

STUDY NOTES

HENGET1302: Indian English Literature

B.A. T.Y. (Semester V) — Major in English (Core)

This comprehensive study guide covers all four units of the course in depth: detailed author background, textual summary, theme analysis, character studies, narrative/dramatic technique, critical perspectives, glossary of key terms, model answers, and revision questions — designed for thorough exam preparation for both Continuous Assessment and the End Semester Examination.

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Section A: Course Structure, Objectives & Assessment

A.1 Curriculum Overview

This course introduces four major works of modern Indian writing in English and English translation, each addressing a distinct social and historical context: caste oppression, the Partition and nationalism, urban middle-class family life, and the decline of feudal Maharashtra. Together, the texts allow a comparative study of how Indian literature represents personal trauma against the backdrop of collective history.

Unit	Text / Author	Genre	Hrs
Unit 1	Baby Kamble — The Prisons We Broke	Autobiography/Testimony	15
Unit 2	Amitav Ghosh — “Going Away” (The Shadow Lines)	Novel excerpt	15
Unit 3	A. K. Ramanujan — Four poems	Poetry	15
Unit 4	Mahesh Elkunchwar — Wada Chirebandi	Play (drama)	15

A.2 Course Objectives (COs) — Detailed

- **CO1:** Analyse autobiographical and testimonial narratives as tools for documenting caste oppression, gender discrimination, and social reform, with special reference to Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*.
- **CO2:** Examine the relationship between memory, national borders, political violence, and personal identity in Amitav Ghosh's “Going Away” from *The Shadow Lines*.
- **CO3:** Interpret A. K. Ramanujan's poetry in terms of its engagement with memory, family, death, cultural hybridity, and the everyday absurdities of middle-class Indian life.
- **CO4:** Understand the decline of the feudal Marathi wada (mansion) system and the disintegration of traditional family structures in Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Wada Chirebandi*.
- **CO5:** Compare and contrast literary representations of personal and collective trauma across different genres (memoir, novel excerpt, poetry, play) and social contexts (caste, partition, family, feudalism).
- **CO6:** Develop critical reading and interpretive skills to analyse Indian literary texts in English and English translation from multiple theoretical perspectives (Dalit studies, postcolonial studies, memory studies, feminist criticism).

A.3 Course Outcomes (COs) with Bloom's Taxonomy Level

No.	Course Outcome	Bloom's Level
COS1	Describe the socio-historical context of Maharashtrian Dalit life in the mid-20th century as portrayed in <i>The Prisons We Broke</i> .	Understand
COS2	Analyse the narrative techniques used in <i>The Prisons We Broke</i> .	Analyse
COS3	Explain the concept of “shadow lines” as developed by Ghosh in “Going Away.”	Understand

No.	Course Outcome	Bloom's Level
COS4	Identify the stylistic features of Ramanujan's poetry (irony, understatement, concrete imagery, hybrid diction, attention to everyday objects).	Analyse
COS5	Analyse the character relationships in Wada Chirebandi as representatives of different responses to historical change.	Analyse
COS6	Compare the representations of “home” and “house” across the four prescribed texts.	Evaluate/Analyse

A.4 Examination Scheme

40% Continuous Assessment (CA) + 60% End Semester Examination (ESE)

Component	Marks
Class Test	20
Assignment / Presentation / Viva / Quiz / Open Book	12
Attendance	8
Total CA	40

Paper Pattern for ESE (60 Marks, 2.5 Hrs)

Question	Coverage	Marks
Q.1 (Compulsory)	Short notes — 5 sub-questions based on the entire syllabus	15
Q.2	Unit 1 (Kamble) — attempt if selected	15
Q.3	Unit 2 (Ghosh) — attempt if selected	15
Q.4	Unit 3 (Ramanujan) — attempt if selected	15
Q.5	Unit 4 (Elkunchwar) — attempt if selected	15
Q.6	Short notes, any 2 of 4 — whole syllabus	15

Instructions: Q.1 is compulsory. From Q.2 to Q.6, attempt any **THREE** questions.

A.4.1 General Answer-Writing Guidance for This Course

Since this course spans four very different genres (autobiography, novel excerpt, poetry, and drama), examiners typically reward answers that demonstrate genre-awareness alongside thematic understanding. The following general principles apply across all four units:

- ✓ Always begin an essay-type answer with a brief statement of context: author, text, and the specific concern the question raises — this signals command of the material within the first few lines.
- ✓ For prose/autobiographical texts (Kamble, Ghosh), support thematic claims with specific incidents or details rather than vague generalisations — examiners can easily distinguish a genuinely read answer from a generic one.
- ✓ For poetry (Ramanujan), always engage with specific images, word choices, or structural features (such as the cumulative catalogue in ‘Small-Scale Reflections’) rather than discussing theme in the abstract alone.
- ✓ For drama (Elkunchwar), remember to address dramatic technique — dialogue, structure, symbolism of setting — and not merely plot or theme, since this is a play meant for performance, not simply a story.
- ✓ Wherever the question allows, a brief comparative reference to another prescribed text (even in a single sentence) demonstrates the kind of synthesising understanding rewarded under CO5/CO6.

A.5 How to Use These Notes

1. Read the “About the Author/Text” section first to build context before the detailed theme analysis.
2. Use the theme sub-sections as the backbone for 15-mark essay answers — each sub-heading can become a paragraph.
3. Use the Model Answers (Section I) as templates, not to be memorised verbatim — adapt them in your own words.
4. Use Section J (Quick Revision Charts) the night before the exam for rapid recall.
5. For Q.1/Q.6 (short notes), rely on the glossary (Section H) and the theme summaries condensed in the revision charts.

Unit 1 -The Prisons We Broke

Baby Kamble

0. Historical Background: Caste and the Ambedkarite Movement

To fully appreciate *The Prisons We Broke*, it helps to understand the broader historical context of the Ambedkarite movement in Maharashtra. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), himself born into the Mahar caste, emerged as the foremost twentieth-century leader of India's Dalit (then termed 'Depressed Classes' or 'untouchable') communities. His campaigns spanned legal reform, political representation (including his central role as chief architect of the Indian Constitution), educational upliftment, and, in his final years, mass religious conversion to Buddhism as a decisive rejection of a caste-ordained Hindu social order.

- ✓ Key milestones of the movement include the Mahad Satyagraha (1927), where Ambedkar led Dalits to assert their right to draw water from a public tank; the Kalaram Temple entry movement (1930s); and the mass conversion ceremony at Nagpur in 1956, in which Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of followers formally embraced Buddhism.
- ✓ This movement forms the direct historical backdrop against which Kamble's narrative unfolds — her account of her community's transformation is inseparable from these broader political and religious developments.
- ✓ Understanding this context allows readers to appreciate why education, self-respect, and religious conversion carry such profound symbolic and practical weight within the text, rather than reading them as purely personal or individual choices.
- ✓

1 About the Author

Baby Kamble (1929–2012) was a pioneering Dalit (Mahar caste) writer from Maharashtra and among the first Dalit women to write a full-length autobiography. Born in Veergaon and later based in Phaltan, she grew up in a family that had already been touched by the Ambedkarite movement, which shaped her lifelong commitment to social reform. Alongside her writing, she ran a small business and remained active in community welfare work. Her autobiography, written originally in Marathi as *Jina Amucha* ("Our Life") and first serialised in the 1980s, was translated into English by Maya Pandit as *The Prisons We Broke* (2008).

- Kamble began writing relatively late in life, after raising a family, and her narrative voice carries the authority of lived, first-hand experience.
- She was deeply influenced by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's movement for Dalit emancipation, education, and religious conversion (to Buddhism) as tools of liberation.
- Her work is considered a foundational text of Dalit women's life-writing in India, alongside authors like Urmila Pawar and Kumud Pawde.

2 About the Text: Structure and Scope

- *The Prisons We Broke* is a testimonial/autobiographical narrative that blends personal memory with the collective history of the Mahar community.
- Written not merely as an individual "I" but frequently as "we" — the personal life stands in for the community's shared suffering and shared liberation.
- The narrative spans roughly three generations, moving from the deeply oppressive pre-Ambedkar period, through the transformative years of the Ambedkarite movement, to the changed (though still imperfect) post-conversion Buddhist Dalit community.

- It is not structured as a single continuous plot; rather, it moves through thematic clusters — childhood memories, rituals and superstitions, marriage customs, work and poverty, the coming of Ambedkar, and the community's collective awakening.

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2.1 Extended Narrative Summary

The narrative opens with Kamble's recollections of childhood within the maharwada, establishing the physical and social geography of segregation that structures the entire community's existence. She describes the daily rituals of subsistence — the collection of leftover or discarded food from upper-caste households, the performance of traditional vatan (customary) duties such as removing dead cattle and carrying messages, and the constant, unremarked violence and humiliation that accompanied any interaction with caste-Hindu villagers.

A substantial portion of the early narrative is devoted to domestic and communal life within the maharwada itself — descriptions of festivals, marriage customs, and especially the position of women, who are shown enduring child marriage, arranged unions, relentless physical labour, and routine domestic violence. Kamble pays close attention to the web of superstition and ritual practice — exorcism rites, beliefs about spirit possession, and codes of female modesty and menstrual seclusion — that governed women's lives within the community, revealing how oppressive structures operated even within a community that was itself oppressed by caste.

The narrative's turning point arrives with the growing influence of Dr. Ambedkar's movement. Kamble recounts the community's gradual, often difficult shift away from degrading practices such as eating carrion, toward a new emphasis on cleanliness, education, and self-respect. This transformation is neither instant nor uncomplicated — Kamble is careful to show resistance, scepticism, and the slow, uneven process by which new ideas took hold, generation by generation.

The later sections of the narrative describe the culmination of this transformation in mass conversion to Buddhism, framed as both spiritual and political liberation — a decisive rejection of a Hindu caste order that had denied Dalits basic humanity. The text closes not with a simple triumphant resolution but with a more complex, reflective assessment of how much has changed and how much continues to constrain the community, particularly its women, even after the formal gains of the Ambedkarite movement.

3 Detailed Thematic Analysis

3.1 Caste Oppression and Untouchability

- Kamble provides graphic, unflinching detail of the humiliations faced by Mahars under the traditional caste system: segregated housing in the maharwada (separate hamlet outside the main village), forced unpaid labour (vatan duties) for upper-caste landlords, and the practice of eating the flesh of dead cattle and other degrading forms of subsistence.
- Physical and verbal abuse by caste Hindus is depicted as routine and unquestioned, revealing how untouchability was naturalised into every aspect of daily life — greeting customs, access to water, temple entry, and seating arrangements.
- The recurring image of imprisonment (reflected in the title) operates on multiple levels: physical confinement to the maharwada, social confinement within a fixed low status, and psychological confinement through internalised shame and fatalism.
- Kamble is careful to show untouchability not as an abstract social evil but as a set of minute, humiliating daily practices — this granular detail is part of the text's testimonial power.

3.2 Gender and Patriarchy within the Community

- Kamble exposes a double oppression: Dalit women suffer caste discrimination from upper-caste society, and simultaneously face patriarchal control and violence within their own community.
- She details child marriage, arranged unions with little or no consent, the drudgery of endless domestic and agricultural labour expected of women, and routine domestic violence normalised as a husband's right.
- Superstitions and rituals — beliefs about menstruation as polluting, practices of spirit-possession and exorcism, and rigid codes of female modesty — are shown as mechanisms that kept women fearful and compliant.
- Importantly, Kamble does not treat gender oppression as separate from caste oppression; she shows how poverty, caste stigma, and patriarchy reinforce one another to trap Dalit women in a uniquely harsh position — an insight that anticipates later intersectional and Dalit feminist theory.

3.3 Ambedkar and Social Reform

- The arrival of Dr. Ambedkar's message into the community marks the decisive turning point of the narrative — the community begins to question long-accepted customs, pursue education, and reject degrading practices such as eating carrion.
- Education, in particular, is presented as the single most powerful instrument of liberation — quite literally “breaking the prison” of ignorance and internalised inferiority.
- Kamble narrates a collective psychological transformation: a shift from fatalistic acceptance of suffering as fate (or as religiously ordained) to an assertive, dignity-based self-respect rooted in Ambedkar's teachings.
- The eventual mass conversion to Buddhism is presented as both a symbolic and practical rejection of a Hindu caste order that denied Dalits humanity — a reclaiming of religious and social identity on their own terms.

3.4 Memory, Testimony, and the Politics of Voice

- The text functions as testimony in the fullest sense — bearing witness to a suffering that mainstream, upper-caste-authored Indian history and literature had largely ignored or romanticised.
- The blurred line between autobiography and community history is deliberate: Kamble's individual “self” is presented as inseparable from her people's collective identity and experience.
- By writing in the first person plural for long stretches, Kamble asserts that her story cannot be fully individualised — it is representative, and this representativeness is itself a political statement against caste society's habit of erasing Dalit individual and collective voice.

4 Narrative Technique

- Oral, conversational, and deliberately unpolished style that mirrors the rhythms of spoken Marathi — this resists conventional “literary” refinement associated with upper-caste, Sanskritised literary traditions.
- Episodic rather than strictly linear structure: the narrative moves between anecdotes, descriptions of rituals, and reflective commentary, resembling oral storytelling traditions more than a Western autobiographical form.
- Alternation between first-person singular (“I”) and first-person plural (“we”) — the collective and the individual voice continually merge and separate.
- Use of irony and dark humour to narrate extreme suffering, which prevents the text from collapsing into a purely victimhood-centred narrative and instead conveys resilience and agency.

- Rich ethnographic detail — descriptions of food, dress, rituals, and festivals — serves a dual function: preserving community memory even as the narrative critiques the oppressive customs it describes.
- Maya Pandit's translation retains many Marathi terms and idioms, preserving cultural specificity for the English-language reader rather than fully domesticating the text.

4.1 Critical Reception and Placement in Dalit Literature

The Prisons We Broke occupies a foundational place within the broader tradition of Dalit life-writing that emerged prominently in Marathi from the 1970s onward, alongside works by writers such as Daya Pawar, Laxman Mane, and later Urmila Pawar and Kumud Pawde. Critics have particularly noted Kamble's significance as one of the earliest Dalit women to publish a full-length autobiographical narrative, addressing gender within the Dalit movement at a time when much Dalit literary and political discourse remained male-centred. Scholars have also highlighted the text's distinctive oral, unpolished narrative register as a deliberate literary and political choice — a refusal of the Sanskritised, upper-caste literary norms that had historically excluded Dalit voices and experience from serious literary consideration.

- The text is frequently taught alongside other Dalit autobiographies as part of a broader pedagogical effort to diversify the canon of modern Indian literature beyond upper-caste, male-authored narratives.
- Maya Pandit's English translation has been credited with bringing Kamble's work to a wider, including international, academic readership, while scholars continue to debate the challenges of translating the specific cultural and linguistic texture of Marathi Dalit narrative into English.

5 Critical Perspectives

- Dalit Studies: reads the text as a counter-narrative to caste-Hindu historiography, asserting Dalit personhood, and as part of a broader Dalit literary movement of testimony and protest.
- Feminist Criticism: highlights the text's early articulation of the “double burden” faced by Dalit women — a concern later central to Dalit feminist theory.
- Life-writing/Autobiography Studies: situates the text within debates on collective versus individual autobiography, and on testimonio as a genre that blurs fact, memory, and political witness.

5.1 Note on Style and Translation

Because The Prisons We Broke is studied in English translation, examiners may occasionally ask students to reflect on the effects of translation itself. Maya Pandit's translation strategy retains a number of Marathi words and culturally specific terms rather than fully substituting English equivalents, preserving a sense of cultural texture and specificity for the English-language reader. This approach has been praised for resisting the loss of cultural nuance that can occur when non-English narratives are fully ‘domesticated’ into standard literary English, though it also means that some readers unfamiliar with Marathi cultural context may need additional explanation of specific terms and practices. Students should be prepared to discuss, at a general level, how translation choices can shape a reader's access to a text's original oral, regional, and cultural texture.

6 Important Examination Questions — Unit 1

- Discuss The Prisons We Broke as a testimonial narrative of Dalit life.
- How does Kamble portray the double oppression of Dalit women?
- Examine the role of Ambedkar's movement in transforming the Mahar community, as depicted in the text.
- Comment on Kamble's narrative technique and use of the collective “we.”
- Write a short note on the significance of the title The Prisons We Broke.
- Discuss the role of education as an instrument of liberation in the text.
- Examine the depiction of rituals and superstitions in the maharwada.

Unit 2 - Going Away

Amitav Ghosh

1. Historical Background: Partition and the India–Bangladesh Border

The *Shadow Lines* draws directly on the history of the 1947 Partition of British India and the subsequent 1971 creation of Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan). The Partition divided Bengal along a hastily drawn boundary (the Radcliffe Line), separating communities, families, and cultural regions that had coexisted for centuries. Dhaka, once a major city of undivided Bengal, became first the capital of East Pakistan and later of independent Bangladesh — a place that for many Hindu Bengali families who relocated to Calcutta (like the narrator's grandmother) remained an irretrievable, border-locked homeland.

- Communal riots recurred periodically in the decades following Partition, often triggered by seemingly unrelated events in distant cities — a pattern the novel dramatizes through its account of riots connected across Kashmir, Dhaka, and Calcutta.
- This historical backdrop is essential to understanding why Ghosh's narrator treats the border not as a simple administrative fact but as a profound and continuing psychological and emotional wound within his family.

1 About the Author

Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956, Calcutta) is one of the most significant contemporary Indian English novelists, celebrated for his fusion of historical research, anthropological detail, and fiction. Trained as a social anthropologist (with a doctorate from Oxford), Ghosh brings a scholarly attentiveness to place, history, and cultural memory into his fiction. His major works include *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, the *Ibis Trilogy*, and *Gun Island*. He has received numerous honours, including the Jnanpith Award and, for *The Shadow Lines* specifically, the Sahitya Akademi Award.

- *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is widely regarded as one of the finest post-Independence Indian English novels dealing with the legacy of Partition and the India–Bangladesh border.
- “Going Away” is an early section of the novel's first part (“Going Away”), narrated retrospectively by the unnamed narrator, recalling his family's past — especially his granduncle Tridib and the English Price family.

2 Context, Setting and Narrative Focus

- The chapter moves fluidly across multiple time frames: the narrator's own childhood in Calcutta, his grandmother Thamma's memories of undivided Dhaka before Partition, and later events connected with the Price family in England.
- Central figures include Tridib (the narrator's granduncle, an intellectual wanderer who shapes the narrator's imaginative geography), Ila (the narrator's cousin, who has grown up abroad and embodies a different, seemingly “free” relationship to travel and place), and Thamma (the grandmother, whose rooted, nationalist sense of home is tied inseparably to her birthplace in Dhaka, now across a national border in a different country).
- The chapter lays the thematic and structural groundwork for the rest of the novel: it establishes memory, cartography, and the arbitrariness of borders as central concerns.

2.1 Extended Narrative Summary

The chapter opens with the narrator, as an adult, reconstructing his childhood understanding of his extended family, centred on the household presence of his grandmother, Thamma, and the frequent visits and stories of his granduncle Tridib. Much of the early narrative establishes Tridib's role as an intellectual and imaginative guide — a man who, despite limited personal travel, possesses an astonishingly detailed knowledge of distant places (particularly London) gained through sustained reading, study, and correspondence with the English Price family.

The narrative then moves to recount the history of the Price family's connection to the narrator's family, tracing back to earlier generations and an enduring friendship that survived colonial hierarchies and geographical distance. Interwoven with this is the story of Thamma's own childhood and youth in undivided Dhaka — her memories of the family home, her involvement in the independence movement as a young woman, and her eventual displacement to Calcutta following Partition.

A central narrative thread concerns Thamma's planned visit back to Dhaka (now in a different country) to bring back an elderly relative, Jethamoshai, who has remained in the old family house. This return journey becomes the occasion for Thamma's bewildered questioning about the nature of the border — her inability to reconcile her lived memory of a continuous, undivided place with the new political reality of a hard international boundary. The chapter interweaves these personal reflections with glimpses of the wider political and communal violence of the period, presented in fragments rather than as a continuous, explained sequence of events, reflecting how such violence entered the family's — and the narrator's own — consciousness: partially, belatedly, and without full resolution.

3 Detailed Thematic Analysis

3.1 Memory and Non-Linear Time

- Ghosh's narrative structure deliberately resists chronology, moving associatively between past and present, much as memory itself operates — a scent, an object, or a stray remark can trigger a leap across decades.
- Personal memory (family anecdotes, childhood recollections) becomes inseparable from national and political history (colonialism, Partition, communal riots) — Ghosh suggests that private and public histories cannot be neatly separated.
- The narrator himself has not experienced many of the events he recounts firsthand; his “memory” is often inherited, constructed from Tridib's stories — raising questions about the reliability and ownership of memory.

3.2 The “Shadow Lines” — Borders and Nationalism

- The novel's central controlling metaphor is that political borders are “shadow lines”: arbitrary, often invisible on the ground, yet capable of producing devastating real-world violence and of severing people who were once part of a single, shared community.
- Thamma's inability to understand how a border can exist without a visible physical marker (a line, a wall, a trench) exposes, with almost naive clarity, the constructed and artificial nature of nationalist boundary-making.
- Ghosh critiques how modern nationalism manufactures false certainties of belonging and identity, while simultaneously erasing centuries of shared regional history, language, and culture between communities now divided by the border.

- The irony that Thamma, a fervent nationalist, cannot locate her own birthplace on a map without seeing the border reflects the novel's broader argument that maps and nations can distort, rather than clarify, lived reality.

3.3 Political Violence and its Silences

- Communal riots and political violence are recalled obliquely and in fragments rather than through direct, sustained description — reflecting how traumatic memory often resists linear, complete narration.
- Ghosh demonstrates the interconnectedness of seemingly distant and unrelated events (unrest in one city triggering violence in another, separated by both distance and the supposed border) — showing how violence ripples outward, ignoring the very borders meant to contain and define separate nations.
- This fragmentary treatment of violence also functions as a formal echo of trauma itself: the events are too painful, or too significant, to be told as a single coherent story.

3.4 Personal Identity, Displacement, and Belonging

- Thamma, Tridib, and Ila represent three distinct relationships to “home”: Thamma's nostalgic, almost obsessive attachment to a lost, physically inaccessible birthplace; Tridib's imaginative, intellectual cosmopolitanism, which allows him to “know” places he has never physically visited through stories, maps, and books; and Ila's rootless, restless mobility, which paradoxically leaves her feeling that she belongs nowhere in particular.
- The narrator constructs much of his own sense of identity and geography vicariously — through Tridib's stories — building an imagined, remembered map of a world he himself has often never physically visited, which becomes as real to him as lived experience.
- The novel thus interrogates what it means to “know” a place: through direct experience, inherited memory, or imaginative construction — and suggests that all three are entangled rather than separate.

3.5 Detailed Character Sketches

Thamma (the Grandmother)

- A former schoolteacher and freedom fighter in her youth, Thamma embodies a fierce, disciplined nationalism forged in the anti-colonial struggle.
- Her attachment to her Dhaka birthplace is intensely emotional, yet her nationalism paradoxically makes her impatient with any notion of undivided, pre-Partition belonging — she wants clear, decisive boundaries even as she is personally devastated by the one that separates her from her home.
- She represents the generation for whom the nation-state was a hard-won ideal, making her particular blindness to the border's arbitrariness especially poignant and ironic.

Tridib

- An intellectual and inveterate storyteller, Tridib has travelled little himself but possesses an extraordinarily detailed imaginative knowledge of distant places, gained through books, maps, and study.
- He becomes the narrator's primary teacher in ‘imaginative geography’ — the idea that a place can be known, and known intensely, without being physically visited.

- His eventual fate (revealed later in the novel) gives tragic weight to his belief that imagination and memory can bridge distances that borders seek to enforce.

Ila

- Raised largely abroad and constantly mobile, Ila represents a cosmopolitan freedom of movement unavailable to Thamma's generation.
- Yet the novel complicates any simple celebration of her mobility: Ila's rootlessness leaves her disconnected and, in some ways, more constrained by Western social codes than she recognises — mobility does not equal genuine freedom or belonging.

4 Narrative Technique

- Complex, non-chronological structure with frequent flashbacks and flash-forwards that mirror the associative workings of memory rather than following calendar time.
- A first-person narrator who functions largely as a listener and assembler of other people's memories and stories, rather than a participant in most of the key events he narrates.
- Constant interweaving of the private (family anecdotes, domestic detail) and the public (historical and political events) — the personal is always shown to be embedded in larger historical currents.
- Recurring motif of maps and cartographic imagery, used to interrogate the reliability of “lines” drawn on paper versus the messier, more continuous reality of lived geography and culture.
- Ghosh's prose style is reflective and essayistic at points, blending narrative scenes with the narrator's philosophical meditations on memory, distance, and freedom.

4.1 Critical Reception

The *Shadow Lines* is widely regarded as a landmark in Indian English fiction's engagement with Partition, distinguished from earlier Partition novels by its indirect, memory-driven approach rather than direct, chronological depiction of violence. Critics have praised Ghosh's formal innovation in using non-linear structure to enact the workings of memory and trauma, as well as the novel's sophisticated critique of nationalism, which extends beyond a simple condemnation of Partition to a broader philosophical questioning of the nation-state as a category of belonging. The novel is frequently discussed alongside other major postcolonial reflections on borders and displacement, and ‘*Going Away*’ in particular is often anthologised and taught as a self-contained meditation on memory and nationhood even outside the context of the full novel.

- Some critics have noted the novel's privileging of an educated, upper-middle-class Bengali perspective, raising questions about whose memories and experiences of Partition are centred within the narrative.
- The novel's treatment of England and the Price family has also been read as an exploration of postcolonial relationships between India and its former coloniser, complicating any simple narrative of national or cultural opposition.

5 Critical Perspectives

- Postcolonial Studies: reads the novel as a critique of the nation-state and of colonial-era boundary-drawing, and as an exploration of the psychological legacies of Partition.
- Memory Studies: examines the novel's treatment of inherited, “postmemory” — memory of events not directly experienced but transmitted through family narrative.
- Trauma Studies: focuses on the fragmentary, non-linear narration of violence as a formal enactment of traumatic memory.

5.1 Note on Prose Style

Ghosh's prose in ‘*Going Away*’ is marked by long, carefully constructed sentences that often accumulate clause upon clause, mirroring the layered, associative quality of memory itself. The narrator frequently shifts between concrete scene-description and more abstract, reflective meditation

on time, distance, and knowledge, producing a prose style that is as much essayistic as narrative. Students should be able to identify and comment on specific instances of this stylistic blending — for example, a passage that moves from a remembered domestic scene to a broader philosophical reflection on the nature of borders or belonging — as evidence of Ghosh's distinctive narrative voice.

6 Unit 2 Important Examination Questions —

1. Explain the concept of “shadow lines” as developed by Ghosh in this chapter.
2. Discuss the relationship between personal memory and political history in “Going Away.”
3. Comment on Ghosh's narrative technique of moving between different time frames.
4. Compare Thamma's and Ila's differing notions of home and belonging.
5. How does the chapter critique nationalism and the idea of borders?
6. Discuss the significance of Tridib as a figure of imaginative geography in the novel.
7. Examine the role of maps as a recurring motif in “Going Away.”

Unit 3 - Selected Poems by A. K. Ramanujan

1 About the Poet

A. K. Ramanujan (1929–1993) was a poet, translator, linguist, and folklorist who wrote with equal distinction in English and Kannada. Born in Mysore, he later taught for decades at the University of Chicago, and his transnational life — moving between India and the United States — deeply informs his poetry's preoccupation with cultural hybridity, memory, and the negotiation between Indian familial roots and a modernist, English-language poetic sensibility. He was also a major translator of classical Tamil and medieval Kannada poetry (*The Interior Landscape, Speaking of Siva*), and his own poetry is often noted for bringing a similarly compressed, image-driven, classical sensibility into English verse.

- Prescribed poems: “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing,” “A River,” “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House,” and “Obituary.”
- Ramanujan's poetry is consistently praised for precise, concrete imagery, controlled irony and understatement, and an unsentimental, often wry exploration of family, memory, and death.

2 Text “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”

Looking for a Cousin on a Swing

When she was four or five
she sat on a village swing
and her cousin, six or seven,
sat himself against her;
with every lunge of the swing
she felt him
in the lunging pits
of her feeling;
and afterwards
we climbed a tree, she said,
not very tall, but full of leaves
like those of a figtree,
and we were very innocent
about it.
Now she looks for the swing
in cities with fifteen suburbs
and tries to be innocent
about it
not only on the crotch of a tree
that looked as if it would burst
under every leaf
into a brood of scarlet figs
if someone suddenly sneezed.

2.1 Overview

- The poem recalls a childhood memory of swinging together with a female cousin, and the gradual awakening of adolescent, quasi-erotic awareness within what had been an innocent, playful physical closeness.
- The poem is structured around a contrast between the unselfconscious physicality of childhood play and the self-conscious, embarrassed distance that develops with the arrival of adult awareness of desire and propriety.

2.2 Themes

- The loss of innocence: the poem tracks a precise, almost imperceptible shift from unthinking childhood intimacy to awkward, adult self-awareness.
- Memory and retrospection: the adult speaker looks back on the childhood scene with an ironic, self-aware distance from his younger self, aware of ambiguities the child could not have understood.
- The body and social convention: the poem subtly critiques how social and familial codes of propriety intrude upon and reshape natural, unselfconscious physical relationships between children as they grow older.

2.3 Style

- Concrete, sensory imagery of the swing and physical movement grounds the poem's more abstract meditation on changing self-awareness.
- A quiet, understated tone rather than explicit emotional statement — the poem's irony emerges from what is left unsaid.

3 Text “A River”

In Madurai,¹
city of temples and poets,
who sang of cities and temples,
every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun
The poets only sang only of the floods.
He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,

of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi²
and Brinda³
as usual.

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

He said:
the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different colored diapers
to tell them apart.

3.1 Overview

- Set in Madurai, the poem contrasts the poetic and mythic treatment of the river Vaikai by “old poets” (the classical Tamil poetic tradition) and “new poets” (Ramanujan's contemporaries) with the actual, often destructive reality of the river's annual floods.
- The old poets are shown to have praised only the river's grandeur — its floods reaching the temple steps, the bridges it touched — celebrating scale and spectacle rather than human consequence.
- Ramanujan criticises poets, old and new alike, for continuing to ignore the real human suffering caused by the floods: deaths, drowned cattle and household goods, and — in the poem's most striking image — a pregnant woman whose twin unborn children are swept away by the flood, spoken of only as a chilling statistic rather than a human tragedy.

3.2 Themes

- A critique of poetic convention and romanticised literary tradition, which repeats inherited images of grandeur without registering lived suffering.

- The gap between art and reality — poetry's tendency to aestheticise disaster rather than confront its human cost.
- Irony as method: the poem's calm, matter-of-fact tone in describing the drowned children's death makes the omission by “old” and “new” poets alike even more damning.

3.3 Style

- A conversational, almost prose-like free verse that deliberately avoids the ornamental, elevated diction associated with the older poetic tradition it critiques.
- Juxtaposition of the mythic/grand (temple, bridges, flood as spectacle) against the mundane/human (a pregnant woman, drowned twins) to sharpen the poem's ironic critique.

4 Text- “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House”

Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House

Sometimes I think that nothing
 that ever comes into this house
 goes out. Things that come in everyday
 to lose themselves among other things
 lost long ago among
 other things lost long ago;
 lame wandering cows from nowhere
 have been known to be tethered,
 given a name, encouraged
 to get pregnant in the broad daylight
 of the street under the elders'
 supervision, the girls hiding
 behind windows with holes in them.
 Unread library books
 usually mature in two weeks
 and begin to lay a row
 of little eggs in the ledgers
 for fines, as silverfish
 in the old man's office room
 breed dynasties among long legal words
 in the succulence
 of Victorian parchment.
 Neighbors' dishes brought up
 with the greasy sweets they made
 all night the day before yesterday
 for the wedding anniversary of a god,
 never leave the house they enter,
 like the servants, the phonographs,
 the epilepsies in the blood,
 sons-in-law who quite forget
 their mothers, but stay to check
 accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces,
 or the women who come as wives

from houses open on one side
to rising suns, on another
to the setting, accustomed
to wait and to yield to monsoons
in the mountains' calendar
beating through the hanging banana leaves
And also anything that goes out
will come back, processed and often
with long bills attached,
like the hooped bales of cotton
shipped off to invisible Manchesters
and brought back milled and folded
for a price, cloth for our days'
middle-class loins, and muslin
for our richer nights. Letters mailed
have a way of finding their way back
with many re-directions to wrong
addresses and red ink-marks
earned in Tiruvalla and Sialkot.
And ideas behave like rumors,
once casually mentioned somewhere
they come back to the door as prodigies
born to prodigal fathers, with eyes
that vaguely look like our own,
like what Uncle said the other day:
that every Plotinus we read
is what some Alexander looted
between the malarial rivers.
A beggar once came with a violin
to croak out a prostitute song
that our voiceless cook sang
all the time in our backyard.
Nothing stays out: daughters
get married to short-lived idiots;
sons who run away come back
in grand children who recite Sanskrit
to approving old men, or bring
betel nuts for visiting uncles
who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water
in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestors' rattle in the throat.
And though many times from everywhere,
recently only twice:

once in nineteen-forty-three
 from as far as the Sahara,
 half -gnawed by desert foxes,
 and lately from somewhere
 in the north, a nephew with stripes
 on his shoulder was called
 an incident on the border
 and was brought back in plane
 and train and military truck
 even before the telegrams reached,
 on a perfectly good
 Chatty afternoon

4.1 Overview

- The poem describes a large joint-family house from which nothing — object or person — ever truly leaves; everything that enters the house is absorbed and stays, whether relatives, mourners, thieves, ideas, illnesses, or even stray animals.
- The house becomes an extended metaphor for the joint family system and tradition itself: endlessly absorbing and retentive, resistant to loss or departure, yet also stifling, all-consuming, and inescapable for those born into it.
- The poem closes with a meditation on death and continuity — even death, the poem suggests, does not really free a person from the house's hold, since memory, ritual, and family narrative continue to fold the dead back into the house's ongoing life.

4.2 Themes

- Cultural hybridity and ambivalence toward tradition: the poem holds together both pride in and burden of the joint family's permanence and inclusiveness.
- Tension between individual freedom and communal/familial bonds — the house's inescapability can be read as comforting continuity or as suffocating confinement, and the poem deliberately keeps both readings alive.
- The randomness and inclusiveness of what the house “absorbs” (serious and trivial alike) creates a tone of wry, almost absurdist humour even while making a serious point about tradition's totalising grip.

4.3 Style

- Cumulative, list-like structure — the poem builds its argument through an accumulating catalogue of things the house has absorbed, mimicking the house's own “absorptive” logic.
- Ironic, deadpan tone throughout, with the gravity of the closing meditation on death emerging almost unexpectedly from the poem's catalogue of domestic trivia.

5Text- “Obituary”

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table of papers,
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him,
a house that leaned
slowly through our growing
years on a bent coconut
tree in the yard.
Being the burning type,
he burned properly
at the cremation
as before, easily
and at both ends,
left his eye coins
in the ashes that didn't
look one bit different,
several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons
to pick gingerly
and throw as the priest
said, facing east
where three rivers met
near the railway station;
no longstanding headstone
with his full name and two dates
to hold in their parentheses
everything he didn't quite
manage to do himself,
like his caesarian birth
in a brahmin ghetto
and his death by heartfailure in the fruit market.
But someone told me
he got two lines
in an inside column
of a Madras¹⁴ newspaper
sold by the kilo
exactly four weeks later
to streethawkers
who sell it in turn
to the small groceries

where I buy salt,
 coriander,
 and jaggery
 in newspaper cones
 that I usually read
 for fun, and lately
 in the hope of finding
 these obituary lines.
 And he left us
 a changed mother
 and more than
 one annual ritual.

5.1 Overview

- A wry, unsentimental meditation on the poet's father's death and its practical, bureaucratic, and financial aftermath — unpaid debts, disputed land, unfinished rituals, and the terse conventions of the newspaper obituary itself.
- The poem deliberately undercuts conventional elegiac solemnity with ironic, almost comic detail — for instance, the father is remembered as leaving behind debts and unresolved practical problems rather than any grand spiritual or material legacy.

5.2 Themes

- Death and inheritance: the poem explores how the dead “live on” not through spiritual transcendence but through unresolved, mundane, everyday consequences — property disputes, family obligations, small persistent memories.
- The ordinariness of mortality: by refusing melodrama, the poem insists that death is absorbed into the practical continuities of family life rather than marking any dramatic rupture.
- The gap between public ritual and private reality: the newspaper obituary's terse, formulaic public language is set against the far messier, more ambivalent private truth of the father's life and death.

5.3 Style

- Flat, factual, almost bureaucratic diction mimics the very obituary form the poem is named after, reinforcing the poem's ironic distance from conventional mourning.
- Absence of overt sentimentality or grief-language — emotion is implied through detail and omission rather than direct statement.

5.4 Additional Note: Reading the Poems Together

Examiners frequently ask students to read two or more of the prescribed poems together. A useful strategy is to notice how each poem centres on a distinct ‘site’ of meaning — the swing (childhood body/desire), the river (nature/poetic tradition), the house (family/tradition), and the obituary notice (death/public ritual) — while sharing a consistent authorial method: beginning from a small, concrete, often domestic image and using it to open onto a larger meditation on memory, tradition, or mortality, always approached through irony rather than direct statement.

- All four poems resist tidy emotional resolution — each ends on an ambivalent or unresolved note rather than a clear moral or sentiment, which is itself characteristic of Ramanujan's modernist sensibility.

- A comparative essay question might trace this shared structural pattern — concrete image, ironic development, unresolved close — across any two or three of the poems as a demonstration of Ramanujan's consistent poetic method.

6 Common Stylistic Features Across the Four Poems

- Irony and understatement rather than direct emotional statement — Ramanujan consistently withholds explicit sentiment, allowing meaning to emerge through juxtaposition and implication.
- Concrete, everyday imagery (household objects, rivers, swings, newspapers) is used to carry larger, more abstract meanings about tradition, mortality, and identity.
- Hybrid diction: an Indian sensibility and subject matter expressed through a precise, controlled, modernist English idiom shaped by Ramanujan's transnational, bilingual formation.
- Sustained attention to the ordinary and domestic as a site of profound meaning — family, death, and memory are approached obliquely through small, specific, concrete details rather than grand abstraction.
- A cool, observant, often self-deprecating poetic persona who positions himself as both participant in and ironic critic of the family/cultural world he describes.

6.1 Note on Ramanujan's Bilingual Formation

Ramanujan's simultaneous engagement with English-language modernist poetry and classical/medieval Tamil and Kannada poetic traditions (which he also translated extensively) gives his English poems a distinctive compressed, image-centred quality often associated with classical Indian poetics, combined with an ironic, self-aware modern sensibility drawn from his exposure to English and American poetry. Students may be asked to comment on this hybrid formation — for instance, noting how the concrete, single-image focus of a poem like ‘A River’ recalls classical Tamil *akam* (interior/domestic) poetic conventions, even as its critical, ironic stance toward tradition marks a distinctly modern departure from those same conventions.

- This bilingual, cross-cultural formation is central to why Ramanujan is frequently discussed as a key figure in debates about cultural hybridity in modern Indian English poetry.

7 Important Examination Questions — Unit 3

1. Discuss Ramanujan's use of irony and understatement with reference to any two prescribed poems.
2. How does “A River” critique poetic tradition and convention?
3. Examine the house as a symbol of the joint family in “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House.”
4. Comment on the treatment of death in “Obituary.”
5. Discuss the theme of memory and childhood in “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing.”
6. Examine Ramanujan's use of concrete imagery across the prescribed poems.
7. “Ramanujan's poetry is a negotiation between Indian roots and a modernist English sensibility.” Discuss.

Unit 4 -Wada Chirebandi

Mahesh Elkunchwar

0. Historical Background: The Agrarian Wada System in Maharashtra

The wada system refers to the large, fortified stone or brick residences historically occupied by landowning families (often of the Deshastha Brahmin or other dominant agrarian castes) in rural Maharashtra, particularly in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. These families typically held substantial agricultural land, exercised considerable local social and economic authority, and maintained an extended joint-family household structure under a single patriarchal head.

- Post-Independence land reforms (including the abolition of zamindari-style landholding and the imposition of land-ceiling acts) progressively eroded the economic base of such families, even as social prestige and inherited property continued to bind extended families to the ancestral home.
- Simultaneously, twentieth-century urbanisation and expanding educational and employment opportunities in cities drew younger generations away from village life, accelerating the fragmentation of the joint family.
- Elkunchwar's play captures precisely this historical transition — the gap between an inherited social prestige tied to the wada and an eroding economic reality that can no longer sustain it.

1 About the Playwright

Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939) is one of the most significant modern Marathi playwrights, celebrated for realistic, closely observed family dramas that examine social and economic change in rural and semi-urban Maharashtra. His plays are known for restrained, naturalistic dialogue and a deep attentiveness to the textures of domestic life. *Wada Chirebandi* (1985) is the first play of Elkunchwar's celebrated "Wada trilogy," followed by *Magna Talyakathi* and *Yugant*, which together trace the decline of a feudal joint family across several decades.

- The trilogy is considered a landmark in modern Marathi theatre for its unsentimental, detailed portrait of a vanishing rural feudal order.
- The English title, *Old Stone Mansion*, captures the wada's function as both literal setting and central symbol of the play.

2 About the Text: Setting and Plot Focus

- The play is set in a crumbling ancestral wada (a large traditional stone mansion) belonging to the Deshpande family, once-prosperous feudal landlords of a Vidarbha village.
- The plot unfolds around a family gathering occasioned by illness and, subsequently, a death in the family, along with pressing property and inheritance matters — a classic dramatic device that draws a dispersed family back under one roof and exposes long-buried tensions.
- The gathering exposes deep tensions between siblings who remained in the village, bound by duty and tradition, and those who migrated to cities in search of modern opportunity and now return as relative outsiders.
- Across the play, the disintegration of the joint family system is shown unfolding amid changing agrarian economic realities, generational conflict, and the erosion of the family's traditional feudal authority and status.

2.1 Extended Plot Summary

The play opens within the ancestral wada, establishing its physically deteriorating condition and the reduced circumstances of the family members who still reside there, most notably an ailing elder and those siblings who have remained in the village to manage the household and property. News of the elder's failing health draws other family members back from the cities, setting in motion the play's central dramatic action: a gradual, cumulative revelation of the tensions, resentments, and competing interests that have built up over years of separation.

As the family reassembles, conversations move between practical concerns — medical care, household expenses, the physical upkeep of the wada — and older, unresolved grievances regarding past decisions, favouritism, and the unequal distribution of both burden and benefit among siblings. The city-based relatives are shown adjusting uneasily to the rhythms and expectations of village and household life, while those who remained express, often obliquely, their resentment at having borne the ongoing responsibility of care alone.

The elder's eventual death precipitates the play's central crisis: decisions must now be made regarding the property, inheritance, and the future of the wada itself. Rather than resolving neatly, these discussions expose deep and possibly unbridgeable differences in how family members understand their obligations to tradition, to each other, and to their own individual futures. The play closes without a tidy resolution, leaving the wada's fate — and by extension the fate of the joint family it once anchored — genuinely uncertain, in keeping with Elkunchwar's naturalistic refusal of melodrama or false closure.

3 Detailed Thematic Analysis

3.1 Decline of Feudalism and the Wada System

- The wada operates as the central symbol of a vanishing socio-economic order — the traditional zamindari/feudal structure that once organised rural Maharashtrian society, with the Deshpande family as its local representatives.
- The physical disrepair of the house — crumbling walls, disused rooms, unpaid-for repairs — mirrors and literalises the family's declining economic and social status.
- Disputes over land and property that surface during the family gathering reveal how the feudal inheritance system, once a source of unquestioned authority, has become a site of conflict and fragmentation in a changed economic landscape.

2 Disintegration of the Joint Family

- Siblings quarrel over inheritance, caregiving responsibilities, and the future of the ancestral home, exposing self-interest and long-suppressed resentment beneath the surface of professed family loyalty and duty.
- A sharp contrast is drawn between those who left the village for the city — seeking modern opportunity, education, or simply escape — and those who stayed behind, bound by duty, tradition, or lack of alternatives; this divide becomes a source of ongoing mutual blame and misunderstanding.
- The play suggests that the joint family, far from being a natural or permanent unit, is held together largely by external structures (property, obligation, the physical house itself) that are now eroding.

3.3 Generational and Value Conflict

- Older characters cling to tradition, family hierarchy, and the inherited honour of the family name, often refusing to recognise how much the surrounding economic and social order has already changed.

- Younger and urban-based characters are shown as more pragmatic, individualistic, and emotionally detached from the wada's symbolic weight, viewing it primarily in practical, economic terms.
- The play captures a society caught between residual traditional feudal values and the pressures of modernity, urban migration, and a changing rural economy — without offering an easy resolution or clear moral verdict on either side.

3.4 Gender Roles within the Family

- Women within the household bear the primary burden of domestic labour and emotional caretaking (particularly of the ailing family patriarch), often with little power over decisions concerning property or the family's future direction.
- Daughters-in-law and daughters occupy particularly constrained positions, caught between the demands of the old feudal household and their own more limited prospects for autonomy.
- The play subtly critiques patriarchal control even as the feudal order itself collapses — suggesting that the decline of feudalism does not automatically translate into greater freedom for the family's women.

4 Characters as Representatives of Historical Change

- Each sibling/family member in the play embodies a distinct response to the family's decline: nostalgic attachment to the old order, resentful acceptance of continuing obligation, opportunistic self-interest focused on personal gain from the property, or resigned, weary acceptance of an unavoidable change.
- The wada itself functions almost as a silent character — a crumbling physical witness to the family's, and by extension the region's, historical transformation from feudal prosperity to economic and social decline.
- The absence of any single, clearly heroic or villainous figure is itself significant: Elkunchwar distributes sympathy and critique across the ensemble, resisting a simple moral binary between “traditional/good” and “modern/bad” (or vice versa).

5 Dramatic Technique

- A realistic, naturalistic dramatic style — everyday, colloquial dialogue, a closely observed domestic setting, and a deliberate avoidance of overt melodrama even at moments of high emotional tension.
- An ensemble structure with no single clear protagonist; the family as a collective unit, rather than any one individual, is the true dramatic subject of the play.
- The house/setting itself is used as a symbolic space throughout — its physical decay parallels and comments on the family's moral, social, and economic decline without requiring explicit authorial commentary.
- Elkunchwar relies heavily on suggestion, silence, and understatement, trusting the audience to read the significance of small domestic details and unspoken tensions between characters.

5.1 Critical Reception

Wada Chirebandi, and the trilogy it initiates, is widely regarded as a landmark achievement in modern Marathi theatre, praised for its unsentimental, closely observed realism at a time when much regional Indian theatre remained more directly influenced by mythological or overtly political dramatic forms. Critics have particularly noted Elkunchwar's skill in avoiding both nostalgic idealisation of the vanishing feudal order and simplistic celebration of urban modernity, instead presenting social change as a genuinely ambivalent, unresolved process experienced differently by each family member. The play's naturalistic technique — extended domestic scenes, restrained dialogue, and a refusal of

melodrama even at moments of significant emotional weight — has been read as a deliberate departure from more theatrical, heightened dramatic conventions.

- The play is often studied alongside Elkunchwar's other major works (such as *Garbo* and *Sonata*) as part of a broader body of realist Marathi drama exploring family, gender, and social change.
- Its status as the opening play of a trilogy means that critics frequently discuss Wada Chirebandi's themes and character trajectories in relation to their further development across *Magna Talyakathi* and *Yugant*, even when only the first play is prescribed for study.

6 Critical Perspectives

- Sociological/Marxist reading: examines the play as a document of changing rural class relations and the transition from a feudal agrarian economy toward capitalist/urban modernity.
- Feminist reading: focuses on the constrained position of women within both the declining feudal order and the family structures that persist despite its collapse.
- Theatre/Performance studies: considers Elkunchwar's naturalistic technique and use of domestic space as central to modern Marathi theatre's departure from earlier, more melodramatic or mythological dramatic traditions.

6.1 Note on Dialogue and Stage Space

Students studying *Wada Chirebandi* as a text (rather than in performance) should make a deliberate effort to visualise its use of stage space and dialogue rhythm, since these are essential to its dramatic meaning. Elkunchwar's dialogue is notable for its naturalistic pacing — characters interrupt each other, trail off, or discuss mundane practical matters even at moments of high emotional significance, refusing the more polished, declarative speech patterns of earlier, more melodramatic Indian theatre. The wada's various rooms and thresholds (verandah, courtyard, sickroom) are used meaningfully to stage different kinds of conversation and confrontation, with characters' movement through the house itself carrying symbolic weight. When answering questions on dramatic technique, students should refer to such specific staging and dialogue choices rather than discussing the play purely as if it were a short story.

7 Important Examination Questions — Unit 4

1. Discuss *Wada Chirebandi* as a play about the decline of feudalism in Maharashtra.
2. Examine the character relationships in the play as representative of differing responses to historical/social change.
3. How does Elkunchwar use the wada as a symbol in the play?
4. Comment on the theme of generational conflict in *Wada Chirebandi*.
5. Discuss the portrayal of gender roles within the Deshpande family.
6. Examine Elkunchwar's use of realistic/naturalistic dramatic technique.
7. “The wada is as much a character in the play as any of the Deshpande family members.” Discuss.

Comparative Study Across All Four Texts

1 “Home” and “House” Across the Four Texts (CO6/COS6)

Text	Representation of Home/House
Kamble — The Prisons We Broke	The maharwada/community settlement as a site of confinement — a literal and social “prison” to be broken through education and reform; home is where oppression is inscribed onto daily life.
Ghosh — “Going Away”	Home as a fragile, remembered geography (Dhaka), divided by an arbitrary political border (the “shadow line”); home exists more vividly in memory and story than in any physically accessible place.
Ramanujan — Poems	The ancestral house as a site of family hypocrisy, absorption, and suffocating permanence (“Small-Scale Reflections”); domestic space also carries the weight of memory, death, and gentle irony (“Obituary”).
Elkunchwar — Wada Chirebandi	The wada as a crumbling physical ruin — its literal decay mirrors and enacts the collapse of the feudal family structure and its once-unquestioned values.

2 Genre and Social Context Comparison

Text	Genre	Social Context	Central Trauma
The Prisons We Broke	Autobiography/Testimony	Caste (Dalit/Mahar community)	Untouchability and gender oppression
“Going Away”	Novel excerpt	Partition/nationalism	Political violence, displaced memory
Ramanujan's poems	Poetry	Urban middle-class family	Death, hypocrisy, loss of innocence
Wada Chirebandi	Play (drama)	Feudal Maharashtra	Disintegration of family/tradition

3 Comparative Treatment of Memory

- Kamble's memory is collective and testimonial — individual recollection stands in for the whole community's suffering and transformation.
- Ghosh's memory is inherited and constructed — the narrator's “memories” of Dhaka and the riots are largely second-hand, built from Tridib's stories, raising questions of ownership and reliability.
- Ramanujan's memory is personal and ironic — childhood and family memories are revisited with a distancing, self-aware irony rather than straightforward nostalgia.

- Elkunchwar's “memory” operates at the level of the family/house itself — the wada carries the sedimented memory of generations, which the returning characters must confront.

4 Comparative Treatment of Social Change

- Kamble: change is depicted as hard-won, positive, and collective — driven by the Ambedkarite movement and education.
- Ghosh: change (Partition, nation-formation) is depicted as externally imposed, violent, and productive of loss rather than progress.
- Ramanujan: change is intimate and generational — the gap between the poet's persona and his family/tradition, treated with irony rather than tragedy.
- Elkunchwar: change is economic and structural — the shift from feudal agrarian order to urban modernity, treated with ambivalence rather than clear celebration or lament.

Theoretical Frameworks

1 Dalit Studies

- A critical framework centred on caste as a primary category of social oppression in South Asia, and on Dalit self-representation as a corrective to upper-caste-authored historiography and literature.
- Key concerns: testimony and witness, the politics of naming and voice, the critique of Hindu religious and social order, and the relationship between Dalit writing and the broader Ambedkarite political movement.
- Most directly applicable to: *The Prisons We Broke*, where Kamble's narrative functions precisely as Dalit testimony and self-representation.

2 Postcolonial Studies

- Examines the cultural, political, and psychological legacies of colonialism, including the arbitrary drawing of national borders and the construction of modern nationalism.
- Key concerns: hybridity, the nation as an “imagined community,” the aftermath of Partition, and the relationship between memory and national identity.
- Most directly applicable to: “Going Away,” with its explicit critique of borders and nationalism, but also relevant to Ramanujan's hybrid diction and Elkunchwar's depiction of a changing postcolonial rural economy.

3 Memory Studies

- Focuses on how individual and collective memory is constructed, transmitted, and represented in literature — including concepts such as postmemory (memory of events not directly experienced but inherited through family narrative) and trauma's resistance to linear narration.
- Most directly applicable to: “Going Away” (inherited memory of Partition-era violence) and Ramanujan's poems (personal, ironic memory of family and childhood).

4 Feminist Criticism

- Examines the representation of gender, patriarchy, and women's agency (or lack thereof) within literary texts and their social contexts.
- Applicable across all four texts: Kamble's Dalit women facing double oppression; Ila's contested freedom versus Thamma's constrained nationalism in Ghosh; the women implicated in the “Great House” and family life in Ramanujan; and the constrained daughters and daughters-in-law of the Deshpande family in Elkunchwar.

Author Timelines (Quick Reference)**1 Baby Kamble**

Year	Event
1929	Born in Veergaon, Maharashtra, into a Mahar family already touched by the early Ambedkarite movement.
1980s	Jina Amucha serialised in Marathi, documenting her community's life and transformation.
2008	English translation <i>The Prisons We Broke</i> published, translated by Maya Pandit.
2012	Baby Kamble passes away, remembered as a pioneering Dalit woman autobiographer.

2 Amitav Ghosh

Year	Event
1956	Born in Calcutta; later trained as a social anthropologist at Oxford.
1986	Debut novel <i>The Circle of Reason</i> published.
1988	<i>The Shadow Lines</i> published; wins the Sahitya Akademi Award.
2000s onward	Continues major fiction (<i>The Glass Palace</i> , the Ibis Trilogy) and nonfiction on climate and history.

3 A. K. Ramanujan

Year	Event
1929	Born in Mysore, Karnataka, into a bilingual, academically inclined family.
1950s–60s	Moves to the United States; begins long academic career at the University of Chicago.
1967	<i>The Striders</i> , his first major English poetry collection, published.
1970s–80s	Publishes major translations of classical Tamil and medieval Kannada poetry (<i>The Interior Landscape</i> , <i>Speaking of Siva</i>).
1993	Passes away in Chicago, leaving a substantial body of poetry, translation, and folklore scholarship.

4 Mahesh Elkunchwar

Year	Event
1939	Born in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.
1970s–80s	Establishes reputation as a major modern Marathi playwright with realist family dramas.
1985	Wada Chirebandi, first play of the ‘Wada trilogy,’ staged/published.
Later	Completes the trilogy with Magna Talyakathi and Yugant, cementing his reputation as a leading figure in modern Marathi theatre.

Glossary of Key Literary Terms

Term	Definition (as relevant to this course)
Testimony/Testimonio	A first-person narrative that bears witness to collective suffering or historical injustice, blurring the line between personal memoir and political/historical documentation.
Untouchability	The practice of caste-based social exclusion and discrimination against communities deemed “impure” within the traditional Hindu caste system.
Maharwada	A segregated hamlet or settlement, typically located outside the main village, historically assigned to the Mahar caste community.
Shadow Lines	Ghosh's central metaphor for political/national borders as arbitrary, often invisible, yet violently consequential divisions.
Postmemory	Memory of events not directly experienced by the individual, but inherited and internalised through family narrative and cultural transmission.
Irony (literary)	A mode of expression in which the intended meaning differs from, or contrasts with, the literal statement — used extensively by Ramanujan to create critical distance.
Understatement	A rhetorical device that deliberately presents something as less significant than it actually is, often to heighten ironic or emotional effect by contrast.
Wada	A large traditional stone mansion associated with feudal landowning families in rural Maharashtra; both literal setting and symbol in Elkunchwar's play.
Feudalism (in this context)	A socio-economic system in which large landowning families held significant local authority over land, labour, and social status, later eroded by agrarian and economic modernisation.
Naturalism (drama)	A dramatic style aiming for lifelike, realistic representation of character and setting, typically featuring restrained, colloquial dialogue and ordinary domestic situations.
Hybrid diction	A blending of linguistic/cultural registers — in Ramanujan's case, Indian subject matter and sensibility expressed through precise modernist English.
Ensemble structure (drama)	A dramatic structure in which no single character is the sole protagonist; dramatic focus is distributed across a group, as in Wada Chirebandi.

Term	Definition (as relevant to this course)
Autobiography	A first-person narrative account of one's own life, traditionally centred on individual development, distinguished in this course from the more collective mode of testimony.
Partition	The 1947 division of British India into India and Pakistan (with Bangladesh emerging separately in 1971), accompanied by mass displacement and communal violence, forming the historical backdrop of 'Going Away.'
Imagined community	A concept describing the nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of it, relevant to Ghosh's critique of nationalism.
Elegy/Elegiac	A reflective poem or passage lamenting the dead; Ramanujan's 'Obituary' is notable for undercutting conventional elegiac solemnity.
Intersectionality	A framework for understanding how overlapping social identities (such as caste and gender) combine to produce compounded forms of discrimination, relevant to Kamble's depiction of Dalit women.
Agrarian economy	An economic system centred on agriculture and landholding, the declining structural basis of the feudal wada system depicted by Elkunchwar.
Free verse	Poetry that does not follow a fixed metrical or rhyme pattern, characteristic of Ramanujan's conversational, image-driven style.

1 Author-Text Quick Match

Author	Text	Original Language
Baby Kamble	The Prisons We Broke (tr. Maya Pandit)	Marathi (Jina Amucha)
Amitav Ghosh	"Going Away" from The Shadow Lines	English
A. K. Ramanujan	Four selected poems	English
Mahesh Elkunchwar	Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion)	Marathi

2 Suggested Further Reading (Background Context)

Area	Suggested Background Reading
Dalit literature/history	Writings and speeches of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar; autobiographical works by Daya Pawar, Urmila Pawar, and Kumud Pawde for comparative context.
Partition studies	General historical accounts of the 1947 Partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War for background to Ghosh's novel.
Modern Indian English poetry	Other work by A. K. Ramanujan, including his translations <i>The Interior Landscape</i> and <i>Speaking of Siva</i> , for comparative stylistic context.
Modern Marathi theatre	Other plays by Mahesh Elkunchwar, including <i>Garbo</i> and the remaining plays of the <i>Wada</i> trilogy, for fuller context on his dramatic method.

Section I: Model Long-Answer Essays (15-Mark Format)

The following model answers illustrate how to structure a full-length 15-mark essay response. Use these as templates for structure and argument development — always write your final exam answer in your own words.

Unit 1 Model Answer

Q: Discuss *The Prisons We Broke* as a testimonial narrative of Dalit life.

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* exemplifies the genre of testimonio, in which personal autobiography merges with collective historical witness. Rather than presenting a purely individual life story, Kamble consistently uses the first-person plural 'we,' signalling that her experiences of untouchability, poverty, and gender oppression stand for the shared suffering of the entire Mahar community. The text's testimonial power lies in its unflinching, granular detail of daily humiliation — segregated housing in the maharwada, forced labour, and degrading food practices — which had rarely been documented from a Dalit woman's own perspective in Indian literature. The narrative's second major function as testimony is to document transformation: the arrival of Ambedkar's message reframes the community's fatalistic acceptance of suffering into an assertive demand for dignity through education and religious conversion. By combining unpolished, oral narrative style with ethnographic specificity, Kamble produces a text that is simultaneously memoir, social history, and political statement — fulfilling the core function of Dalit testimonial literature: to make visible a suffering and a resistance that mainstream historiography had ignored.

Unit 2 Model Answer

Q: Explain the concept of 'shadow lines' as developed by Ghosh in *Going Away*.

The phrase 'shadow lines,' which gives Ghosh's novel its title, encapsulates the text's central argument about the arbitrariness of political borders. In *Going Away*, this idea emerges most powerfully through Thamma's bewilderment at the concept of a national border with no visible physical marker — she expects to see a line, a wall, or a trench separating India from what was once her home in Dhaka, and cannot reconcile this expectation with the reality of an invisible, cartographic division. Ghosh uses this naive but penetrating question to expose how modern nationalism constructs seemingly absolute distinctions of belonging and identity that have no basis in the lived, continuous geography and culture of the region. The border is a 'shadow' because it is at once insubstantial — an abstraction drawn on paper — and yet capable of casting a very real, violent effect, dividing families, triggering communal violence, and reshaping entire lives. The novel's fragmented, non-linear treatment of the riots and political violence connected to Partition further reinforces this idea: the border's consequences ripple outward unpredictably, ignoring the very lines meant to contain and define separate nations. Through this concept, Ghosh critiques the nation-state's claim to natural, self-evident boundaries, suggesting instead that such lines are historically contingent, ideologically constructed, and tragically consequential.

Unit 3 Model Answer

Q: Examine the house as a symbol of the joint family in 'Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House.'

In this poem, Ramanujan transforms the ancestral joint-family house into an extended metaphor for tradition itself. The poem's central conceit is that the house absorbs everything that enters it — relatives, mourners, thieves, stray animals, ideas, even illnesses — and never truly releases anything, whether object or person. This absorptive, retentive quality mirrors the workings of the joint family system: an institution that draws individuals into its orbit and resists their full departure, whether through obligation, memory, or ritual. Ramanujan's cumulative, list-like structure enacts this logic formally, building meaning through an accumulating catalogue of trivial and significant items alike, producing a tone of wry, deadpan humour. Yet the poem's closing meditation on death complicates any simple celebratory reading: even mortality, the poem suggests, does not free an individual from the house's hold, since memory and family narrative continue to reabsorb the dead into the household's ongoing story. The house thus becomes ambivalently both a symbol of comforting continuity and of suffocating, inescapable confinement — Ramanujan refuses to resolve this tension, instead holding pride in and burden of tradition together within a single controlling image.

Unit 4 Model Answer

Q: Discuss Wada Chirebandi as a play about the decline of feudalism in Maharashtra.

Mahesh Elkunchwar's Wada Chirebandi uses the ancestral stone mansion of the Deshpande family as both literal setting and controlling symbol for the broader decline of Maharashtra's feudal agrarian order. The wada, once the seat of a locally powerful landowning family, is shown in a state of physical disrepair — crumbling walls and neglected rooms that visually enact the family's declining economic and social status. The occasion of a family gathering, prompted by illness and subsequent death, draws together siblings who remained bound to the village and its traditional obligations, and those who migrated to cities in pursuit of modern opportunity; their reunion exposes long-suppressed tensions over property, inheritance, and responsibility that the feudal system's assumed hierarchy could no longer smoothly contain. Elkunchwar's naturalistic, ensemble dramatic technique — avoiding a single clear protagonist and relying on restrained, colloquial dialogue — distributes sympathy and critique across the family rather than offering a simple verdict on tradition versus modernity. The play thus dramatizes feudal decline not as a single dramatic event but as a slow, generational unravelling, played out through property disputes, generational value conflict, and the persistent, if diminished, patriarchal constraints still placed on the family's women even as the old order collapses around them.

Additional Model Answer — Unit 1

Q: How does Kamble portray the double oppression of Dalit women?

Baby Kamble's narrative repeatedly demonstrates that Dalit women within the Mahar community endured a compounded form of oppression, subject simultaneously to caste-based discrimination from upper-caste society and to patriarchal control within their own community. On one hand, Dalit women, like all Mahars, were denied basic dignities by caste-Hindu society — excluded from public spaces, subjected to degrading labour, and treated as ritually impure. On the other hand, within the maharwada itself, women faced child marriage, arranged unions without consent, relentless domestic and agricultural labour, and routine domestic violence treated as a husband's prerogative. Kamble further shows how superstition and ritual — beliefs about menstrual impurity, practices of exorcism, and rigid codes of modesty — functioned as additional mechanisms of female control, often enforced by older women themselves upon younger ones, revealing how

patriarchy operates even through its victims. Crucially, Kamble does not treat these two axes of oppression as separate; she demonstrates how poverty, caste stigma, and gender subordination reinforce one another, trapping Dalit women in a uniquely constrained position. This anticipates what later theorists would term an intersectional analysis, and it is one of the text's most significant contributions to Indian feminist and Dalit literary discourse.

Additional Model Answer — Unit 2

Q: Discuss the relationship between personal memory and political history in 'Going Away.'

In 'Going Away,' Ghosh consistently demonstrates that personal, familial memory cannot be separated from the larger currents of political and national history. The narrator's recollections of his grandmother, of Tridib, and of the Price family are never purely private; they are continually interwoven with the histories of colonialism, Partition, and communal violence that shaped his family's displacement from Dhaka to Calcutta. Thamma's memories of her childhood home are inseparable from the political fact of Partition, which transformed her birthplace into foreign territory overnight. Similarly, the narrator's own understanding of distant riots and violence comes to him fragmented and indirect — pieced together from adult conversations, newspaper reports, and Tridib's own store of knowledge — mirroring how political history enters personal consciousness unevenly and incompletely. Ghosh's non-linear narrative structure formally enacts this entanglement: the text moves associatively between childhood scenes in Calcutta, Thamma's memories of Dhaka, and later events in England, refusing any clean separation between the domestic and the historical. The novel's ultimate argument is that private memory is always already political, and that the traumas of national history are lived out, often silently, within ordinary family life.

Additional Model Answer — Unit 3

Q: How does 'A River' critique poetic tradition and convention?

Ramanujan's 'A River' mounts a sustained critique of both classical and contemporary Indian poetic conventions by exposing their shared failure to register human suffering. Set on the banks of the Vaikai in Madurai, the poem recalls how 'old poets' within the Tamil literary tradition celebrated the river's floods for their grandeur — the water reaching temple steps, touching famous bridges — treating the flood as an occasion for aesthetic and devotional celebration. Ramanujan's central irony is that 'new poets,' his own contemporaries, continue this same pattern, reproducing inherited images of grandeur rather than confronting the flood's real human cost. The poem's most devastating image — a pregnant woman whose twin unborn children are swept away by the flood waters — is delivered in the same flat, understated tone as the poem's other details, forcing the reader to register the shocking gap between poetic convention and lived reality. Through this juxtaposition of myth and mundane tragedy, Ramanujan suggests that poetic tradition, when followed uncritically, can become a form of moral blindness — substituting inherited beauty for honest witness. The poem is thus as much a meta-poetic statement about the responsibilities of poetry itself as it is a description of a particular river.

Additional Model Answer — Unit 4

Q: Examine the character relationships in Wada Chirebandi as representatives of different responses to historical change.

Elkunchwar structures Wada Chirebandi as an ensemble drama in which each member of the Deshpande family embodies a distinct stance toward the family's declining feudal fortunes, avoiding any single protagonist or straightforward moral resolution. Those siblings who remained in the village are shown bound by duty and tradition, often resentful of the burden of caregiving and upkeep that has fallen disproportionately upon them, even as they retain a lingering attachment

to the wada's symbolic status. Those who migrated to cities return with a more detached, pragmatic view of the property, often primarily concerned with its monetary value in the context of inheritance, reflecting the increasing dominance of market-oriented, individualistic values over inherited communal obligation. Generational divides compound these differences: older characters cling more firmly to hierarchy and the family's traditional honour, while younger characters treat such concerns with impatience or indifference. Meanwhile, the women of the household — largely excluded from decision-making regardless of their labour and emotional investment in the family's welfare — reveal that the decline of feudal authority does not automatically produce greater freedom for all family members. Through this carefully distributed range of responses, Elkunchwar avoids reducing the wada's decline to a simple contest between old and new, tradition and modernity, instead presenting historical change as something differently absorbed, resisted, or exploited by each individual within the same family.

Additional Model Answer — Unit 3 (Second)

Q: Discuss the theme of memory and childhood in 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing.'

Ramanujan's 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing' uses a single, concrete childhood scene — swinging together with a female cousin — to trace the delicate, almost imperceptible transition from unselfconscious childhood physicality to adult self-awareness of desire and social propriety. The poem's power lies in its refusal to sentimentalise this transition: rather than mourning the loss of innocence in an overtly emotional register, Ramanujan's adult speaker looks back on the scene with a controlled, ironic distance, aware of ambiguities and undercurrents that his younger self could not have recognised or named. The swing itself, as a concrete physical image, allows the poem to register bodily closeness and motion without needing to state directly what has changed between childhood and adulthood; the reader is left to infer the shift in meaning attached to the same remembered physical actions. This technique — grounding a poem's emotional and psychological argument in a single, precise, concrete image — is characteristic of Ramanujan's broader poetic method, and the poem exemplifies how memory, in his work, is never simply nostalgic but always inflected by the ironic self-awareness of the remembering adult mind.

Comparative Model Essay

Q: Compare the representations of 'home' across any two of the prescribed texts.

Both *The Prisons We Broke* and 'Going Away' explore 'home' as a site of profound ambivalence, though the two texts approach this theme through very different social contexts. For Baby Kamble, the maharwada — the Mahar community's segregated settlement — is simultaneously home and prison: it is the site of kinship, ritual, and community memory, yet it is also where caste oppression is most intimately and repeatedly enacted upon the body and daily life. Kamble's narrative arc traces a movement from accepting this space as an unquestioned given to actively transforming it through education and the Ambedkarite movement — 'home' becomes something to be reformed and reclaimed rather than simply inhabited. In Ghosh's 'Going Away,' by contrast, home is defined primarily by inaccessibility: Thamma's Dhaka is a home she can no longer physically reach, rendered foreign by the arbitrary but violently consequential drawing of a national border. Where Kamble's home is a present, lived space to be changed from within, Ghosh's home exists primarily in memory and story, its loss made permanent by a political rather than social transformation. Both texts, however, share a crucial insight: that 'home' in each case is inseparable from larger historical and political forces — caste hierarchy in one case, nationalism and Partition in the other — and that neither text allows home to remain a simple, comforting, private space untouched by history.

Quick Revision Charts & Viva Questions**One-Line Theme Summary Chart**

Text	One-line Theme Summary
The Prisons We Broke	Testimony of caste and gender oppression, and liberation through Ambedkarite reform and education.
“Going Away”	Memory, arbitrary national borders (‘shadow lines’), and the entanglement of personal and political history.
Ramanujan's poems	Irony-laden meditations on family, memory, death, and cultural hybridity through concrete, everyday imagery.
Wada Chirebandi	The slow disintegration of a feudal joint family, symbolised by the crumbling ancestral wada.

Key Names and Terms Quick Reference

Text	Key Names/Terms to Remember
Kamble	Jina Amucha (original Marathi title); Maya Pandit (translator); Dr. B. R. Ambedkar; maharwada; Buddhist conversion.
Ghosh	The Shadow Lines (novel); Thamma (grandmother); Tridib (granduncle); Ila (cousin); the Price family; Dhaka; Sahitya Akademi Award.
Ramanujan	“Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”; “A River” (Vaikai river, Madurai); “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House”; “Obituary”; The Interior Landscape (translations).
Elkunchwar	Wada Chirebandi (Old Stone Mansion); Deshpande family; “Wada trilogy” (with Magna Talyakathi, Yugant); Vidarbha setting.

Short Notes

The Significance of the Title *The Prisons We Broke*

The title operates on both literal and metaphorical levels. Literally, it evokes the segregated maharwada and the physical/social restrictions imposed on the Mahar community under untouchability. Metaphorically, it captures the psychological imprisonment of internalised inferiority, fatalism, and oppressive customs that governed daily life, particularly for women. The plural 'prisons' acknowledges the multiple, overlapping forms of confinement — caste, poverty, gender, superstition — while 'broke' signals the active, hard-won liberation achieved through the Ambedkarite movement, education, and eventual conversion to Buddhism, framing the text as a narrative of collective emancipation rather than mere suffering.

Thamma's Understanding of the Border

Thamma's inability to comprehend a border without a physical marker — a line, a wall, a trench — exposes the constructed, arbitrary nature of national boundaries in Ghosh's novel. A former freedom fighter with a disciplined nationalist worldview, she expects the border to be visibly inscribed on the landscape, much as national identity is inscribed with certainty in her own mind. Her confusion becomes the vehicle for Ghosh's broader critique: that nations are 'imagined,' that borders are historically contingent rather than natural, and that such abstractions can nonetheless produce devastatingly real consequences, severing a lifetime's memory of home from present geographical and political reality.

The House as Symbol in 'Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House'

Ramanujan's poem uses the ancestral joint-family house as an extended metaphor for tradition's absorptive, retentive power. The house is shown to receive and permanently keep everything and everyone who enters — relatives, mourners, even thieves — reflecting how the joint family similarly draws individuals into lasting, often inescapable obligation. The poem's cumulative catalogue structure enacts this absorptive logic formally. Its closing meditation on death, which the house's hold survives even mortality, complicates any simple reading of the house as purely comforting, instead holding together pride in continuity and anxiety about confinement within a single ambivalent image.

The Wada as Symbol in *Wada Chirebandi*

The crumbling ancestral wada functions as the play's central symbol, its physical disrepair directly paralleling the Deshpande family's declining feudal status and fracturing unity. As a once-grand seat of local authority now beset by financial strain and disputed inheritance, the wada embodies the transition from a stable agrarian feudal order to an uncertain modern economic reality. Elkunchwar uses the house almost as a silent character, a witness to generations of family history, whose uncertain fate at the play's close — much like the family's own future — remains deliberately unresolved, reinforcing the play's naturalistic refusal of tidy dramatic closure.

Short Note: Irony in Ramanujan's Poetry

Irony is Ramanujan's principal poetic tool for approaching emotionally weighted subjects — childhood desire, natural disaster, family tradition, and death — without resorting to direct sentimental statement. In 'A River,' the same flat, understated tone describes both the river's mythic grandeur and a drowned pregnant woman's twin children, sharpening the critique of poetic convention's blindness to real suffering. In 'Obituary,' the bureaucratic, factual diction of the poem undercuts conventional elegiac solemnity, allowing the poem to register loss through absence and implication rather than overt grief. This consistent ironic distance is a defining feature of Ramanujan's modernist poetic voice.

Extended Comparative Essay: Memory Across the Syllabus

Q: Compare the function of memory in any two of the four prescribed texts.

Memory functions as both subject and structuring device in Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Ghosh's 'Going Away,' though the two texts mobilise it toward different ends. In Kamble's narrative, memory is fundamentally collective and testimonial: her recollection of childhood suffering, ritual humiliation, and eventual community transformation is offered not as a private record but as a shared history, told largely in the first-person plural, standing in for the experience of the Mahar community as a whole. Memory here serves an explicitly political function — to document injustice and to record the hard-won process of liberation through the Ambedkarite movement, ensuring that this history is not lost or erased by dominant caste-Hindu narratives. In Ghosh's chapter, by contrast, memory is more fragmented, inherited, and epistemologically uncertain. The narrator's understanding of Dhaka, Partition-era violence, and even his own family's history comes to him largely second-hand, filtered through Tridib's stories and Thamma's recollections, raising persistent questions about the reliability and ownership of memory that is not directly experienced. Where Kamble's memory work asserts a stable, if painful, collective truth, Ghosh's narrative structure — moving non-chronologically between time frames — enacts memory's inherent instability and its entanglement with imagination. Both texts, however, insist that memory is never merely personal: in each case, individual recollection is inseparable from larger histories of caste or nation that have shaped the possibilities of individual life.

Q: Compare the treatment of gender across the prescribed syllabus, with reference to at least two texts.

Gender operates as a significant, if variably foregrounded, concern across the prescribed syllabus, most explicitly in Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* and Elkunchwar's *Wada Chirebandi*. Kamble's text offers perhaps the most sustained and explicit feminist critique, documenting the double oppression faced by Dalit women, who endure both caste discrimination from upper-caste society and patriarchal control within their own community — through child marriage, domestic violence, and restrictive ritual codes around menstruation and modesty. Kamble's narrative is notable for refusing to separate the Ambedkarite movement's gains from an ongoing critique of patriarchy: liberation from caste oppression does not automatically resolve gender subordination within the community. Elkunchwar's play offers a structurally different but thematically resonant picture: as the feudal Deshpande family's fortunes decline, the women of the household continue to bear the primary burden of domestic labour and caregiving, particularly of the ailing patriarch, while remaining largely excluded from decisions regarding property and the family's future. In both texts, then, the erosion or transformation of one oppressive structure — caste hierarchy in Kamble, feudal economic order in Elkunchwar — does not straightforwardly translate into greater freedom for women, who remain constrained by persistent patriarchal expectations. This shared insight suggests that gender subordination operates according to its own logic, capable of outlasting or adapting to changes in the larger social and economic structures within which it is embedded.

Q: 'Each of the prescribed texts stages a conflict between tradition and modernity.' Discuss with reference to at least two texts.

The tension between tradition and modernity runs through the prescribed syllabus in varied forms. In Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, tradition initially appears as an oppressive force — the inherited caste order and its associated rituals and superstitions — against which the modernising

influence of the Ambedkarite movement, with its emphasis on education and self-respect, is positioned as liberating. Here modernity is unambiguously framed as progress, even as Kamble acknowledges the difficulty and unevenness of the community's transition away from old practices. In Elkunchwar's *Wada Chirebandi*, by contrast, the relationship between tradition and modernity is treated with far greater ambivalence: the decline of the feudal wada system is neither straightforwardly mourned nor celebrated, and the play refuses to endorse either the nostalgic attachment of those who remained in the village or the pragmatic detachment of those who moved to the city. Reading these two texts together reveals that the syllabus as a whole resists any single, uniform verdict on tradition and modernity — instead presenting their relationship as historically and socially contingent, capable of being genuinely liberating in one context (caste reform) and genuinely more ambiguous in another (the loss of an inherited but also constraining family

Short Note: Gender and Patriarchy in the Prescribed Syllabus

Gender operates as a significant concern across the prescribed texts, most explicitly in Kamble's and Elkunchwar's works. Kamble documents the double oppression of Dalit women, who face caste discrimination from upper-caste society and patriarchal control within their own community through child marriage, domestic violence, and restrictive ritual codes. Elkunchwar shows how, even as the Deshpande family's feudal fortunes decline, its women continue to bear the primary burden of domestic labour and caregiving while remaining excluded from property decisions. Both texts suggest that the erosion of one oppressive structure — caste hierarchy or feudal economic order — does not automatically produce greater freedom for women, who remain constrained by persistent patriarchal expectations that operate according to their own, more durable logic.

Short Note: Education and Knowledge as Transformative Forces

Education functions as a decisive transformative force in at least two of the prescribed texts. In Kamble's narrative, education — encouraged directly by the Ambedkarite movement — becomes the primary instrument by which the Mahar community moves from fatalistic acceptance of caste oppression to assertive self-respect and reform, quite literally 'breaking the prison' of ignorance and internalised inferiority. In Ghosh's 'Going Away,' Tridib's extensive, self-directed knowledge of distant places, gained through study rather than direct experience, becomes a different kind of transformative education — one that reshapes the narrator's own imaginative relationship to geography and memory. Both texts thus present knowledge, whether formal or self-taught, as a means of expanding possibility and agency beyond what direct lived circumstance would otherwise allow.