No. She had already shrivelled up at the mere thought of such a hunger. The thought of a man did not come to her as a longing, but as an answer to her need for food and clothing. She was a widow's burden and must not continue to remain so.

However, even after all the hints and innuendoes, Rahat

Mian did not spill the beans, nor did any marriage proposal come from his family. Overcome by despair, Bi Amma pawned her anklets and arranged a niyaaz dedicated to Pir Mushkil Kusha, the patron saint. Through the afternoon, girls of the mohalla made a racket in the courtyard. Bi Aapa retired to the mosquito-infested room where mosquitoes sucked up the last drops of her blood. Exhausted, Bi Amma was putting the last stitches on the suit of the chauthi, sitting on the chauki. Today, her face bore the marks of destinations. It was the last stage, the impasse would soon come to an end. Today, her wrinkles once again shimmered like lit-up candles. Bi Aapa's friends were teasing her, and she was trying hard to make a blush appear on her face with her last drops of blood. For the past several days her fever had not remitted. Like a candle in its last gasp, her face would light up for a moment and then fade out. She beckoned me to her side, removed her pallu and handed over to me the plate which contained the sweets consecrated by the niyaaz.



‘Maulvi Saheb has said a special incantation over it,’ the hot, feverish air breathed out by her touched my ear.

I took the plate and wondered—Maulvi Saheb has read a special incantation over it. Now the malida will be offered to Rahat’s stomach, which was like a furnace, a furnace that had been kept warm with our blood for the last six months. The sanctified malida would fulfil the wish. Wedding trumpets rang in my ears. I rushed out to the roof to see the baraat. The groom’s face was adorned with a billowing flower wreath which touched the horse’s mane. Wearing the shahabi jora and laden with flowers, Bi Aapa stepped slowly and gingerly. The gold-embroidered suit shimmered. Bi Amma’s face bloomed like a flower. Bi Aapa lifted her bashful eyes for a moment and a tear of gratitude trickled down and got entangled like a star amidst golden sequins.

‘All this is the result of your efforts,’ Bi Aapa’s silence seemed to say. Hamida felt a lump in her throat.

‘Go, my dear sister,’ Bi Aapa woke her up from her reverie. She got up with a start, wiped her eyes with the corner of her dupatta and made for the veranda.

‘This . . . this malida,’ Bi Aapa said, controlling her leaping heart. Her feet were trembling, as though she had entered a snake hole . . . And then the mountain moved . . . Rahat opened his mouth. Hamida stepped back. At a distance the shehnai of some wedding party screamed out as though it were being stifled. With shaking hands, she made a lump of the sacred malida and held it towards Rahat’s mouth.

Her hands were pulled by the mountain where they got drowned in the bottomless, putrid abyss. A big rock stifled her scream. The plate of sanctified malida tumbled from her hands and hit the lantern. The lantern fell on the ground, gasped a few times



and gave out. In the courtyard, the women of the mohalla were singing songs praising the saint Mushkil Kusha.

In the morning Rahat left by train, after thanking them for their hospitality. His marriage had been fixed, and he was impatient to reach home.

After that, no one fried eggs, made paranthas or knitted a sweater in that household. Tuberculosis, which had been haunting Bi Aapa for a long time, now pounced on her.

And she quietly surrendered her futile existence to its fatal embrace.

Then, once again, a clean sheet was spread on the couch in the seh-dari. The women of the mohalla gathered there.

The white expanse of the shroud spread before Bi Amma like death's mantle. She was shaking all over in the effort to control herself. Her eyebrow was twitching. The desolate wrinkles were howling, as though a thousand pythons were hissing in them.

Bi Amma straightened the fabric, then folded it in the shape of a square. And a thousand scissors ran through her heart. Today her face bore the marks of a terrible peace, a fatal contentment. Unlike the other suits of chauthi, this one would not have to be stitched.

All of a sudden, the young girls gathered in the seh-dari began to twitter like so many mynas. Flinging the past aside, Hamida went over to join them. The mark of the white cotton on the red twill. How many young girls would have merged their longings in its red, and how many unfortunate virgins would have



mingled its white in the whiteness of their shrouds. And then, everyone became quiet. Bi Amma put in the last stitch and snapped the thread. Two large tears trickled slowly down her cotton-soft cheeks. The wrinkles on her face glowed, and she smiled. It was as though today she felt sure that Kubra's wedding suit was finally complete and the trumpets would ring out any moment.



GLOSSARY

chinks: small narrow gaps or openings

scrawny: extremely thin and bony

winnowing: separate the chaff and husk from the grain

riveted: fixed

shroud: a plain garment in which a dead body is wrapped in and buried

snippets: small pieces or scraps

thimbles: small caps worn on the tips of fingers to protect them while sewing

array: a wide variety

mortar: a cup-shaped vessel used to grind ingredients used for cooking

sequins: small shiny discs sewn onto clothing for decoration

flowerets: very small flowers

moat: a deep ditch, usually filled with water, surrounding a town or fort for defence

muslin: a thin delicate fabric

chauthi: the word for ‘wedding’ in Urdu

paandaan: a Hindi/Urdu word for the container in which betel nuts and leaves are kept

bodice: a woman’s undergarment, shaped like a sleeveless vest

twill: a kind of weave which produces a diagonal pattern

alchemist: a medieval scientist who was supposed to be able to transform other metals into gold

guffaws: loud and hearty laughter



junction: particular point in time

sartorial: relating to tailoring or dressing

gusset: a second layer sewn into a piece of cloth to make it larger, stronger or more comfortable

hem: the edge of a piece of clothing

warped: become bent or twisted out of shape

mehr: in Islam, a mandatory payment made to the bride by the groom or the groom's family, at the time of the wedding

scuffle: a short, confused fight

omens: events regarded as predicting good or evil to come in the future

portentous: of great significance

aalam: Hindi and Urdu word for state or condition; here, it is also used to mean 'representation'

pique: a feeling of irritation or resentment

writhe: twist one's body involuntarily; squirm

bloodshot: tinged with red, indicating tiredness or sickness

hakeem: a physician who uses natural medicines to cure minor illnesses

bismillah ceremony: a Muslim ceremony which marks a child's beginning to learn about Islam and read the Quran. It is usually held when a child is around four or five years old.

intimations: indications; hints

ringlets: locks of curly hair

coquettishly: playfully; flirtatiously



impetuously: thoughtlessly

crepe: a light, thin fabric with a wrinkled surface

veritable: a word used for emphasis

baraat: Hindi word for the wedding party which accompanies a groom

massa: a traditional unit of mass. One massa amounts to about 0.97 grams.

tola: a traditional unit of mass, equivalent to about 12 grams.

cockade: a decorative knot of ribbons

shehnai: a piped instrument usually played at weddings

jushanda: a herbal medicine to treat cough and cold

tumultuous: violent; full of ups and downs

tremulously: tremblingly

pester: bother; trouble

spinsterhood: the state of being unmarried. This word is used only to refer to women.

innuendoes: hints; allusive remarks

impasse: a situation in which no progress is possible

incantation: spell

malida: a sweet dish made of flour, ghee and sugar

reverie: daydream

bashful: shy; coy

gingerly: carefully and cautiously

stifled: suffocated



putrid: very unpleasant; repulsive

abyss: a deep and seemingly bottomless pit

desolate: utterly wretched and unhappy

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a single word, phrase or sentence each.

1. What was Kubra's mother famous for?
2. What did Bi Amma do every afternoon?
3. Why did Kubra's wedding clothes have to be made again and again?
4. What would happen if the hem of the wedding suit was warped?
5. What is Hamida's father compared to?
6. Why did Hamida's father not get himself treated for his cough?
7. How did their father's death affect Hamida and Kubra?
8. Why did Bi Amma buy an expensive crepe dupatta during Shab-e-baraat?
9. Where did Kubra usually hide away to escape difficult or embarrassing situations?
10. What suggestion did Bi Amma's adopted sister give so that Rahat proposed marriage to Kubra?
11. What does Rahat say about the food Bi Amma and Kubra make?
12. What did Bi Amma do as a final attempt to win Rahat's attention?
13. Why was Rahat so eager to return home?
14. How did Kubra die?
15. What becomes Kubra's eventual 'jora'?

B. Answer the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. What memories does Hamida have of her father?
2. How does Bi Amma react to the news of Rahat's arrival?
3. What does Kubra do for Rahat?
4. What is Hamida's opinion of Rahat?
5. Draw a character sketch of Rahat.
6. What does marriage represent for Kubra?



7. Why does Bi Amma have a look of peace and contentment on her face at Kubra's funeral?

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Bring out the significance of the title 'The Wedding Suit'.
2. 'Rahat' is the Urdu word for relief, rest or comfort. Do you think Chughtai uses the name deliberately in order to create a sense of irony? Discuss in detail.



5. Reflections on Gandhi

George Orwell

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TEXT

George Orwell was the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair (1903–1950), a British novelist, essayist, critic and journalist. Orwell was born in Motihari (present-day Bihar) in British India. His father worked in the Indian Civil Service. He was educated in England, but returned to work in the British provinces when he took a job with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He re-evaluated his life after an illness, deciding to follow his calling as a writer. He had a long prolific writing career and was highly regarded for his journalism during his lifetime. He is best known to present-day readers as the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, both dystopian novels examining the evolution and workings of systemic oppression.

The following essay first appeared in *Partisan Review* in 1949. Orwell examines Gandhi's philosophies and their impact on world politics in this essay. Orwell attempts to separate the persona of Gandhi from his ideas, offering a balanced critique of both.

Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent, but the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases. In Gandhi's case the questions one feels inclined to ask are: to what extent was Gandhi moved by vanity—by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a praying mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power—and to what extent did he compromise his own principles by entering politics, which of their nature are inseparable from coercion and fraud? To give a definite answer

one would have to study Gandhi's acts and writings in immense detail, for his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant. But this partial autobiography, which ends in the nineteen-twenties, is strong evidence in his favour, all the more because it covers what he would have called the unregenerate part of his life and reminds one that inside the saint, or near-saint, there was a very shrewd, able person who could, if he had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, an administrator or perhaps even a businessman.

At about the time when the autobiography first appeared I remember reading its opening chapters in the ill-printed pages of some Indian newspaper. They made a good impression on me, which Gandhi himself at that time did not. The things that one associated with him—home-spun cloth, “soul forces” and vegetarianism—were unappealing, and his medievalist program was obviously not viable in a backward, starving, over-populated country. It was also apparent that the British were making use of him, or thought they were making use of him. Strictly speaking, as a Nationalist, he was an enemy, but since in every crisis he would exert himself to prevent violence—which, from the British point of view, meant preventing any effective action whatever—he could be regarded as “our man”. In private this was sometimes cynically admitted. The attitude of the Indian millionaires was similar. Gandhi called upon them to repent, and naturally they preferred him to the Socialists and Communists who, given the chance, would actually have taken their money away. How reliable such calculations are in the

long run is doubtful; as Gandhi himself says, “in the end deceivers deceive only themselves”; but at any rate the gentleness with which he was nearly always handled was due partly to the feeling that he was useful. The British Conservatives only became really angry with him when, as in 1942, he was in effect turning his non-violence against a different conqueror.

But I could see even then that the British officials who spoke of him with a mixture of amusement and disapproval also genuinely liked and admired him, after a fashion. Nobody ever suggested that he was corrupt, or ambitious in any vulgar way, or that anything he did was actuated by fear or malice. In judging a man like Gandhi one seems instinctively to apply high standards, so that some of his virtues have passed almost unnoticed. For instance, it is clear even from the autobiography that his natural physical courage was quite outstanding: the manner of his death was a later illustration of this, for a public man who attached any value to his own skin would have been more adequately guarded. Again, he seems to have been quite free from that maniacal suspiciousness which, as E. M. Forster rightly says in *A Passage to India*, is the besetting Indian vice, as hypocrisy is the British vice. Although no doubt he was shrewd enough in detecting dishonesty, he seems wherever possible to have believed that other people were acting in good faith and had a better nature through which they could be approached. And though he came of a poor middle-class family, started life rather unfavourably, and was probably of

unimpressive physical appearance, he was not afflicted by envy or by the feeling of inferiority. Colour feeling when he first met it in its worst form in South Africa, seems rather to have astonished him. Even when he was fighting what was in effect a colour war, he did not think of people in terms of race or status. The governor of a province, a cotton millionaire, a half-starved Dravidian coolie, a British private soldier were all equally human beings, to be approached in much the same way. It is noticeable that even in the worst possible circumstances, as in South Africa when he was making himself unpopular as the champion of the Indian community, he did not lack European friends.

Written in short lengths for newspaper serialisation, the autobiography is not a literary masterpiece, but it is the more impressive because of the commonplaceness of much of its material. It is well to be reminded that Gandhi started out with the normal ambitions of a young Indian student and only adopted his extremist opinions by degrees and, in some cases, rather unwillingly. There was a time, it is interesting to learn, when he wore a top hat, took dancing lessons, studied French and Latin, went up the Eiffel Tower and even tried to learn the violin—all this with the idea of assimilating into European civilisation as thoroughly as possible. He was not one of those saints who are marked out by their phenomenal piety from childhood onwards, nor one of the other kind who forsake the world after sensational debaucheries. He makes full confession of the misdeeds of his youth, but in fact there is not much to

confess. As a frontispiece to the book there is a photograph of Gandhi's possessions at the time of his death. The whole outfit could be purchased for about 5 pounds, and Gandhi's sins, at least his fleshly sins, would make the same sort of appearance if placed all in one heap. A few cigarettes, a few mouthfuls of meat, a few annas pilfered in childhood from the maidservant, two visits to a brothel (on each occasion he got away without "doing anything"), one narrowly escaped lapse with his landlady in Plymouth, one outburst of temper—that is about the whole collection. Almost from childhood onwards he had a deep earnestness, an attitude ethical rather than religious, but, until he was about thirty, no very definite sense of direction. His first entry into anything describable as public life was made by way of vegetarianism. Underneath his less ordinary qualities one feels all the time the solid middle-class businessmen who were his ancestors. One feels that even after he had abandoned personal ambition he must have been a resourceful, energetic lawyer and a hard-headed political organiser, careful in keeping down expenses, an adroit handler of committees and an indefatigable chaser of subscriptions. His character was an extraordinarily mixed one, but there was almost nothing in it that you can put your finger on and call bad, and I believe that even Gandhi's worst enemies would admit that he was an interesting and unusual man who enriched the world simply by being alive. Whether he was also a lovable man, and whether his teachings can have much for those who do not accept the

religious beliefs on which they are founded, I have never felt fully certain.

Of late years it has been the fashion to talk about Gandhi as though he were not only sympathetic to the Western Left-wing movement, but were integrally part of it. Anarchists and pacifists, in particular, have claimed him for their own, noticing only that he was opposed to centralism and State violence and ignoring the other-worldly, anti-humanist tendency of his doctrines. But one should, I think, realise that Gandhi's teachings cannot be squared with the belief that Man is the measure of all things and that our job is to make life worth living on this earth, which is the only earth we have. They make sense only on the assumption that God exists and that the world of solid objects is an illusion to be escaped from. It is worth considering the disciplines which Gandhi imposed on himself and which—though he might not insist on every one of his followers observing every detail—he considered indispensable if one wanted to serve either God or humanity. First of all, no meat-eating, and if possible no animal food in any form. (Gandhi himself, for the sake of his health, had to compromise on milk, but seems to have felt this to be a backsliding.) No alcohol or tobacco, and no spices or condiments even of a vegetable kind, since food should be taken not for its own sake but solely in order to preserve one's strength. Secondly, if possible, no sexual intercourse. If sexual intercourse must happen, then it should be for the sole purpose of begetting children and presumably at long intervals. Gandhi himself, in

his middle thirties, took the vow of brahmacharya, which means not only complete chastity but the elimination of sexual desire. This condition, it seems, is difficult to attain without a special diet and frequent fasting. One of the dangers of milk-drinking is that it is apt to arouse sexual desire. And finally—this is the cardinal point—for the seeker after goodness there must be no close friendships and no exclusive loves whatever.

Close friendships, Gandhi says, are dangerous, because “friends react on one another” and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitude cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife or a child die rather than administer the animal food prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi—with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction—always gave the patient the choice of staying alive at the price of committing a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and

the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the sense which—I think—most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco, and so forth, are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid. There is an obvious retort to this, but one should be wary about making it. In this yogi-ridden age, it is too readily assumed that “non-attachment” is not only better than a full acceptance of earthly life, but that the ordinary man only rejects it because it is too difficult: in other words, that the average human being is a failed saint. It is doubtful whether this is true. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings. If one could follow it to its psychological roots, one would, I believe, find that the main motive for “non-attachment” is a desire to escape from the pain of living, and above all from love, which, sexual or non-sexual, is hard work. But it is not necessary here to argue whether the other-worldly or the humanistic ideal is “higher”. The point is that they are incompatible. One must choose between God and Man, and all “radicals” and “progressives”,

from the mildest Liberal to the most extreme Anarchist, have in effect chosen Man.

However, Gandhi's pacifism can be separated to some extent from his other teachings. Its motive was religious, but he claimed also for it that it was a definitive technique, a method, capable of producing desired political results. Gandhi's attitude was not that of most Western pacifists. Satyagraha, first evolved in South Africa, was a sort of non-violent warfare, a way of defeating the enemy without hurting him and without feeling or arousing hatred. It entailed such things as civil disobedience, strikes, lying down in front of railway trains, enduring police charges without running away and without hitting back, and the like. Gandhi objected to "passive resistance" as a translation of Satyagraha: in Gujarati, it seems, the word means "firmness in the truth". In his early days Gandhi served as a stretcher-bearer on the British side in the Boer War, and he was prepared to do the same again in the war of 1914—18. Even after he had completely abjured violence he was honest enough to see that in war it is usually necessary to take sides. He did not—indeed, since his whole political life centred round a struggle for national independence, he could not—take the sterile and dishonest line of pretending that in every war both sides are exactly the same and it makes no difference who wins. Nor did he, like most Western pacifists, specialise in avoiding awkward questions. In relation to the late war, one question that every pacifist had a clear obligation to answer was: "What about the Jews? Are you prepared to see them exterminated? If not, how

do you propose to save them without resorting to war?" I must say that I have never heard, from any Western pacifist, an honest answer to this question, though I have heard plenty of evasions, usually of the "you're another" type. But it so happens that Gandhi was asked a somewhat similar question in 1938 and that his answer is on record in Mr. Louis Fischer's *Gandhi and Stalin*. According to Mr. Fischer, Gandhi's view was that the German Jews ought to commit collective suicide, which "would have aroused the world and the people of Germany to Hitler's violence." After the war he justified himself: the Jews had been killed anyway, and might as well have died significantly. One has the impression that this attitude staggered even so warm an admirer as Mr. Fischer, but Gandhi was merely being honest. If you are not prepared to take life, you must often be prepared for lives to be lost in some other way. When, in 1942, he urged non-violent resistance against a Japanese invasion, he was ready to admit that it might cost several million deaths.

At the same time there is reason to think that Gandhi, who after all was born in 1869, did not understand the nature of totalitarianism and saw everything in terms of his own struggle against the British government. The important point here is not so much that the British treated him forbearingly as that he was always able to command publicity. As can be seen from the phrase quoted above, he believed in "arousing the world", which is only possible if the world gets a chance to hear what you are doing. It is difficult to see how Gandhi's methods could be applied in a country where opponents of the regime

disappear in the middle of the night and are never heard of again. Without a free press and the right of assembly, it is impossible not merely to appeal to outside opinion, but to bring a mass movement into being, or even to make your intentions known to your adversary. Is there a Gandhi in Russia at this moment? And if there is, what is he accomplishing? The Russian masses could only practise civil disobedience if the same idea happened to occur to all of them simultaneously, and even then, to judge by the history of the Ukraine famine, it would make no difference. But let it be granted that non-violent resistance can be effective against one's own government, or against an occupying power: even so, how does one put it into practice internationally? Gandhi's various conflicting statements on the late war seem to show that he felt the difficulty of this. Applied to foreign politics, pacifism either stops being pacifist or becomes appeasement. Moreover the assumption, which served Gandhi so well in dealing with individuals, that all human beings are more or less approachable and will respond to a generous gesture, needs to be seriously questioned. It is not necessarily true, for example, when you are dealing with lunatics. Then the question becomes: Who is sane? Was Hitler sane? And is it not possible for one whole culture to be insane by the standards of another? And, so far as one can gauge the feelings of whole nations, is there any apparent connection between a generous deed and a friendly response? Is gratitude a factor in international politics?

These and kindred questions need discussion, and need it urgently, in the few years left to us before somebody presses the button and the rockets begin to fly. It seems doubtful whether civilisation can stand another major war, and it is at least thinkable that the way out lies through non-violence. It is Gandhi's virtue that he would have been ready to give honest consideration to the kind of question that I have raised above; and, indeed, he probably did discuss most of these questions somewhere or other in his innumerable newspaper articles. One feels of him that there was much he did not understand, but not that there was anything that he was frightened of saying or thinking. I have never been able to feel much liking for Gandhi, but I do not feel sure that as a political thinker he was wrong in the main, nor do I believe that his life was a failure. It is curious that when he was assassinated, many of his warmest admirers exclaimed sorrowfully that he had lived just long enough to see his life's work in ruins, because India was engaged in a civil war which had always been foreseen as one of the byproducts of the transfer of power. But it was not in trying to smooth down Hindu-Moslem rivalry that Gandhi had spent his life. His main political objective, the peaceful ending of British rule, had, after all, been attained. As usual the relevant facts cut across one another. On the other hand, the British did get out of India without fighting, an event which very few observers indeed would have predicted until about a year before it happened. On the other hand, this was done by a Labour government, and it is certain that a Conservative government,

especially a government headed by Churchill, would have acted differently. But if, by 1945, there had grown up in Britain a large body of opinion sympathetic to Indian independence, how far was this due to Gandhi's personal influence? And if, as may happen, India and Britain finally settle down into a decent and friendly relationship, will this be partly because Gandhi, by keeping up his struggle obstinately and without hatred, disinfected the political air? That one even thinks of asking such questions indicates his stature. One may feel, as I do, a sort of aesthetic distaste for Gandhi, one may reject the claims of sainthood made on his behalf (he never made any such claim himself, by the way), one may also reject sainthood as an ideal and therefore feel that Gandhi's basic aims were anti-human and reactionary: but regarded simply as a politician, and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!

GLOSSARY

vanity: excessive pride in one's appearance or achievements

coercion: persuading someone using force or threats

fraud: cheating

unregenerate: not reforming or showing repentance; obstinately bad

shrewd: having a sharp and keen sense of perception and judgement

medievalist: belonging to the Middle Ages

cynically: not trusting in human sincerity

Socialists: people who believe in Socialism, a political movement which advocates for state ownership of all industry, so that equal or need-based resources and opportunity can be provided to all

Communists: people who believe in Communism, a more extreme form of Socialism which aims for a dictatorship controlled by the working class

actuated: motivated by

malice: desire to harm someone; ill will

besetting: here, present everywhere and constantly

hypocrisy: pretending to have and practice virtues, when one does not, in reality

afflicted: caused pain or trouble to

top hat: a formal hat worn by men in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in England

piety: religious and reverent

debaucheries: excessive indulgence in rich food, alcohol, drugs and/or sex

pilfered: stole small items, usually of little value

ethical: having high moral principles

adroit: clever; skilful

indefatigable: untiring

anarchists: people who rebel against any form of established order or government

pacifists: people who are against war and violence in any form

centralism: the control of several territories or activities under one central governing authority

indispensable: absolutely necessary

condiments: substances used to add flavour to food, such as salt, pepper, etc.

backsliding: relapse into bad ways

chastity: the state of refraining from sexual activity, usually until after marriage

cardinal: central; main

humanistic: a belief system in which the value and agency of human beings is emphasised

broth: a kind of thin soup

asceticism: severe self-discipline and avoiding all kinds of indulgence

retort: a sharp response

exterminated: destroyed

appeasement: pacifying someone by agreeing to some or all their demands

gauge: estimate; determine the measure of

kindred: here, related

reactionary: opposing political or social reform

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following in a single word, phrase or sentence each.

1. Why does the writer find Gandhi's beliefs unappealing?
2. Why was Gandhi genuinely liked among British officials?
3. What does the writer term India's 'besetting vice'?
4. How does the writer describe Gandhi's moral temperament?
5. What was the very first cause Gandhi took up by way of his entry into public life?
6. What does the writer call the 'essence' of being human?
7. Why do some people find it easy to be saints?
8. In which role does Gandhi's greatest strength lie, according to the writer?

B. Answer the following in about 100–150 words each.

1. Why was Gandhi met with universal forbearance and liking?
2. What was Gandhi's attitude to war?
3. How was Gandhi's philosophy opposed to the humanist philosophy?
4. What are the limitations of Gandhi's satyagraha movement?

5. What are the lessons the writer says the world must learn from Gandhi's philosophy?

C. Answer the following in about 300 words each.

1. Draw a character sketch of Gandhi, as described in this essay.
2. One cannot be both a human and a saint. How does the writer put this point across?
3. Do you think the essay is a balanced critique of Gandhi's autobiography and his views in general? Why/Why not?