

# QUESTIONS

- How could you read this novel as a struggle between modern life and established traditions?
- How could you see this as a religious novel about how to live or co-exist in society?
- How do the first few pages of the novel set us up for such an interpretation?

# Traditional vs Modern

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  - in the work of the printing press?
  - in the role of women?
  - in the role of men?
  - in religion and religious observance?
  - in a seeming resistance to “progress” or change?

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How is tradition valuable?

How is it disruptive?

- Where do we see the “modern”?

- Where do we see the “modern”?
  - in Vasu?
  - in Rangi?
  - in Nataraj’s wife?
  - in technology?
  - in education?
  - in notions of “progress” or change?

- How is the novel a struggle between good vs. evil?



- What is the significance of the printing press?
- How does it compare the James' printing press in *The Long Song*?

# QUESTIONS

- What is the significance of time in the novel? How is it both important and unimportant?
- How could you read this novel as a struggle between modern life and established traditions?
- How could you see this as a religious or spiritual novel about the meaning of life and how to live or co-exist in society?
- How is the novel a struggle between good vs. evil?
- How does Nataraj's treatment of his wife and family affect your reading of the novel?
- What is the significance of the printing press?
- How are some of the other characters rep of society? What are the various jobs that are represented, and how are they rated in importance?

# Rakshasa

- A demon or evil spirit in Hinduism.
- Many Rakshasas were particularly wicked humans in previous incarnations.
- Rakshasas are notorious for disturbing sacrifices, desecrating graves, harassing priests, possessing human beings.
- They are shapechangers and magicians.

- Vasu is the most likely Rakshasa figure in the novel (85)
- But Rangi when she first speaks is presented as if she were too: remember she appears as an “animated hyena” (113) whispering from behind the bamboo curtain

# Vasu/Rakshasa

- Shapeshifting; appearing and disappearing
- Larger than life
- Lust for human flesh
- Potentially desecrating animal life with guns, taxidermy
- Particularly wicked
- Disrupting ceremony

# Questions to ask

- What are the cultural implications of introducing a Rakshasa figure? How does this *representation* affect the representation of other things/people? What does it mean to have the spiritual operating in the “real” world?
- How is this different from the way we see God in our Christian lives?

# Think about this in relation to the postcolonial:

- How is tradition valuable? How is it disruptive?
- How is modernization valuable? How is it disruptive?
- Does modernization have to happen at the expense of tradition?
- Does tradition have to counter modernization?
- How does the novel negotiate or propose a balance between the two?

# India vs the West

- India vs the West  $\neq$  tradition vs modern: that is, India is not presented in the novel as a country mired in a regressive past that needs the modernization that colonization brings
- But it may also be engaging with/responding to colonialist notions of “India,” not to reaffirm them, but to displace them



- White westerners do not figure in this novel, except as they are represented by technologies and ideas—AND as the colonial presence that leads to cultural condition within which recovery/preservation/foregrounding of the past, and of tradition comes to be of vital importance

# The Ballad of East and West

## Rudyard Kipling

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never  
the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's  
great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor  
Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho'  
they come from the ends of the earth!

# Printing Presses and Taxidermy

- Both are technologies of *preservation*
- Even if not both necessarily historically “western,” both have extensive histories in western cultures: printing emerges in Europe with the work of Johannes Gutenberg ca. 1450 to develop movable type (although movable type had been used in China for centuries); taxidermy takes off as a cultural medium in the west in the 1800s-- in the period of imperialism and colonization

- The novel *foregrounds* the western associations with the technologies--for printing by constantly drawing attention to the Heidelberg press (although it never actually gets visibly used), and for taxidermy by making implicit its opposition to cultural practices in Malgudi

- BUT it also *foregrounds* the extent to which what is really being *reproduced* on Nataraj's press are cultural documents that speak to a spiritual belief system and to a nationally-situated art
- It's less clear what's being *preserved* in Vasu's taxidermy; rather, it's something that needs to be stopped or expelled because it's potentially destructive

- Taxidermy's potential destructiveness, in the novel, threatens to enter into the cultural work of reproduction in the print shop when Vasu wants Nataraj to print his book
- How can we compare Thomas' press to Nataraj's?
- Would Thomas like the Heidelberg?

# Women

- To engage with the representation of women or men in a literary work is to engage in a kind of critical analysis in which the category of gender is the object of investigation.
- “Gender” is a term that usually refers to biological (natural, essential) **and/or** cultural (constructed, performed) sexual difference
- The action of the novel revolves around men, primarily--or men and elephants--but women play crucial roles in the story.

# Things to think about

- Nataraj's shop vs the rest of the house: public vs private; commercial vs domestic; masculine vs feminine
- Women as “keepers” or guardians of tradition
- Women as *disrupters* of tradition
- Wives vs not-wives
- Rangi--as demonic, spiritual, maternal, sexual (81)



# Questions to ask

- How does the text represent women? What does it suggest are their salient characteristics? What does it present as their role in society? What does it position as their cultural work? How does it represent them differently from men? What associations--symbolic, narrative--are made for and with regard to women?

# Questions to ask in a general way

- How do you actually effect non-violent resistance without being violent? Does Nataraj succeed? Rangi? The novel, in promoting such an idea?
- How do you contend with evil and aggression? When do you start resisting?
- If your beliefs have been compromised, what should you do to reaffirm them?

# How is Gandhi in the novel--and why does it matter?

- Gandhi isn't a *character* in the novel in the sense that he figures as an agent within the *plot*; we don't see him; he doesn't speak or appear or do anything with regard to the action of the story
- BUT he plays a role in the way the story is told and in what the book is about—partly at a **symbolic** level

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# Symbols vs Metaphors

- If we think about symbols as being different from metaphors, the primary difference has to do with the extent to which a metaphor evokes an object in order to demonstrate a quality or an idea, whereas a symbol embodies that quality or idea.
- If Gandhi functions in the novel *symbolically*, it's because he—the real person—can be understood to have taken on this kind of value in representation, in terms of a quality or idea that the mere invocation of his name can bring into the text.

# Symbols and Icons

- It might be said that at a symbolic level Gandhi is *iconic*; that is, he—as image in the novel—somehow resembles in form or shape or nature that which is signified by his name.
- “Gandhi”—the term, the *icon*—*means* or invokes a certain set of characteristics, a way of being, a philosophy, a politics.

# What does “Gandhi” mean? Or, what does Gandhi represent?

- **Set of characteristics:** civil disobedience, pacifism, resistance through non-violent means, spiritual leadership, responsibility to lead when called, sense of human frailty, sense of human power to effect change—collectively and individually, profound faith, profound conviction, holistic engagement of all aspects of personal and political life

- **Way of being:** My soul refuses to be satisfied so long as it is a helpless witness of a single wrong or a single misery. But it is not possible for me, a weak, frail, miserable being, to mend every wrong or to hold myself free of blame for all the wrong I see.



- **Philosophy:** I am but a seeker after Truth. I claim to have found a way to it. I claim to be making a ceaseless effort to find it. But I admit that I have not yet found it.

- **Politics:** non-violent nationalism
- ...I do entertain the hope that there is yet work for me to do, that the darkness that seems to have enveloped me will disappear, and that...India will come to her own demonstrably through non-violent means.

# Representing the nation

- It's possible to see Gandhi figuring in the novel as a *symbol* of nation, and thus representing the ways in which a national community imagines itself, what it sees as its shared values and goals.

- As for my leadership, if I have it, it has not come for any seeking; it is a fruit of faithful service. A man can as little discard such leadership as he can the colour of his skin. And since I have become an integral part of the nation, it has to keep me with my faults and shortcomings, of some of which I am painfully conscious and of many others of which candid critics, thanks be to them, never fail to remind me.

# Questions to ponder

- How does the novel take a Gandhian position with regard to its representation of India? Or to day-to-day life for humans more generally?
- Does the novel take up a Gandhian philosophy?
- Is the novel *thematically* Gandhian? That is, do Gandhian philosophies or ideas function at the level of *themes*?
- Is the novel *politically* Gandhian? That is, is it working to promote a vision of India comprehensible in relation to the work of Gandhi?

# How do we define and configure *nation*?

- A people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language; a nationality. A relatively large group of people organized under a single, usually independent government; a country.

# How do we define and configure *nation*?

- Is this a valid definition, or are there problems with it?
- Is it an imaginary construct, or is it a real place?
- Is it political, ideological, cultural?
- Are there such things as national identities?

# How do we define and configure *nation*?

- Is it an imaginary construct, or is it a real place?
- Is it political, ideological, cultural?
- Are there such things as national identities?
- The act of drawing up borderlines defining a nation-state and a national identity is deeply problematic. On what criteria do you define a nation's essence? shared language? hair colour? size of ears? Who belongs and who is excluded, and who decides? Nations like to see themselves as natural phenomena, but are in fact imagined communities
- National identities are usually defined, and serve the interests of, the most powerful group in the nation-state. Vasu is a patriot (p 17), so why must he be eliminated?



# India vs. the West

- India vs. the West  $\neq$  tradition vs. modern: that is, India is not presented in the novel as a country mired in a regressive past that needs the modernization that colonization brings.
- But it may also be engaging with/responding to colonialist notions of “India,” not to reaffirm them, but to displace them.
- The nation of India, then, is partly defined by how it is not like the West (like our use of the term *Other*), and how the community bands together to get rid of Vasu, and to confirm community through the parade and celebration.

# India vs. the West

- Westerners do not figure in this novel, except as they are represented by technologies and ideas.
- However, the colonial presence leads to the cultural condition within which the novel attempts to recover/preserve/foreground the past, and demonstrate how tradition comes to be of vital importance to ideas of nation.

# India vs. the West

- The novel *foregrounds* the western associations with the technologies for printing by constantly drawing attention to the Heidelberg press (although it never actually gets visibly used), and for taxidermy by making implicit its opposition to cultural practices in Malgudi

# India vs. the West

- BUT it also *foregrounds* the extent to which what is really being *reproduced* on Nataraj's press are cultural documents that speak to a spiritual belief system and to a nationally-situated art. What Nataraj produces is, in many ways, a necessary function of his idea of community and nation.
- It's less clear what's being *preserved* in Vasu's taxidermy; rather, it's something that needs to be stopped or expelled because it's potentially destructive.

# What is essential to the function of a *nation*?

- Is law necessary to nation? What is the effect when law is imposed on citizens?

# What is essential to the function of a *nation*?

- Let's go back to Gandhi and his symbolic role in *Man-eater*.

# What is essential to the function of a *nation*?

- Is the novel *politically* Gandhian? That is, is it working to promote a vision of India as a nation comprehensible in relation to the work of Gandhi?
- How do we interpret scenes where violence is used to uphold the law, yet is ineffective?
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# Violence and law and *nation*

- How do you contend with evil and aggression? When do you start resisting?
- If your beliefs have been compromised, what should you do to reaffirm them?
- Is this scene's confrontational position one that that attempts to fuse old ways with new ones? Vasu's aggressiveness and spontaneity is attractive.



# Violence and law and *nation*

- How do you contend with evil and aggression? When do you start resisting?
- If your beliefs have been compromised, what should you do to reaffirm them?
- How do you actually effect non-violent resistance without being violent? Does Nataraj succeed? Rangi?
- Does the novel successfully promote such an idea?

# HYBRIDITY

- Other terms within larger theoretical concepts of the novel also emerge.
- Hybridity refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft and Griffin).
- Essentially, we are talking about new cultures and identities emerging from globalization, clashing and borrowing and renewing positions from the past (taking the best of Vasu)
- Hybridization takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic.

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- Hybridity refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft and Griffin).
- Essentially, we are talking about new cultures and identities emerging from globalization, clashing and borrowing and renewing positions from the past.
- Hybridization takes many forms including cultural, political and linguistic.
- Such terms can help us negotiate Rangi, for example, whom we we were discussing last class.

## HYBRIDITY

She is a

- "public woman" (115),
- prostitute" (149-50)
- "a dedicated woman" (116)
- "a dancing woman" (147)
- "irresistible" (115)
- a "notorious character" (81)
- "a perfect female animal" (82)
- "the woman to avoid" (114)
- "the awful fleshy creature whom Sastri considered it a sin to look at" (114)

## Rangi

- Her mother, Padma, is not described in such fluctuating terms, partly because Rangi is a “new, modern woman.”
- She dismisses Vasu's other women: "Let any man do what he fancies. I don't care what anyone does, so long as he doesn't dictate to me what I should do" (116).
- She makes Nataraj and other men question their marriages, and her overt sexuality, combined with her respect for tradition, make her difficult to negotiate.
- This is where terms such as hybridity are useful.
- Narayan does not want to return to the past, but shows tentative characters trying to negotiate the future.