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Paper Name: English for Communication Skills

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A) A HORSE AND TWO GOATS

- R. K. NARAYAN

2.0 Objectives

After studying this **unit**, you will be able to:

1. Develop your reading and comprehension skills through a close study of a modern Indian short story.
2. Recognize and reflect on human values such as honesty, simplicity, dignity, and mutual understanding.
3. Gain an introductory familiarity with Indian Writing in English, especially village life as portrayed by Indian writers.
4. Appreciate the literary contribution of R. K. Narayan as a major Indian storyteller in English.
5. Understand the cross-cultural conflicts and misunderstandings that arise between people from different social and cultural backgrounds.

About the Author

R. K. Narayan was born in a working class south Indian family in Chennai in 1906. R.K. Narayan spent most of his childhood under the loving care of his grandmother, Parvati who taught him arithmetic, mythology and Sanskrit. He also attended many different schools in Chennai like Lutheran Mission School, Christian College High School, etc. He was interested in English literature since he was very young. After getting married in 1933, Narayan became a reporter for a newspaper called The Justice and, in the meantime, he published his first novel, 'Swami and Friends'. His second novel, 'The Bachelor of Arts' was published in 1937. In 1938, Narayan wrote his third novel, 'The Dark Room' which dealt with the subject of emotional abuse within a marriage and it was warmly received, both by readers and critics. He is best known for his novels such as 'Mr Sampath' (1949), 'The Financial Expert' (1952), 'The Guide' (1958) for which he received the Sahitya Akademi

Award in 1961, and 'The Man-eater of Malgudi' (1961), and the stories, 'Malgudi Days' (1982).

2.1 Introduction

"A Horse and Two Goats" is one of the most popular short stories by R. K. Narayan, a leading figure in Indian Writing in English. The story is set in the fictional South Indian village of Kritam and centres on an old villager named Muni. Narayan uses simple language, gentle humour, and vivid description to present a meeting between Muni and a wealthy American tourist, a meeting that becomes both comical and meaningful because the two men cannot understand each other's language.

Through this brief encounter, Narayan explores themes such as poverty, cultural difference, communication gap, and the contrast between traditional Indian village life and modern Western prosperity. At the same time, he paints a sympathetic picture of Muni's daily struggles, dreams, and dignity. This unit will guide you through the story section by section, helping you to follow the plot, understand the characters, and notice the deeper implications of the "deal" that takes place between the two men.

2.2 Presentation of Subject Matter

2.2.1 Section–1

About the Story:

'A Horse and Two Goats', a short story by the renowned Indian writer R. K. Narayan, offers a rich narrative that serves as an excellent resource for developing reading and comprehension skills among students. The story, set in a small South Indian village, presents a seemingly simple tale that is layered with deeper meanings and themes, making it an ideal text for enhancing critical thinking and understanding.

This story presents a comic dialogue between Muni, a poor Tamil-speaking villager, and a wealthy English-speaking businessman from New York, America. They are engaged in a conversation in which neither can understand the other's language. The foreigner with his English is baffled by the incomprehensible behaviour of Muni, while Muni is equally mystified by the American's strange words and antics. The author makes the story amusing and humorous in many ways. With

gentle humor, Narayan explores the conflicts between rich and poor, and between Indian and Western culture.

Through this story, students are introduced to the unique flavor of Indian Writing in English, a genre that has significantly contributed to global literature. R. K. Narayan, a pioneer of this genre, masterfully blends humor, irony, and social commentary, providing insights into the everyday lives of ordinary people in India. His portrayal of the village of Kritam and its inhabitants allows readers to engage with the cultural and social dynamics of the time.

In addition to its literary merit, "A Horse and Two Goats" also serves as a vehicle for inculcating values among students. The narrative subtly imparts lessons on humility, simplicity, and the importance of understanding and respecting cultural differences. As students explore the interactions between Muni, the impoverished villager, and the affluent American tourist, they are encouraged to reflect on the broader themes of cross-cultural conflicts and globalization.

By studying this story, students not only gain an appreciation for R. K. Narayan's literary contribution but also develop a deeper awareness of the challenges and opportunities that arise from cultural exchanges. This understanding is crucial in a world that is increasingly interconnected, where the ability to navigate and appreciate cultural differences is more important than ever.

"The Setting and Muni's Life"

Kritam is one of the many villages scattered across the Indian landscape, marked by a barely noticeable dot on district survey maps. The maps are primarily for tax officials rather than motorists, as reaching Kritam is difficult due to its location far from the highway, at the end of a rough track created by bullock carts. Despite its tiny size, Kritam's name means "coronet" or "crown" in Tamil, reflecting a grandiose self-perception. The village comprises fewer than thirty houses, with only one made from brick and cement, known as the Big House. This house, brightly painted in yellow and blue and adorned with elaborate carvings of gods and gargoyles, stands in stark contrast to the other houses, which are constructed from bamboo thatch, straw, mud, and other simple materials. Muni's house is the last one in the fourth street, beyond which fields stretch out.

Muni, in his younger and more prosperous days, owned a flock of forty sheep and goats. He would drive them to the highway a couple of miles away each morning and sit by a clay statue of a horse while the cattle grazed. Armed with a bamboo pole with a crook at the end, he would gather foliage from avenue trees to feed his flock and collect faggots and dry sticks for fuel. His wife, though old, was slightly younger than he was and took care of the household. She would light the domestic fire at dawn, boil water in a mud pot, mix in some millet flour and salt, and give him his first nourishment of the day. She also used to pack a similar millet ball for his lunch, which he used to eat with a raw onion.

Over time, Muni's fortunes decline unnoticed. From his original flock of forty, he was now left with only two goats. His all other goats caught deadly disease. The Big House charges a rent of half a rupee per month for the use of their pen, which Muni can no longer afford, so the goats are tethered to a drumstick tree in front of his hut. This morning, Muni manages to gather six drumsticks from the tree and brings them inside, feeling triumphant. He considers the tree his own because he lives in its shadow, even though no one can precisely claim ownership.

Muni's wife suggests that if he were content with drumstick leaves alone, she can boil and salt some for him, but Muni is tired of the leaves and craves for the drumsticks in a sauce. His wife retorts that he only has four teeth left but still craves big things. She agrees to prepare the sauce if he can get all the necessary ingredients: rice or millet, dhal, chili, curry leaves, mustard, coriander, gingerly oil, and one large potato. Muni repeats the list to himself to remember it and walks to the shop in the third street.

At the shop, Muni sits on an upturned packing case, clearing his throat and coughing to catch the shopman's attention. The shopman eventually notices him and jokingly calls him a "young man," which makes Muni laugh excessively to please the shopman. The shopman, pleased by Muni's response, engages in local gossip with him, which typically includes references to the postman's wife, who had eloped to the city. The shopman harbors a grudge against the postman, who frequently evades paying his debts.

Muni often asks the shopman for food items on credit, promising to repay later. Sometimes the shopman obliges, but on this particular day, he loses his temper and

berates Muni for his unpaid debts. The shopman takes out his ledger and reminds Muni of his longstanding debt of five rupees and a quarter, suggesting that paying it off might allow him entry to heaven (swarga). Muni, caught off guard, mumbles that his daughter had promised to send money for his fiftieth birthday. The shopman doubts Muni's claim, questioning his age and recalling that Muni had mentioned a birthday just five weeks earlier when asking for castor oil. Muni, unsure of his exact age, repeats "fifty" weakly, but the shopman and other onlookers suggests he is more likely seventy.

Feeling humiliated and exposed, Muni eventually leaves the shop and returns home empty-handed. He tells his wife that the shopman has refused to give him anything and suggests her to sell the drumsticks. His wife, frustrated and unable to find anything to give him to eat, tells him to fast until evening, believing it would do him good. She then sends him off with the goats, instructing him not to return before sunset. Muni knows that if he complies, she would somehow find a way to conjure up some food for dinner. Her temper, though volatile in the morning, usually improves by evening. She would likely go out to work, grinding corn at the Big House, sweeping, or scrubbing somewhere, earning enough to buy food and prepare a meal for him.

Despite their dire situation, Muni and his wife manage to scrape by through her occasional labor, relying on the generosity of the Big House for water and sometimes food. Muni's life, marked by a steady decline from moderate prosperity to stark poverty, reflects the harsh realities faced by many villagers in rural India. His daily struggles and the dynamics of his relationship with his wife paints a vivid picture of survival in a small, forgotten village like Kritam.

"Visit to Statue and the Meeting with the American"

Muni, lets loose his two scrawny goats from the drumstick tree near his hut. He drives them forward with peculiar cries, keeping his head down, lost in thought, and avoiding eye contact with the villagers. He bypasses old acquaintances lounging in the temple corridor, recalling better times when he was wealthier and owned a larger flock of sheep. Those days, the town butcher would visit him weekly, bringing gifts of betel leaves, tobacco, and occasionally bhang, which they would smoke together in a secluded coconut grove. These memories now seem like relics of a previous life.

Muni's fortunes declined after a pestilence wiped out his sheep. His only remaining animals are the two goats, which he wishes someone would take off his hands. The village shopman claims Muni is seventy years old, an age where one waits for God's call. Muni reflects on his life, worrying about his wife's future after his death. They married as children when Muni was 10 and his wife was just 8 years old. They have no progeny, which he believes could have brought them divine blessings. Despite the lack of children, Muni has a fondness for his cousin's daughters in the neighboring village, considering them as good as his own.

As Muni walks through the village with his goats, he avoids looking at anyone, aware that they see him as the poorest man in their caste. Comments about his goats and his poverty follow him, but he remains stoic. Only when he reaches the outskirts of the village he lifts his head, guiding the goats to the foot of a life-sized clay horse statue at the village edge. Muni spends his days sitting on the statue's pedestal, watching the highway and the passing vehicles, feeling a connection to the larger world.

While sitting at the statue, Muni watches the sun and waits for a signal to return home. He knows his wife would be more sympathetic if he returns home later, giving her time to prepare food and cool off her temper.

The horse is nearly life-size, molded out of clay, baked, burnt, and brightly colored. It rears its head proudly, prancing its forelegs in the air and flourishing its tail in a loop. Behind the horse stands a warrior with scythe-like mustachios, bugling eyes, and an aquiline nose. The old image-makers believed in indicating a man of strength by bulging out his eyes and sharpening his moustache tips. Muni insists that he knows the beads to sparkle like the nine gems at one time in his life.

The horse itself is said to be as white as a dhobi-washed sheet and had a cover of ure brocade of red and black lace, matching the multicolored sash around the waist of the warrior. But none in the village remembered the splendor as no one noticed its existence. Even Muni, who has spent all his waking hours at its foot, never bothers to look up. The statue had been closer to the population of the village, but when the highway was laid through or the tank and wells dried up completely, the village moved a couple of miles inland.

Muni sits at the foot of a statue, watching his two goats graze in the arid soil. He

watches the sun tilted westward, but it's not the time to go back home. He must give his wife time to cool off and feel sympathetic before she can scrounge and get some food. He watches the mountain road for a time signal when a green bus appears around the bend.

As he observes a yellow vehicle coming down at full-speed, he notices a red-faced foreigner driving it. As he waits, he notices a new type of vehicle approaching—a yellow car-bus hybrid. It stops near him, and a red-faced foreigner, dressed in khaki, steps out. The man, who turns out to be an American, inspects his vehicle and then notices the horse statue, exclaiming "Marvelous!" Muni is intrigued by the novelty of such spectacles, but late work at the source of the river on the mountain makes him casually describe everything he sees. Today, while observing the yellow vehicle, he notices a red-faced foreigner stopping in front of him. The foreigner approaches Muni, asking for a gas station nearby or waiting until another car comes. Muni tries to escape, but he cannot easily extricate himself from his seat and the goats. The foreigner asks for gas station first and when he sees the horse statue, he starts to praise it.

The foreigner takes out his silver cigarette case and lights a cigarette, asking Muni if he smokes. Muni responds with surprise, having had no offer of a smoke from anyone for years now. He had always wanted to smoke a cigarette, but only once did a shopman give him one on credit. The other, puzzled but undaunted, flicks the light open and lights Muni's cigarette. Muni draws a deep puff and starts coughing, which is racking but extremely pleasant. When his cough subsided, he wipes his eyes and takes stock of the situation, understating that the other man was not an inquisitor. Yet, he remains wary, no need to run away from a man who gave him such a potent smoke.

The American introduces himself as coming from New York and presents Muni with his card, which Muni fears might be a warrant for his arrest. Despite his wariness, Muni listens as the American explains his visit to India, describing how a power failure in New York led him and his wife, Ruth to decide on a trip to India. The American's wife is currently in Srinagar while he tours the country. Muni can't understand any English so he starts to think that the foreigner is a policeman and investigating the murder happened in neighboring village. Muni is hesitant to answer

the question, fearing that he might be trying to present a warrant and arrest him. He is a native of the famous Tamil village of Kritam, which is known for its rich history and cultural heritage.

Muni, in his confusion and nervousness, talks about various village matters. He assures the American that his village has always had a clean record and that any wrongdoing must be from the neighboring village. The American, not understanding Muni's Tamil, continues to ask questions about the statue, impressed by its craftsmanship. Out of fear, Muni starts to explain in his language the recent incident where a body was found mutilated and thrown under a tamarind tree at the border between Kritam and Kuppam, leading to much gossip and speculation. Muni assures the man that his village has a clean record and that their village has always had a clean record.

The man then asks Muni to speak slowly and understand English, as everyone in the country seems to know it. Muni makes some indistinct sounds in his throat and shook his head. The other person then goes on to explain in detail his background, explaining that he was stuck in a power failure in Connecticut last August and decided to visit India this winter along with his wife, Ruth.

As the conversation continues, Muni becomes more comfortable, especially after the American offers him another cigarette. The American, trying to bridge the communication gap, speaks slowly and clearly, explaining his fascination with different cultures and his desire to explore India. Muni, though still not fully understanding, feels a sense of connection with the foreigner, appreciating the rare opportunity to share a cigarette and a conversation with someone from far away.

Muni is reflective at the end of the oration and says "Yes, no" as a concession to the other's language. He then goes on to explain that he had heard his uncle say something about losing cattle and that the priest at the temple can see the face of the thief in the camphor flame when caught. The American observes Muni's hands intently and asks him what he means by "chop something." Foreigner admits that he enjoys a hobby of chopping wood for the fireplace.

A) ***"The Deal and the Irony"***

Muni, feeling utterly confused and willing to leave, attempts to walk away

muttering, “Must go home.” However, the foreigner grabs his shoulder and, desperate to communicate, asks, “Is there no one here to translate for me?” He scans the deserted road under the sweltering afternoon sun, where a sudden gust of wind whips up dust and dead leaves into a ghostly column heading towards the mountain road. The stranger, almost pinning Muni to the statue, asks, “Isn't this statue yours? Why don't you sell it to me?”

Muni finally grasps the man's reference to the horse and begins recounting its history in Tamil. Muni follows the man’s gestures and slowly comprehends the conversation topic, feeling relieved that the subject has shifted from a mutilated body to the statue. He eagerly continues, “I was a child when my grandfather told me about this horse and the warrior, and my grandfather was a child when…” Each attempt to explain the statue's antiquity deepens Muni’s reminiscence. The foreigner interrupts, “I don't want to waste my time here. I will offer you a good price for this,” gesturing at the horse, assuming Muni owns it due to his authoritative demeanor on the pedestal.

The foreigner, fascinated by the musicality of Muni’s Tamil, wishes he has a tape recorder. “Your language sounds wonderful. I enjoy every word you say. You don't need to explain its points to me,” he said, assuming Muni was engaging in a sales pitch.

Muni, recounting his past, says, “I never went to school; only Brahmins went. We worked in the fields from dawn to dusk, and during harvest, I could play by the tank. I don't know your language. Only learned men and officers do. Our postman knew it but doesn't speak anymore after his wife left him. Women must be watched, or they sell themselves and the home.” He chuckles at his own joke.

The foreigner laughs heartily, offers Muni another cigarette, and, reassures by the continuous supply, Muni decides to stay. The American, standing on the pedestal, lectures, “I could give a better sales talk for this. This is a marvelous combination of colors, though faded. How do you achieve such colors?”

Muni, now sure the topic is the horse and not the dead body, says, “This is our guardian. It signifies death to our enemies. At the end of Kali Yuga, the Redeemer will come as a horse named Kalki, who will come to life, gallop, and trample all bad men.” As Muni speaks of bad men, he envisions his shopkeeper and brother-in-law

being trampled by the horse, enjoying the thought.

As Muni visualizes this scene, the foreigner, oblivious to Muni's narrative, assures, “This will have the best home in the U.S.A. I'll push away the bookcase, and if Ruth disapproves, I'll convince her. We might need to shift the TV, but I’ll place it in the middle of the living room. Ruth will likely worry about parties, but we'll stand around it and have our drinks.”

Muni continues describing the end of the world, “Our pundit said the oceans will cover the earth, carrying good people and flooding the evil ones. Do you know when this will happen?”

The foreigner, misinterpreting the question, responds about transportation, “I can push the seat back and make room in the rear. The van can take an elephant.”

Muni, still on avatars, says, “I never missed our pundit's temple discourses. He said Vishnu, the highest god, comes to save us when evil men trouble us. He has come many times. First, as a great fish that saved the scriptures during a flood…”

“I’m a modest businessman dealing in coffee,” the foreigner interjects.

Muni catches the word “coffee” and replies, “If you want coffee, drive to the next town during Friday market. They have coffee hotels. I don't wander about; I go nowhere.” Returning to avatars, he says, “The first avatar was a little fish that grew into a huge whale, saving the holy books. The next was a wild boar that lifted the earth from the sea…”

The foreigner, trying to emphasize his modesty, repeats, “I am not a millionaire. We can only afford sixty minutes of TV time a month, though we hope to sponsor a regular show if sales go up.”

Muni, intoxicated by his memories, explains, “When we played Ramayana, they dressed me as Sita. I had a good voice, and they always gave me the women’s roles. I was always Goddess Lakshmi, in a brocade sari…”

The foreigner, realizing time was slipping away, asks, “Will you accept a hundred rupees for the horse? I’d take the soldier too, but no space this year. I’ll have to cancel my air ticket and take a boat home with the horse in my cabin if necessary.” He smiles at the thought and adds, “I’ll pad it with straw so it doesn’t break.”

“When we played Ramayana, they dressed me as Sita,” Muni continues. “A

teacher taught us songs, and we paid him fifty rupees. He played Rama and destroyed Ravana, the demon with ten heads. Do you know the story of Ramayana?"

The foreigner, wanting to finalize the deal, replies, "I have a station wagon. I can take the horse if you help me."

"Do you know Mahabharata? Krishna, the eighth avatar, helped the Five Brothers regain their kingdom. As a baby, he danced on a giant serpent, trampled it to death, and then sucked the demoness's breasts flat," Muni elaborates, gesturing with his hands. The foreigner, mystified, asks, "What are you saying? Your answer is crucial. We need to talk business."

"When the tenth avatar comes, do you know where we'll be?" Muni asks.

"Help me lift the horse from its pedestal, and we can do anything if we understand each other," the foreigner insists.

Mutual mystification is complete. The old man chatters on, balancing the conversational credits and debits, saying, "Oh, honorable one, I hope God has blessed you with numerous progeny. You seem like a good man, willing to talk to an old man like me. All day, I have no one to talk to, except when someone asks for tobacco. But I've given up chewing; it's too expensive now." Noting the foreigner's interest, Muni asks, "How many children do you have?" The foreigner, misunderstanding, repeats, "I said a hundred," encouraging Muni to ask about his children's genders and marriages.

The foreigner, realizing the old man expected money, takes out a hundred-rupee note and said, "Well, this is what I meant."

Muni, seeing the note, thinks the man was asking for change. Laughing, he says, "Ask our headman, who's a moneylender. He can change a lakh of rupees in gold sovereigns. He disguises himself in rags to mislead the public. But he thinks I took his pumpkins, so he doesn't like me."

The foreigner, deciding to show interest in Muni's goats, strokes their backs. Muni, now understanding the man wanted to buy his goats, thinks his dream of opening a small shop with the money was coming true. He envisioned selling fired nuts, colored sweets, and green coconut under a thatched roof on this spot.

The foreigner gives Muni one hundred rupees in tens now saying, "This is for

you, or you may share it if you have a partner."

Muni, thinking the foreigner would take the goats, asks, "Are you carrying them in that?"

"Yes, of course," the foreigner replies, thinking he meant the horse.

"This will be their first ride in a motor car," Muni says. "Take them after I'm out of sight, or they'll follow me." He salutes, turns, and walks away.

The foreigner watches Muni walking away, and then looks at the goats grazing peacefully. He imagines the horse perched on its pedestal in the westerly sun perches on the pedestal of the horse, as the westerly sun touches off and seems to set the warrior's head aflame, He ponders, "I guess he went to get some assistance!" and sits down to wait. After some time, he stops a truck that was going downhill and enlists the assistance of a few men to remove the horse from its pedestal and loads it into his station wagon. He pays each of them five rupees, and in exchange, they help him start his engine and siphons off petrol from the truck.

With the money safely tucked away at his waist dhoti, Muni rushes home. As his wife crouched in front of the heated oven, wondering whether food might miraculously fall from the sky, he closes the street door and steals up to her quietly. Muni shows off his luck for the day. Taking the notes from him, she counts them using the fire's light before exclaiming, "One hundred rupees! What did you get it from? Have you been stealing?

"I have sold our goats to a red-faced man. He handed me all of this money and drove them away because he was so crazy to have them!

But when he just finishes speaking, they hear the bleating outside. The two goats come at her door when she opens it. "They're here!" she says. "What does all of this mean?"

He swears loudly, grabs one of the goats by the ears, and yells, "Where is that man? Are you unaware that you belong to him? Why did you return?" The goat just wriggles in his hands. He also poses the identical query to the other. The goat gives a self-shake. "The police will come tonight and break your bones if you have stolen," his wife threatens, giving him a fierce look. "Keep me out of it. I'm going to my parent's house."

Summary:

"A Horse and Two Goats" by R.K. Narayan is a story about a poor villager named Muni who lives in a small, remote village in India. Muni, who once had a prosperous life with a large flock of sheep, is now left with just two goats. One day, while he is sitting by the side of the road near a statue of a horse, a wealthy American tourist arrives in a car and tries to communicate with Muni, who only speaks Tamil.

The story revolves around a humorous misunderstanding between Muni and the American. The American thinks Muni is the owner of the horse statue and wants to buy it, while Muni believes the American is asking about his goats. Despite neither understanding the other's language, the American ends up giving Muni a hundred rupees, thinking he has bought the statue. Muni, on the other hand, believes he has sold his goats.

The story highlights the cultural and linguistic gap between the two characters, creating a comic situation where both walk away satisfied but completely misunderstanding each other's intentions. The tale also sheds light on the stark differences in wealth, lifestyle, and worldview between rural India and the Western world.

a) The Priest

- Arun Kolatkar

2.1 Objectives

After studying this **unit**, you will be able to:

1. Develop your reading and comprehension skills through a close study of a modern Indian English poem.
2. Develop an appreciation for poetic language, imagery, and form in contemporary Indian poetry.
3. Understand the historical, social, and cultural context of pilgrimage and temple worship in Maharashtra as reflected in the poem.
4. Analyse the structure, style, and thematic elements of Arun Kolatkar's "The Priest," including its use of irony and visual detail.

2.2 Introduction

"The Priest" is a well-known poem by Arun Kolatkar from his celebrated collection *Jejuri*, which is based on the poet's visit to the pilgrimage town of Jejuri in Maharashtra. The poem offers a sharp, almost cinematic sketch of a temple priest who serves at the shrine of Khandoba. Rather than presenting the priest as a purely holy or spiritual figure, Kolatkar portrays him as an ordinary, vulnerable human being, deeply concerned about his daily survival and the offerings of the pilgrims.

Through this portrait, the poem invites us to question romantic and idealized views of religion and pilgrimage. It shows how faith, ritual, hunger, expectation, and economic need are closely linked in the everyday life of temple workers. Kolatkar's language is simple and conversational, but his images are powerful and suggestive. The poem becomes an example of how modern Indian poetry in English can explore complex themes—such as spirituality, poverty, and hypocrisy—through brief, visual scenes and understated irony.

2.3 Presentation of Subject Matter

In this section, the poem is discussed in terms of:

- The figure of the priest as presented in the poem
- The setting of Jejuri and the temple environment
- The priest's expectations and inner thoughts
- The poet's attitude and use of irony

You may first read the poem in your textbook. Then use the explanations given here to understand each part clearly.

2.3.1 The Priest and His Setting

The priest in the poem serves at the temple of Khandoba at Jejuri. He lives either on the temple premises or very close to it, and his life depends on the offerings brought by pilgrims. The poem shows him early in the morning, waiting by the roadside or near a culvert wall, looking anxiously for the arrival of the bus that will bring pilgrims to the shrine.

Instead of describing the temple in grand or spiritual terms, Kolatkar focuses on small, realistic details: the cold surface of the culvert, the long road, the bus that may or may not arrive on time. The priest's body itself is compared to an "offering"—suggesting that he is worn out, almost sacrificed, by years of service and poverty. This image blurs the line between the sacrificer and the sacrificed, hinting at the cost of religious labour on the human body.

The setting of Jejuri, a famous pilgrimage centre, is therefore not idealised. It appears as a place where faith, business, expectation, and disappointment are mixed together.

2.3.2 The Priest's Expectations

The poem presents the priest waiting "eagerly and suspensefully" for the pilgrim bus. His concern is not only spiritual; he is thinking of the offerings—money, coconuts, food— that pilgrims will bring to the temple. As the chief pujari and custodian of the deity, he receives these offerings as his main source of livelihood.

Critics point out that in the poem the priest even prays for the bus to arrive soon, repeating mantras as if the arrival of pilgrims is itself an object of prayer. This creates an ironic situation: the priest prays not only for the god's blessings on devotees but also for his own material security. The poem thus suggests how economic dependence on offerings can shape religious behaviour.

The anxiety of the priest—will the bus come on time, will there be enough pilgrims, will he get sufficient offerings or even his favourite sweet dish—is shown indirectly through his posture, glance at the road, and inner thoughts. Kolatkar allows us to see the human, worried side of a religious figure.

2.3.3 The Poet's Perspective and Irony

Although the poem revolves around the priest, the implied observer is the poet himself, who stands slightly outside the scene, watching and describing. Kolatkar's tone is not openly angry or sentimental; it is cool, observant, and ironic. He does not call the priest "good" or "bad," but the details he selects suggest both sympathy and critique.

On one hand, the priest appears as a poor, aging man whose body is tired and whose life is tied to the uncertain flow of pilgrims. On the other hand, he is also shown as someone whose focus is more on offerings than on pure devotion. Scholars argue that Kolatkar uses this double view to comment on the commercialization of faith and the gap between ideal spirituality and actual practice at pilgrimage sites.

The irony deepens when we remember that the poet himself is also a visitor to Jejuri, but not a typical pilgrim. He is an observer who does not fully share the priest's beliefs, and he refuses to enter the "old man's head," that is, to adopt the priest's blind faith. This creates a contrast between skepticism and belief, between modern, questioning attitudes and traditional ritualistic practices.

2.3.4 Language, Imagery, and Form

"The Priest" is written in free verse without a fixed rhyme scheme. The lines are short and visually striking, almost like still images in a film. Kolatkar uses:

- **Concrete, physical imagery**: parts of the body, the bus, the culvert wall, broken shrines.
- **Colloquial diction**: simple, everyday English that keeps the poem close to

ordinary speech.

- **Symbolic details**: the “broken down shrine,” the “pair of eyes” from an old idol, the priest’s posture and gaze.

These elements make the poem accessible to students while offering deeper meanings for careful readers. The structure of the poem follows the movement of time—from the priest’s waiting to the eventual arrival of the pilgrims’ bus—and captures a complete scene in a few brief stanzas.

2.4 Check Your Progress

Answer the following questions in your own words.

1. Short Answer Questions (1–2 sentences each):
   a) Who is the central figure in the poem “The Priest,” and where does he work?
   b) Why is the priest so concerned about the arrival of the bus?
   c) What do the offerings of the pilgrims mean for the priest’s daily life?
2. Brief Descriptive Questions (3–4 sentences each):
   a) Describe the setting of the poem and the atmosphere created by Kolatkar.
   b) How does the poet show the tension between faith and economic need in the priest’s life?
3. Conceptual Questions:
   a) What is ironic about the way the priest prays in the poem?
   b) In what way does the poem question idealised pictures of religious devotion?

2.5 Summary

“The Priest” by Arun Kolatkar is a vivid, ironic portrait of a temple priest at Jejuri, a famous pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra. The poem shows the priest waiting by the roadside for the morning bus that brings pilgrims to the temple of Khandoba. His posture and thoughts reveal not only his religious role as a pujari but also his anxiety about getting enough offerings to survive.

Kolatkar presents the priest through sharp visual images and simple, conversational language. The priest’s body is compared to an offering, suggesting

that years of service and poverty have almost sacrificed him. The poem highlights the way economic need and religious ritual get mixed, as the priest prays for the arrival of pilgrims who will provide him with food and money.

At the same time, the poet remains a somewhat detached observer, questioning romantic images of holy men and sacred places. The broken shrines, the tired body of the priest, and his dependence on offerings together suggest a world where faith coexists with hunger, doubt, and commercialization. In this way, "The Priest" becomes not only a portrait of one man but also a comment on the condition of religion and religious functionaries in modern India.

2.6 Terms to Remember

1. **Free Verse**: A type of poetry that does not follow a regular rhyme scheme or metre, used by Kolatkar to create a natural, speech-like rhythm.
2. **Imagery**: Descriptive language that appeals to the senses (sight, sound, touch, etc.), such as the description of the priest's body or the broken shrine.
3. **Irony**: A contrast between appearance and reality, or between what is expected and what actually happens; here, the priest's "prayer" is strongly linked to his material expectations.
4. **Persona**: The speaker or voice in the poem; in *Jejuri*, the persona often resembles a skeptical visitor observing religious scenes.
5. **Pilgrimage**: A journey to a holy place for religious reasons; Jejuri is one such pilgrimage centre dedicated to Khandoba.
6. **Commercialization of Faith**: The process by which religious practices become linked with business and money-making, as suggested by the priest's dependence on offerings.

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Model Points)

(Students' answers may be worded differently. These are key points for reference.)

1. a) The central figure is a temple priest at Jejuri, who serves at the shrine of Khandoba.

   b) He is concerned because the bus brings pilgrims, whose offerings are his

main source of income.

c) The offerings provide him with food, money, and basic security; they are essential for his survival.

2. a) The poem is set near a temple in Jejuri, by a roadside or culvert, in the early morning. The atmosphere is tense and expectant, as the priest waits for the bus to appear in the distance.

   b) Kolatkar shows the priest chanting prayers while looking anxiously at the road, making it clear that his religious activity is tied to his hope for material gain.

3. a) The irony lies in the fact that the priest's prayer is not only for spiritual reasons; he prays for the bus to arrive so that he can receive offerings from pilgrims.

   b) By focusing on poverty, broken shrines, and the priest's economic worries, the poem questions pure, idealised images of devotional life at pilgrimage centres.

2.8 Exercise

1. **Short Answer (2–3 sentences each):**

   a) How does Kolatkar humanise the figure of the priest in the poem?

   b) What do the images of the broken shrine and the priest's tired body suggest about faith and time?

2. **Long Answer (150–200 words each):**

   a) Discuss the theme of spirituality versus material need in "The Priest."

   b) Examine the use of imagery and irony in the poem, with reference to at least three specific details.

3. **Activity-based Tasks:**

a) Imagine you are a modern visitor to Jejuri. Write a short prose sketch (120–150 words) describing the priest from your point of view, using some of the images from the poem.

b) Compare "The Priest" with any other poem or story you know where a religious figure is shown as ordinary and flawed. What similarities and differences do you notice?

B) THE RAVEN

- Edgar Allan Poe

About the Author:

Edgar Allan Poe, born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, was a famous American writer known for his eerie and imaginative stories. After losing his parents early, he was raised by John and Frances Allan in Virginia. Poe had a troubled life, including financial problems and a difficult marriage. Poe started his writing career with poetry in 1827 but became well-known for his short stories and poems like "The Raven," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Fall of the House of Usher." He worked as an editor and critic in cities like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Despite struggles with money and alcohol, Poe's work greatly influenced the genres of horror and detective fiction. He died on October 7, 1849, in Baltimore under mysterious circumstances.

About the Poem:

"The Raven," published in 1845, is one of his most famous poems. It tells the story of a man who is visited by a talking raven late at night. The raven's repeated word, "Nevermore," drives the man to despair as he questions the meaning of his sorrow. The poem is known for its dark, haunting mood and rhythmic, musical quality. "The Raven" explores themes of grief and loss, capturing the reader with its mysterious and emotional atmosphere.

Summary

Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven" is a haunting and emotional tale about a man struggling with deep grief over the loss of his beloved Lenore. The poem begins on a cold December night. The narrator is alone in his room, reading old, forgotten books to distract himself from his sorrow and to seek some comfort.

As he reads, he hears a gentle tapping sound at his chamber door. The sound is so soft and faint that he initially thinks it might be a visitor. The narrator is tired and weary, but he tries to reassure himself by thinking it's just someone knocking. He opens the door, but to his disappointment, he finds nothing there but darkness.

Returning to his room, he continues to hear the tapping, which grows louder. He convinces himself that it must be the wind, so he opens a window to investigate. To his surprise, a large, majestic raven flies into the room and lands on a statue of Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom, which is placed above his door.

The narrator is intrigued by this mysterious bird and begins to talk to it. He asks the raven for its name and if it has any message for him. The raven replies with the word "Nevermore," which means "never again." The repeated word unsettles the narrator and fills him with a growing sense of dread.

As the night progresses, the narrator becomes increasingly desperate. He questions the raven about whether he will ever find relief from his grief or if he will be reunited with Lenore in the afterlife. Each time, the raven's response remains the same: "Nevermore." This repeated answer intensifies the narrator's anguish and hopelessness.

The narrator becomes more distraught and tries to convince himself that the raven's responses are just the result of some past unhappy master who taught the bird this one word. Despite this rationalization, the raven's presence and its single word continue to torment him.

Finally, the narrator demands that the raven leave, asking it to take its beak from his heart and to fly away. However, the raven remains perched on the statue, still looking down at him with its eerie eyes. The poem concludes with the narrator realizing that his soul will be trapped in endless grief, just as the raven will stay perched above his door, casting a shadow that symbolizes his eternal sorrow.