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# UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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**Writing** is an art, and more so creative writing, which is an expression of your creative urge. You will find this course not only informative but also stimulative of your creative impulse, in which respect it differs from all other courses. This course not only discusses the various aspects of creative writing, but also helps you **mould** yourself into a writer.

In the first Unit on your creative writing course, certain fundamental ideas are discussed. It starts with the assumption that writing is a social act, and that man writes because he must share with others what he thinks and feels. Further, it informs **you** that

- the distinction between creative and non-creative writing is that between **informing** and **revealing**;
- the content of writing chooses the only form appropriate to it;
- the essence of content is experience transformed in the mind of the writer;
- structure is **basically** the ordering of **material**;
- style is that handling of language which expresses the content best;
- an aspiring writer should
  - i) read extensively and with discrimination,
  - ii) allow his experience to mature,
  - iii) strike out his own path, **i.e.** write something individual, different;
  - iv) **begin** with keeping a private diary of thoughts and experiences;
  - v) then **visualise** the course of the work clearly; and
  - vi) try to achieve **maximum** clarity, precision, directness, and a **sense** of economy.
- You must not only be your own critic, but should also submit your **work** to discerning friends for **criticism**.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Man is a social **animal**. Once his primary needs such as food, shelter and clothing are met, it becomes **necessary** for him to **fulfil** the social need of communication. He must communicate with other human beings not only to seek and impart information, but also to share with them his experiences—his joys and sorrows. The signals man **makes** through speech, action or artistic creation, have **all** this common **purpose—to** be understood by others.

Early man expressed himself through gestures with his hands and face. This was the first mode of communication available to him. Man could also produce mutually unconnected grunts and groans to express his basic emotions like anger and satisfaction. This **was** another mode of communication for him. With the passage of time, with developing intelligence, he began to connect one sound with another and turn his grunts and groans into sound **patterns**. These sound patterns, with specific meanings attached to each and understood by all in the group, became speech.

However, both gestures and speech had severe limitations. These could be useful only when members of the group were in close proximity.

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## 1.2 THE BIRTH OF WRITING AND ITS IMPORTANCE

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Imagine a situation like this: a woman with her children is away collecting wood for the fire and her man, resting in front of the cave, suddenly spots a wild boar which he has to chase away or hunt. How will he tell his woman where he has gone?

Out of such a **situation** came the first cave drawings, and from these the ideograph. When **these** were found inadequate, alphabets which could reproduce human speech **phonetically**, were gradually devised. Herein lies the genesis of writing, which can broadly be defined as 'a system of human intercommunication by means of visible conventional markings.'

The **earliest** efforts at **writing**, about six thousand years ago, were made in Egypt and Mesopotamia. They are etchings on clay tablets called '**cuneiforms**'. Starting with them, man continued to improve his methods of writing. He **devised** several other things like parchment, birch-bark and finally paper. If the entire span of time, from the birth of the first well-defined Neanderthal Man **300,000** years ago to the present **time**, is reduced to a **time-scale** of 50 years, writing has been in vogue **only** in the last one year or less. Yet, the strides which human **civilisation** has made in this one year of time-scale have been greater than in the rest of man's **history**. If it is so, the **credit** for it must **go** to one single factor, that is, **writing**, for writing means communication and communication means progress. In the whole of human history, there has been nothing more glorious than writing to explore oneself, and to express oneself. If writing had not been invented, we would not have known anything of the past, anything of other places or people. We would have continued to live in utter ignorance of one another in our isolated little holes.

Why does one write? There could be some easy yet inadequate answers to this question, such as **money**, vanity, or drive for fame. **All** these might be true to some extent. But, basically and more importantly, the answer lies in the urge of the writer to communicate a thought or a feeling—that is, to express himself. As T.S. Eliot has said, '**You** write because you feel the need to free yourself of something'. This **means** that it is psychological and aesthetic compulsion. It also becomes a **social need** when you write about and for other people, as in a novel or a short story, so as to be able to establish a bond with them.



## 1.4 THE SUBSTANCE OF WRITING

Every literary work, big or **small**, essentially consists of four aspects

### 1.4.1 Content

The essence **of content** is **experience**. Experience is what one acquires from **the** life around, **through** one's **senses**, by **observing** things that happen. No writer can possibly write in a **vacuum**. He **would have** seen life around **him** in its various situations, happy and sad, **harsh** and poignant, and he would have made mental notes of everything. When, suddenly, it occurs to **him** to **write** a **story** with a **certain** event as its centre, **with** a particular set **of characters**, the right **elements**, which he had once accumulated in **his** mind and which have in the meanwhile undergone strange **transformations** **within** him, **will begin** tumbling out of their own accord and take a new life **on** paper. Even when **one** invents a story, its **elements** would somewhere resemble **the real**. Otherwise, **the** writing will lack credibility and **authenticity** (**which** are discussed in Unit 3 of Block 1). A well-written work should always **give the reader the feeling** that it is real; it should never make him say, 'Oh, how could this **ever happen!**' Hence, it is necessary for a writer to keep his eyes and ears open and **closely observe** the life around so as to be able to stock those images for use in **future**.

### 1.4.2 Form

Form has two meanings: **Firstly**, literary **form** and secondly, structural form.

As for literary form, the **content** itself generally decides what form it **should take**. Whether a particular **insight** should come out as a story or a novel, or its nature and quality are such that **nothing** but a poem express it full is not generally decided consciously. It comes on its own with the idea of writing itself. **Occasionally**, the writer may be in a **dilemma** and has to decide, taking all **factors** into consideration, which form to **choose**.

### 1.4.3 Structure

As for its structural **sense**, **the** guiding principle should be easy communication for easy **comprehension**. In **order** to achieve a good structure, **the** writer should first of all order his material, **that** is, decide—(a) how much of what should be in the work, and (b) in what order. **Logic**, commonsense and experience, **drawn** from one's wide reading, will help here. Just as a 500-page novel cannot be **managed** with only two characters, an **eight-page story** cannot have two dozen characters, unless the writer is a genius. One cannot go **on** describing the locale of the story for seven pages, **reserving** all the action **and** its denouement to the last page. As for the order, the Aristotelian 'beginning-middle-and-end' is a time-tested sequence. But a gifted writer **can** always make variations. Literary tradition has provided us with several acceptable models; but if the writer is innovative he can create newer models. It is important to bear in **mind**, however, that ultimately structure is only a means to an end, and one should **choose** only that in which the content comes through best.

In its totality, a piece of writing is like a work of architecture, where every stone is well-cut and fits into **the** other as if the two are one piece. Nothing in it should stick out. The total structure **should** make an aesthetically **satisfying** whole. The stone metaphor above **applies** to every single element of writing—first the word, then the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter and finally the book itself. Each word in a sentence should work like the right musical note, and each sentence like a bar and the book as a **whole** like a symphony, harmonious in its total orchestration.

### 1.4.4 Style

Then comes style. It is possible that two works written on the same subject, or with the same theme, **should** both be structurally satisfying, yet stylistically one may be better than the other. **Style** is a manner of expressing one's thoughts and **feelings** in words. It is the result of long-cultivated awareness of words and sentences, of the way a writer connects one sentence with another. For one writer, '**succour**' may be



what others have written. When we talk of reading, we do not mean reading casually for entertainment, or because there is nothing better to do. What really matters is reading **critically, analysing** for oneself every detail of the work, asking questions at every step as to why the **writer** has devised his plot in a particular manner, or has made the characters act the way they do, and whether it could have been done in any other way. Long years of close reading in this manner builds up a writer's equipment. It increases his vocabulary. It often provides ready answers to the questions which crop up in the process of writing.

The subject for writing should occur to the writer spontaneously, either coming from inside, or as a sudden reaction to something encountered in the outside world. This is what makes for **inspired** writing. You should not sit down to write with a question like 'What should I write?'.

### 1.5.2 Allow your experience to ripen

The experience which you draw from the life around you should not be put on paper as it is. That would make it a mere matter-of-fact, hackneyed piece of journalism. You should learn to make that experience your own, by **internalising** it. You should allow it to gestate within your mind, in the process of which you may reject a few details and **add** a few others from similar experiences. This kind of gestation **will** also make it personal, intimate and authentic. Hence, it is not desirable to rush for pen and paper as soon as **there** is a desire to write. We have used the word 'gestation'. The act of writing is like giving birth to something. It should come of its own, after it is ripe enough and when it can no longer wait. It serves no purpose to wrench it out by force.

### 1.5.3 Write about your experience differently

Before writing about **anything**, you should ask yourself whether it is something trite which others have already written about, or something new. If it is new, there is nothing like it. It is not **that** a writer can always hit upon new things to write about. Life does not have a new theme to offer everyday to everyone. It is the same birth, the same hunger, the **same** love and the same death—always. But though the themes are few and limited, their variations are unlimited. Here lies the scope for an imaginative mind. You will have to ask yourself whether you can write about the same old thing differently, bringing your own insights and perceptions into it.

### 1.5.4 Start with your diary

Before launching out on **more** ambitious projects like short stories and novels, it is best to **start** with your own diary and reminiscences. A few months of consistent writing of the diary, for **your** private reading, will give you confidence to undertake **more difficult** types of **writing** later on.

### 1.5.5 Visualisation, outline and design

Once you have the basic idea of what you want to write, and you are convinced that it **will** make a fairly good literary work, keep thinking about all its aspects, such as the theme, plot, situation, characters, dialogues, etc. Jot down every small detail that occurs to you. Then **put** down **everything** sequentially and prepare an outline to show how it will start, develop and end. Before finally putting pen to paper, you should have a clear picture in your mind of the entire work. This is called visualisation.

There are many gifted **writers** who, at the time of starting, have only a vague idea of what they are going to write. But as they proceed, the unconscious mind takes over and the writing takes **very** different turns and twists to produce very interesting results. This method may not be advisable for the beginner.

The beginning and the end of a work are vital as in a musical piece. The first few pages are like a **leash** and you should be able to hold the readers with it and lead them on. In fact, there **are** some readers who, if they do not **find** the first and last few paragraphs **interesting** enough, would **just** put down the book.

### 1.5.6 Some do's and don'ts

- i) If there is any one **single** quality which distinguishes most great works, it is clarity—clarity of thought and clarity of expression. Your writing should not be dense or dull, but should shine like a mirror.
- ii) Precision is another such quality—precision both in respect of your thoughts, and the words you use to express them. **Word is God.** Take your words seriously. Do not waste them. When you use a word, make sure of its precise meaning. Tools like the dictionary, thesaurus, etc., will help you to understand the correct meaning of words and their usages.
- iii) Do not overwrite. The days of ornate prose are over. It is possible to achieve miracles even with simple sentences. **No wonder**, the Bible is still considered a model of good writing.
- iv) Similarly, avoid being pompous. Don't be very flippant either. Choose your words and expressions according to the mood of your work.
- v) Also avoid archaisms, **i.e.**, words no longer in vogue, slang, **cliches** and jargon. Write, as it comes to you, effortlessly.
- vi) Length, **i.e.**, how much to write, is yet another important factor. The length will be determined by the scope of your subject. If you are clear in your mind about what you want to say, the end will come where it should.
- vii) Do not try to explain too much. Leave something to the reader's imagination also.
- viii) **Let** your writing be sprightly. A touch of humour, if it is not against the basic mood of your work, is **always** welcome.

### 1.5.7 Learn to be your own critic

After you have written a piece, read it aloud to yourself to test it on your ears. You will **find** several false notes, both in your statements and expressions. You will be surprised that quite a few things which you found exciting when you first put them on paper now seem band. Remove them mercilessly. Every writer should learn to be his own critic.

Once your first draft is ready, put it aside till such time as it is out of your mind. It may have to be for a week, a fortnight, or a **month, or more.** Now **read it** again. You will then see it in a fresh light. At places, it may even make you wonder how you could have been so silly as to write certain things. There will be more work for you, and the typed pages will be filled with corrections. But you should not be dismayed.

### 1.5.8 Seek others' opinions

**For** every writer, it is important to build up a close circle of creative writers and discriminating readers who are on the same wave-length and who can read through his manuscript patiently and give an honest, unbiased opinion about it. It is necessary to shed one's shyness to be able to show one's work to others and also curb one's ego to consider their criticism, however drastic it might be. But, in the end, it **will** be good for the work. If even after all **this** a work fails to pass muster, better forget about it rather than hunt for a publisher. The world will not be the poorer by that one work which failed to come off. You can always make it up with your next work.

#### Activity 3

Did you ever feel the urge to **unburden** yourself of any experience, pleasant or unpleasant, in your life?

Write about it in not more than 200 words.

(See the hints given at the end of this Unit).

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## 1.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

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### Activity 1

- i) Man, being a social animal, has an innate compulsion to communicate with other human beings, not only to **inform them** or know anything from them, but also to share his experiences with them—his joys and sorrows. It is a means for overcoming loneliness and for fulfilling his social urges.
- ii) The forms of communication like gestures, sounds, speech and even signals, all have severe and obvious limitations which early man must have experienced. To overcome their limitations he must have resorted to cave drawings from which the **ideograph** came to be developed. But when they were found inadequate or unhelpful, he must have devised the alphabets which could reproduce human speech. The earliest attempts at writing (in Egypt and Mesopotamia) were **etchings** on clay tablets (cuneiforms) which were followed by those on parchment, birch-bark and **finally** on paper.
- iii) A possible answer is money, vanity or desire to win fame. But the **chief** reason why one writes is to **fulfil** one's urge to communicate a **thought/feeling**, or to relieve oneself of pent-up feelings or other such tensions. There is always a psychological and aesthetic need for a writer.

### Activity 2

- i) Non-creative writing **informs** while creative **writing reveals**. The distinction between the two becomes blurred when a non-creative writing is expressed in poetic language and moves the reader as any creative writing does.
- ii) Form and content; no, if it is a mere transcription of actual experience, it becomes journalistic writing. The facts, whether 'real' or 'invented', undergo transformation **in** the **writer's mind** before they are presented in the form of a story; a novel or a poem. Only then **will** they interest and move others.
- iii) Structure means the ordering of the story material, as in architecture. It applies to every element—plot, character and language.
- iv) Critical reading of the best books of literature—not merely reading them for **entertainment**—is necessary for an aspiring writer. It helps not only in developing his vocabulary but also in suggesting answers to questions which he encounters in the course of his writing. It may act as a **catalyst** to his own creative efforts.

### Activity 3

#### Hints

- i) Write in the first person 'I' form.
- ii) Your vocabulary should include a large number of words and phrases describing your feelings, thoughts and emotions.
- iii) You can use abbreviations, slang and figures of speech.

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## 1.8 GLOSSARY

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You **will find** in the glossary a short list of the words used in this Unit.

**Aristotelian beginning-middle-and-end:** According to **Aristotle**, every form of creative writing should have a clear design—a beginning, a middle and an end.

**Character:** The aggregate of traits and features that form the nature of a person is referred to as character.

**Denouement:** The untying of the complications of a plot; the catastrophe of a tragedy or other event, immediately after the climax, that brings to its end the dramatic conflict.

**Form:** In a literary work, form refers to its shape and structure, and to the manner in which it is made (see **style**), as opposed to its **substance** (content), or what it is about. Form and substance are inseparable but they may be analysed and assessed individually.

**Ideograph:** A written symbol that represents an idea or an object rather than a particular word or speech sound. The Chinese and Japanese languages, for instance, are **ideographic**.

**Phonetics:** It is the study of speech sounds: their production, transmission, and reception. It also involves the analysis, transcription and classification of the sounds of speech.

**Plot:** It is the plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a play, poem or work of fiction. In order to discover the plot you **ask** yourself such questions as: Why did that happen? Why is this happening? What is going to happen next—and why?

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# UNIT 2 HOW TO ACHIEVE LUCIDITY AND DIRECTNESS

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## Structure

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    - 2.2.1 Decide what you want to ~~make~~ clear
    - 2.2.2 Clarity depends upon proper education
    - 2.2.3 Clarity requires a concrete definition of your subject
  - 2.3 Your writing must be engaging
  - 2.4 Clarity and transparency
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  - 2.8 Always keep your reader in mind
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  - 2.10 Directness
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    - 2.10.4 Directness
  - 2.11 **Summing up**
  - 2.12 Activities : aids to answers
  - 2.13 Glossary

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## 2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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Readability, clarity, lucidity, or directness (call this quality by whatever name you will), is one of the **most** important values to be cherished in creative writing, for all writing is **aimed** at a reader who must understand what you are saying. Otherwise communication, which is the purpose of all writing, will not be possible. This fundamental principle of writing is so important that it has been stressed in other Units of your syllabus as well, so that when you write you can aim at meaning, not obscurity, which is unmeaning. You have to remember that

- to achieve clarity you must know, thoroughly and competently, what you want to be clear about. Until your mastery of the subject is complete you will neither know its broad pattern and its **details**, nor will you be able to define for **yourself** what you want to say on the subject; to be able to do so you must have a deep interest in the **subject**. Creativity can emerge only from **this**—so also **transparency**, which is spontaneous and illuminating. Great scientists or great artists have this quality of creative expression; and
- mere rigidity of academic discipline cannot help anyone to attain it; clarity relates to the response of your listener, your reader. If your writing fails to communicate, it has no meaning; but
- clarity is not facile comprehensibility—a mere simplicity of statement. It applies to complex and highly sensitive thoughts also; hence the difficulty in achieving clarity; to achieve clarity one **has** to be a master of language, for it is only by manipulating language **skilfully** that one can express great and complex thoughts **effectively**; such manipulation is called technique, in which the mastery of syntax is **as** important as **a competent** use of vocabulary;
- all this will help you achieve directness and clarity, which make for readability.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the second Unit of **Block 1** of your course. In the first Unit—an introductory one—the genesis of **writing**, the types of writing, the essential aspects of a literary work, tips to an aspiring **writer** like you, and some helpful **Do's** and **Don'ts** were discussed, as also question like 'Why does one write?' and 'Why should one learn to be one's own critic or **seek** others' opinions?'

In this Unit, the importance of the qualities of clarity and directness, which impart value to your work, are explained—qualities which have already been referred to in the previous Unit. Indeed, **their** importance cannot be over-emphasised because, whatever be the theme of **your** work, it will not appeal to the reader if it suffers from opaqueness or obscurity. As pointed out in the previous Unit, the one distinguishing quality of all great literary works is clarity—clarity of thought and clarity of expression.

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## 2.2 THE DIMENSIONS OF CLARITY

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What do you want to be clear about? **Who** do you want to address? **What** is it you want to make clear?

### 2.2.1 Decide what you want to make clear

What you want to make clear is the subject that you have chosen. You cannot be clear about the **smallest** detail without being clear about the whole field, or the subject of which it is a part. Civil liberties, for example, are concerned with the **Constitution**, the judiciary, the widespread knowledge of law in society, the expenses of legal action and an abiding faith in the fruits of the judicial system based upon actual experience. The protection of consumers is linked with the entire market **condition**, and the spending mentality of people in an inflationary situation, where it **seems evidently** more gainful to spend money immediately.

### 2.2.2 Clarity depends upon proper education

Clarity depends upon an **adequate**, competent and **relevant** education. If you have not mastered your subject, you can only flounder about; and in trying to clarify, you may make it all the more **confusing**. Do not try to explain anything which you do not know. Go back to the subject itself, take an all-round and distant view of it, and just as you can see the fields and water and forests in patterns from the air, you will find things falling **into** a **design**. Clarity requires not only a little time and distance from the matter you are dealing with, but also demands wide acquaintance with it.

### 2.2.3 Clarity requires a concrete definition of your subject

Since nobody knows, nod can hope to know, everything, clarity needs a distinctive definition of what your **subject** in hand is. Brash confidence of the 'I know what I want' type is not enough, you have to know what you want to say. If you are presenting routine **information** it is one thing, but it is quite another thing if you are using it for creative **writing**, since what is needed here is an identification **with** the subject. As soon as the **other** man knows that you are not **talking** about something he already knows, but of **something** which you know in a special way, he **will** listen to you.

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## 2.3 YOUR WRITING MUST BE ENGAGING

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A subject which can **form** the matter of creative writing must be interesting: interesting to you and **also** interesting to the people who are going to read your work. Making **things interesting** is a skill, and there are exercises which purport to teach you how to do it. These, however, are merely guidelines and cannot teach you creative writing itself. You may succeed in **making** your writing merely interesting but you **know** what you **are** doing, and so does the man at the receiving end. You



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## 2.5 RIGIDITY MAY AFFECT CLARITY

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Most subjects, even topics, **academically** speaking, have a rigid outline—academic disciplines require and produce a certain controlling of the **mind**, and so far as clarity in creative **expression** goes, **this** rigidity hinders and may even **damage** it.

You yourself are **the basis** and source of clarity. Clear expression must be free, spontaneous, **plastic—sensitive** to the relation **between** you and the people to whom you speak. We seem to **be** very little concerned about clarity when we express ourselves. We seem to **think** that it is the importance of the subject matter that will automatically achieve **clarity**, or that it is the duty of the reader to extract clarity out of whatever we choose to say, in whichever manner we like. In fact, it is one of the advantages of writing, a **different** from speech, that questions are not asked of you right there. But never **imagine** for a moment that because you are writing, questions cannot be asked of you. That kind of feeling or **assumption** is the enemy of clarity. Some of the best **writers** are involved with themselves, **making** their statements, asking their questions, **answering** them themselves. In such cases, there is no clarity, but only rhetoric, **which** is a **confining** of expression. Some of **finest** creative work may eventually **come** out of it but this does not usually happen. Complete self-involvement is not a condition in which you can attain clarity within yourself about what you are **saying**.

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## 2.6 CLARITY IS NOT FACILE COMPREHENSIBILITY

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Clarity does not mean **putting** everything at superficially comprehensible levels. A great deal can be said **very** clearly by omitting its essential complications and it is sometimes useful, as an **evaluation** of clarity, to see what the losses are in achieving this kind of clarity! Such evaluation acts **as** a salutary check on unclear, complicated expressions we may have used.

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## 2.7 CLARITY IS NOT SIMPLICITY OF STATEMENT

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If we consider Henry **James's** novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, we will have to modify our view of clarity. **Clarity** is not limited to dealing only with simple matters, simple statements, simple **human** beings or simple human experiences. If that were so, clarity would set a **frustrating** limit on complex and highly sensitive creative writing. In this novel, Isabel **Archer**, Madame Merle, Osmond, and **Ralph** are not simple human beings. The **hopes** and unions with which *The Portrait of a Lady* begins and the disillusionments which it **reaches** do not represent a simple movement of disappointments; yet the creative art of Henry James lies in the achievement of clarity and **intricacy**. The intricate is so presented to the mind's eye that it is lit up by a luminous clarity. This brings us to the point of saying that clarity has a principle of delight in it which **makes** it creative. If clarity does not require accuracy of vision, if it does not involve the **difficult** exercise of precision in conveying this accuracy of vision, it would not be **the beautiful** thing that it is. It is the difficult thing and not the easy thing that is **beautiful** when rendered appropriately so.

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## 2.8 ALWAYS KEEP YOUR READER IN MIND

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The Victorian **convention** of addressing the reader may have **vanished**, but the reader is still very **much** with us. The clarity of writing—because clarity is a result, an **effect**, not a quality **as such**, depends upon our knowing **clearly** who our reader is. The reader **decides** our **choice** of language. Every writer has his preferences, and

this may, of course, make him choose his readers, but there is no reader **absolutely** made for the language which is the chosen language of the writer. The writer of the **age** of Shakespeare knew the love of language his audience had, and made his reader love his **language** by **leading** him further in the same direction. T.S. Eliot did not **have** readers readymade for the language, knowledge, skill and potentiality, and yet **he** drew upon these. His readers found him difficult, but they loved the **difficulty**; they knew where he was going and were prepared to go along with him and also had **the** resources for doing so. One indeed not only seeks one's audience, but also 'creates' it as it were, which is not possible for every writer.

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## 2.9 RELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CLARITY

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**Language**, being the medium for a diversity of human communications, has to be **individualised** every time it is used. That is why dialects, slang and changes of idiom **are** so essential to creative writing. An abstract standard of language with its prescriptions of correctness and grammar is never enough for creative writing. **There** is a kind of clarity which correctness and grammar may bring about—but **beyond** that we need a community of expression which binds all of us together and **mobilises** the entire resources of the language. **Aristotle**, in his definition of the classic style, defines it as **thinking** the thoughts of the wise and speaking the language of the **common** people. Wise thoughts need not necessarily be expressed in **difficult** language. The language used by common people can be extraordinarily rich in **expressions**. Most people **recognise** the qualities and potentiality of their speech and **are** able to use it with a sense of creativity, pleasure and competence. As soon as the **writer** gets into active touch with the **man** for whom he wishes to write, he has found the key to clarity—and the response is not only of **understanding**, but **also** of that **delight** in the catholicity of experience, which is the field of art. Then the **struggle** for clarity is over and a new world of delight opens.

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## 2.10 DIRECTNESS

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**There** are great examples of directness of language both in life and in literature; in fact, the one leads to the other. **Shaw**, himself a consummate stylist, said, 'Force of **assertion** is the alpha and omega of style'. Oliver **Cromwell**, speaking to the Rump, said, 'You have stayed in this place too long, and there is no health in you. In the **name** of God, go! One characteristic which all these share is a strong conviction, a **purposive** direct need of and drive for, **meaning**. Strong convictions men have, or they acquire them, and it is not relevant here to speak of the roots and modes of such convictions. But it should be evident that men might have strong **convictions** **and** yet remain inexpressive, tongue-tied. The convictions might thus falter, remain unexpressed, and come out **as** anything but direct.

### 2.10.1 How to achieve directness: technique

**Directness**, therefore, has to be forged by technique. However simple it may look **when** achieved, it is the result of continuous exercise, application and refinement. **Syntax** is the muscle of language, and exercise of syntax brings out the inherent force of the language. A writer has to experiment with the language to discover and adapt **its** syntax to bring out the compelling force which drives him. Few writers have achieved such creative power with directness in **modern** times as Ernest **Hemingway**. 'The Killers' is a story one **can** go over again and again to see what can **be** done with the bare bones of syntax.

'He must have got **mixed** up with something in Chicago.'  
'I guess so,' said Nick.  
'It's a hell of a thing.'

(Then there is a **pause** during which George takes out a towel and wipes the counter.)

I wonder **what he** did? Nick said.  
'**Double-crossed** somebody. That's what they kill them for.'  
'I am going to **get** out of this town,' Nick said.  
'Yes, that is a **good** thing to do.'

'A hell of a thing', 'an **awful** thing', 'a good thing to do' are straight out of the syntactical forms **worn** bare by constant usage and yet, isolated by the variation in rhythm, surrounded and spaced by silence and laconic speech, they expand with a burden of meaning, a pressure of **direct** experience that does not bear thinking about.

### 2.10.2 Clarity and syntax

Syntax has a **structure** to which you can return after letting it stand by itself for a time, so that it can **reveal** its outline of meaning. There is a length of time between 'He must have got **mixed** up with something in Chicago', and 'I wonder what he did?' But once we have that ominous vagueness of 'mixed up in something' it is amplified into 'double-crossed **somebody**'. Again, we return to the anonymous public kind of syntax of statement 'a hell of a thing', 'an awful thing' **till** we reach the consequence, 'That's what they **kill them** for'.

### 2.10.3 Clarity and vocabulary

The directness of **syntax**, used with a structural rise of force, is combined with bareness of vocabulary. The accumulation of meaning which can be carried by the **simplest** of words, '**thing**', is sharpened by the structural use of **syntax**. Lest we should think that this **can** be done only with dialogue, let us look at a piece of description **from another Hemingway** masterpiece, 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber'.

'He's dead in **there**,' Wilson said 'Good work,' and he turned to grip Macomber's hand and as they shook hands, grinning at each other, the **gunbearer shouted** wildly and they saw him coming out of the bush sideways, fast as a crab, **and** the bull coming, nose out, massive head straight out. . . coming in a charge, his little pig eyes bloodshot as he looked at them.

### 2.10.4 Directness

Directness, with sharp changes in action, needs abruptness. From the chumminess and relaxation of **mutual** congratulation, we are back to the turmoil of action. Some of the key words are '**wildly**', 'fast as a **crab**', 'bull' and then the anthropomorphic transition to the '**killer**' image, 'nose out', 'head out' and **finally** the primitive intention, 'little pig eyes **bloodshot** as he looked at them'. It is characteristic of the energy of directness that it leaps over differences, going **straight** for its point and we are not deflected, diverted or **confused** by any of the peculiarities of expression that are subsumed in the **directness**.

In one animal **description** we have bull, crab and pig—but they are kept to their distinct purpose of use, not **spilling** over into the whole image, which is one of instantaneous danger. Directness, even in **Hemingway**, the master of the short, simple sentence, does not limit itself by rigidly adhering to that mode of syntax. The details are broken up: clear, vivid, but structured together into the combined moment of **catastrophic** recognition.

#### Activity 2

Examples of clarity in creative writing have been given in this Unit. There are also two excerpts from **Hemingway**. Quote two short passage from any two other writers as examples of clarity. **Also** discuss, in not more than 70 words in each case, how the effect has been **achieved**.

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

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## 2.11 SUMMING UP

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- Clarity and directness are the most important qualities of creative writing.
- Clarity has three dimensions—what you want to be clear about, what you want to make clear and to whom **you** want to be clear.
- To achieve clarity you must have mastery over your chosen subject, **i.e.**, you **must** distance yourself, think over the matter and get well acquainted with it.
- You must be actually interested in the subject and must identify yourself **with** it. Only then will you be presenting even a familiar matter in a special way so as to hold the reader's attention.
- **Making** things interesting to **all** concerned is a skill which can be learnt. But it is not enough for creative **writing** which has the power to move others and to make things **luminous**.
- Clarity is associated with **transparency** which implies **an absorption** in what is being presented—for example the lecture on radar, Shakespeare's **Sonnets** or **Tolstoy's War and Peace**.
- It is you who are the source of clarity. The reader should not be expected to extract clarity from what you present to him. You should yourself anticipate and tackle questions which the reader may ask. But total self-involvement does not, by itself, ensure clarity **within** yourself about what you are saying.
- Clarity does not mean mere comprehensibility, since to make a thing comprehensible one may sometimes omit its essential complexities or complications.
- Clarity does not come **from oversimplified** statements alone.
- One not only seeks an audience but also creates it, as it were.  
Clarity has a great deal to do with language. In a literary work, it is not enough to achieve grammatical correctness in the use of language for it needs to be **individualised**. Rather, you should aim at the expressiveness and distinctiveness which sometimes **characterise** the speech of the common people.
- Strong, **unfaltering** convictions may help in achieving directness of language, but you need continuous and constant experimentation with language to **realise** its inherent force.
- The manipulation of syntax makes for clarity. Skilful, **structural** use of syntax may lend new **meanings** to words.

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## 2.12 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

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### Activity 1

- i) Without mastering **one's** subject one might fumble or make **all** the more confusing what one **wanted** to make clear. Further, one has to be clear about the smallest **detail** of the subject to be able to project it accurately. This should enable the writer to **hold** the attention of the reader.
- ii) Transparency is **associated** with clarity. It involves concentration on the subject, without **which** clarity cannot be achieved. The author has illustrated this by his experience of Dr. K.S. **Krishnan's** lecture on the radar. Unless you master your subject, you are likely to lapse into confusion. Further, a writer should closely observe the use of every little detail in order to make his writing clear and complete.

### Activity 2

#### Hints

Here are four possibilities for you to consider

- i) vividness
- ii) expressiveness
- iii) original use of words and syntax
- iv) facts made luminous.

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## 2.13 GLOSSARY

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You will find in the **glossary** a short list of the literary terms used in this Unit.

**Anthropomorphism:** **Animals** and objects are given human form and qualities.

**Clarity:** One of the three **essential** qualities of expression. It is associated with (1) grammatical **construction**, (2) correspondence with fact, (3) **logical ordering**, and (4) graphic **imagery**.

**Epiphany:** In literature, epiphany means an intuitive and sudden insight into **the** reality and basic **meaning** of an event.

**Rhetoric:** The body of **principles** and **theory concerned** with the presentation of facts and ideas in clear, **convincing** and attractive language, whether spoken or written

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# UNIT 3 AUTHENTICITY AND CREDIBILITY

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## Structure

- 3.0 Aims and Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The child accepts the incredible quite easily
  - 3.2.1 Two absurd but **delightful** stories
  - 3.2.2 The child is not worried by improbability, nor is it worried by moral issues
  - 3.2.3 A sense of reality, however, comes later
- 3.3 Writing is a form of self-expression, even with children
  - 3.3.1 The act of writing itself tells the writer which of his feelings are not sincere, and which are
  - 3.3.2 In writing, authenticity of **emotions** is measured by authenticity of expression
  - 3.3.3 For the writer what authenticity means is that he must himself believe what he wants others to believe
- 3.4 Authenticity of facts
  - 3.4.1 The experience barrier : dangerous to cross it
  - 3.4.2 Experience barrier between cultures
  - 3.4.3 How cross-cultural raids can violate norms of decency
  - 3.4.4 Total authenticity of locale and culture : R.K. Narayan
  - 3.4.5 Authenticity is the **base** of even highly imaginative creation : Raja **Rao**.
  - 3.4.6 Authenticity established, the author can go in for great comic exaggeration: R.K. Narayan.
  - 3.4.7 Authenticity **makes** all the difference between great comedy and situation comedy.
- 3.5 Credibility stems from authenticity
  - 3.5.1 Authenticity **and** credibility : a close look at Mulk Raj **Anand's** "The Lost Child"
  - 3.5.2 **How Anand** establishes **authenticity**
  - 3.5.3 The poetic **passages** are just
  - 3.5.4 The shift **in** language further strengthens the authenticity
- 3.6 Summing up
- 3.7 Activities : aids to answers
- 3.8 Glossary

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## 3.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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This Unit considers one of the **most** important norms of writing, viz., the **establishment** of authenticity and credibility, without which no creative writing can appeal to the reader. It **discusses** the various implications of these two concepts, and illustrates, through examples, how successful writers achieve these effects. This lesson tells you that

- the fantastic imagination of children can take any absurdity in its stride; but
- the adult mind has a sense of reality which looks for the authentic in literature;
- **although** all writing is self-expression, the act of writing filters our emotions; only those which are genuine can be expressed through **writing**;
- the writer must live the experience which he is **trying** to communicate; if he wants readers to feel something he must first feel it himself;
- authenticity of facts is very **important**; a writer must avoid crossing experience and culture barriers;
- authenticity of **locale and** culture have been achieved by such writers as Raja **Rao** and R.K. Narayan. On this authentic base they have written highly imaginative or **comically exaggerated** tales;
- credibility can be **realised** only when authenticity has been achieved;
- Mulk **Raj Anand's** story, discussed at length, shows **how** these effects have been obtained.

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the **third Unit** of Block 1, dealing with the fundamental **norms** of writing. In the **first Unit** we have considered questions of a general nature like, 'Why does one

write? 'What are the two essential aspects of a literary work?' 'What are the Do's and Don'ts for an **aspiring** writer like you?'-and 'Why should one learn to be one's own critic, and why should one seek **other's** opinions?' In the second Unit we have discussed what clarity **means** and how clarity, **which is not** mere simplicity of statement, can be achieved, and also the technique to be **adopted** for achieving directness. Even if your writing attains clarity and **directness**, it will not be valued as a literary work unless it is **marked** by **authenticity** and credibility.

In this Unit, I will tell **you** what authenticity and credibility actually **mean**, and how they can be **realised** in **your work**. But there are no set formulae or recipes for achieving clarity, directness, authenticity or credibility. You are only told what they are but not what can be **done** to achieve them. What is presented here is to help you achieve them on your own through the exercise of your creative imagination. These Units do not constitute a manual, but only **an aid** to the disciplining of your creative powers.

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## 3.2 THE CHILD ACCEPTS THE INCREDIBLE QUITE EASILY

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Children love to hear **stories**. For instance, in fairy tales, **folk** tales, or new stories made up by gifted parents on the spur of the moment, giants and spirits, talking animals and plants, **kindly** gods and bad angels figure prominently, as also do improbable incidents. The child's mind accepts the absurdities with delight and asks no questions about credibility or authenticity. For example, the story may run like this: 'Once there was a **cat** who, when a kitten, liked drinking ink. She had lapped up so much ink that . . . ' of, 'An old man went **walking** in the forest. His **dog** ran behind him. The old man **walked** on and on. By chance he dropped a mitten (a glove for the hand and the wrist). . . ' The **child** enjoys listening to it, but does not question whether it is true or false, probable or improbable. Let us examine these two stories.

### 3.2.1 Two **absurd** but delightful stories

The first story begins **with** a **delightful** absurdity; **the second begins** normally enough, but soon becomes **quite** funny. Let us say that first a mouse enters the mitten, making it his **home**. **Gradually** a frog, a hare, a fox, a grey wolf, a boar, and a brown bear invite **themselves** in. It is only when the bear has entered the mouse's home that there is **some** crowding and the mitten is about to burst. But before another guest can **enter** and **make** that happen, the old man notices that he has lost the mitten and **goes back** to look for it. **The dog** finds it, barks, and the frightened animals run out and away. Thus the story becomes incredible as it develops.

### 3.2.2 The child is not worried by improbability, nor is it worried by moral issues

The child finds **nothing** improbable in **these** stories, as he is prepared to accept any odd event for the **sake of** the story—just to find out what happens next. The important **thing** for the child is **that** things should keep happening. He is not **worried** about the moral **implications** **either**. For **instance**, consider a story like the following: a tiger comes, eager to rescue his friend, the jackal, who has **fallen** into a trap. The jackal has no hesitation in using the tiger for his escape, letting him **fall into** the trap, and getting **killed** in the end. The child may feel sorry for the tiger, but will not condemn the jackal **for** his act of **betrayal**.

### 3.2.3 A sense of reality, however, comes later

As the child grows **up**, however, he develops a sense of reality. **He** is no longer willing to **accept** improbabilities; he measures up other people's **narration** of **events** against his own **experience**, his own standard of **credibility**. In this **particular Unit**, we are concerned with **authenticity** and credibility as two basic features of adult writing. The logic of **children's** literature being rather different, it **will** be **discussed in Course 4**.



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## 3.4 AUTHENTICITY OF FACTS

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It is needless to say that the truth of facts lies at the very root of authenticity of feelings. One cannot **merely** imagine a death and write a good poem of grief; one cannot invent a beloved **and** write a true poem of love; one cannot construct out of one's head a **working-class home** and write a story of the hopes or despairs of **working-class** people. **Writers** have **sometimes** tried to do so, and although they may have fooled some, they **have** not succeeded for long. Behind an authentic feeling must lie an authentic object, an authentic background, a truth of experience. The writer must possess the power of accurate observation, and a good memory to hold the details.

### 3.4.1 The experience barrier : dangerous to cross it

There is such a thing as an **experience** barrier. We are born in one sort of family, **live** with a particular group of people, have a **certain** kind of social and cultural inheritance, and go **through** a limited **number** of experiences. These present the picture of life as we see it. It is possible, through wide reading, to get to know of other peoples and their **lives**; yet that kind of knowledge can **never** be as **direct and** as deep as the one we have **lived** ourselves. If, without direct experience, we **try** to portray an area of reality **from** which we have been excluded, our creative writing will sound hollow. One **common** example of this **kind** of insincerity is seen when writers with a **middle-class** background are tempted to portray life as lived in the 'high society'—upper class, **westernised**, amoral and carefree. Similarly, when writers with a **pre-eminently** rural or urban background, wish to cross their experience **barrier** and **write** on urban or rural themes, about which their knowledge is scanty, they fail to **convince** the reader. Only great writers are able to cross this barrier **with** the help of their powerful imagination.

### 3.4.2 Experience barrier between cultures

It is **similarly** dangerous to write about other cultures without going deeply enough into them. One of the **reasons** why very few Europeans have written with any measure of understanding about India is surely that their penetration **into** our culture has been **superficial**. It matches some of the superficial observations we tend to make about other **cultures**: the British, the American, the African, and so forth. In a recent novel, written by a foreigner who has lived long enough in India, a tea party is described, with a lot of **amused** observation. The Principal of a private coaching institution has invited his **staff** to a tea party, and among the **invitees** is a junior member who has come **with** his pregnant wife. To most of the staff, who are quite poor, the tea party seems **to** be an opulent affair. There is much dressing in one's finery; everyone **talks** in a stilted fashion, **using** Victorian English of a ripe vintage, and many **sycophantic** compliments are paid to the host. When food is served, everybody tries **to be** discreet and genteel, with the result **that** they all eat so little—all, except the **pregnant** wife of the junior teacher. She is fond of sweets, though in her **married** **We** **her husband** could satisfy this craving fully, only once. In any **case**, either because of her deprivation, or Because she is pregnant (this reason is also hinted at), she makes **a** grab at the sweets and eats them **greedily**. It is all so funny—the account of **the tea party**—the writer seems to say; **all** so funny, yet **so** sordid.

### 3.4.3 How cross-cultural raids can violate norms of decency

To an Indian reader of the story it is, however, obvious that the account of the tea party is indescribably cruel, and since fun is made of deprived people—the little education, the lack of money and social status—it is in bad taste. The author does not see (because the author **has** not penetrated into the culture of the characters ridiculed), that behind much of what seems to be **funny** lies inescapable **servitude** and poverty. A person of breeding (not to speak of true culture) does not make **fun** of misfortune.

The moral, therefore, is that **unless** the writer can truly say that he has gone **deep** enough into another culture to be able to understand it, he should not attempt any cross-cultural raids.

### 3.4.4 Total authenticity of locale and culture: R.K. Narayan

One Indian writer who never allows this to happen in his novels and short stories is R.K. Narayan. His stories **are** all set in and around **Malgudi**, a small **imaginary** town in **Karnataka**. Geographical reality is pronounced in **all** of them, as is the reality of persons, their occupations, hopes and failures, amusements, their daily life. So truthful is Narayan about the people living in this small town, so authentic is his **portrayal** of their manners of speech, their education and their attitudes of mind, that very soon after beginning to read the second story by Narayan, one feels that one has actually lived in **Malgudi** all one's life. Narayan has found all his material in this **small** town. Narayan's stories **ring** true because his authentic voice comes from the **authentic** experience that he portrays.

### 3.4.5 Authenticity is the base of even highly imaginative creation: Raja Rao

Even when a writer wishes to transform his material into a highly-imaginative narrative, he must first ensure the **authenticity** of the material. Once he **has** done that, he can fashion the material into the **realistic**, fantastic, symbolic or any other mode that he **likes**. Take, **for** instance, Raja Rao's story, 'The Cow of the Barricades' (included in **the Policeman** and the Rose, O.U.P.), in which the story of the cow, Gauri, and her **participation** in the Mahatma's non-violent movement is narrated. Not only is **Gauri** created authentically, bit by bit, before our eyes, but the human characters also—the Master, his disciples, and even the red men. Raja Rao creates this **authentic** world so carefully, that when at the end of the story he invests Gauri with the **conscious** purpose of a martyr walking sedately towards her willed death, we **find it** totally credible.

### 3.4.6 Authenticity established, the author can go in for great comic exaggeration: R.K. Narayan

In R.K. Narayan's stories authenticity serves a similar purpose, though it takes a **different** direction. With authenticity established, Narayan often imparts to credibility the **dimension** of comic exaggeration. In 'A Horse and Two Goats' (included in **A Horse and Two Goats**, Vision Books), Narayan takes eight pages to **create** the world of the story: the village of Kritam; Muni, the owner of two goats; his long-suffering and shrewish wife; the **shopman**; and finally the terracotta horse. This is **done** at a leisurely pace, till the stage is completely set for the red-faced man to arrive 'in a new sort of vehicle' which looked 'both a motor car and bus'. When **Muni** takes him to be a policeman, the comedy starts. **Muni's** knowledge of the red-faced man's **languages** is confined to a simple 'yes, no', spoken at once. The **red-faced** man cannot understand a word of the chaste **Tamil** which Muni speaks, and for **which** the village of Kritam is famous. They, however, carry on a conversation for the next thirteen pages, **talking** at cross purposes.

**No** one can tell what he (**Muni**) was planning to say, as the other interrupted him at this stage to **ask**, 'Boy, what is the secret of your teeth? How old are you?'

The **old** man forgot what he had started to say and remarked, 'Sometimes, we **too** lose our cattle. Jackals or cheetahs may **sometimes** carry them off, **but** sometimes it is just theft **from** over in the next village, and then we will **know**





### 3.5.1 Authenticity and credibility: a close look at Mulk Raj Anand's 'The Lost Child'

Let us now examine a short story titled 'The Lost Child', written by **Mulk Raj Anand**, a story that aptly illustrates what we have so far said about authenticity and credibility. Fortunately for us, h a n d himself provides a background to the story. He was doing research in Philosophy in London, and he found his work very hard.

I could not master the whole of European thought quickly. I did not know Greek or Latin or German or French. I was advised by my Professor to be honest and accept the fact that I did not know very much. But I **struggled** all the same, late into the nights, read huge tomes and brooded. But the more I read the more I felt lost.

Then I remembered some words of Guru Nanak, who had once said: We are all children lost in the world fair.' I went to sleep brooding on these words.

In the early hours of the morning, I recalled that I had been physically lost in a fair at the age of six in Kaleshwar village, on the banks of the **Beas** river in Kangra valley. I had strayed away from my parents, looking at a juggler's tricks and was crying for my mother and father when I could not **find** them. All the things I had wanted my parents to buy for me, the balloon, the sweets, the flowers, I did not want any more. I only cried out: 'I want my mother! I want my father!' Someone picked me up and tried to console me, but I was inconsolable and cried, 'I want my mother! I want my father!'

I wrote that experience of my childhood in the early morning. As I had had the experience of being actually lost, the narrative was authentic and true to my experience. Only I did not put it down in terms of myself. But I, unconsciously, wrote about a child, any child, who may get lost in the way as I had got lost.

### 3.5.2 How Anand establishes authenticity

h a n d says that ~~the~~ story was authentic because he had the experience of getting lost. However, it is not the same thing to have an experience and to be able to write about it with an authentic voice. Mere experience does not give a writer the authentic tone in writing. It has to be created **skilfully**. **Anand** first establishes the setting: the season, the place, the people, **the many** ways of travelling to the fair, and then introduces the child with these words, 'One little boy ran between his **parents'** legs, brimming over with life and laughter. The joyous morning gave greetings ~~and~~ unashamed invitations to all to come away **into** the fields, full of flowers and songs.' The child is full of life and a sense of **wonder**; all his five senses are fully alive and stimulated. He is happily possessed of the faculty of being totally absorbed in the sensation of the moment to the complete forgetfulness of his surroundings. On the way to the fair, he and his **parents** enter a footpath in a field.

It was a flowering mustard field, pale like melting gold, as it swept across miles and miles of even land—a river of liquid light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying at places into broad, rich tributary streams, yet **running** in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silver light. Where it ended, on one side stood a cluster of low mud-walled houses thrown into relief by a dense crowd of yellow-robed men and women, from which arose a high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises, sweeping across the groves to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of **Siva's** mad laughter. The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the **shrill** joy and wonder of this vast glory and feeling that they, too, wore the **evidence** of this pure delight in their faces, he left the footpath and plunged headlong into the field, prancing like a young colt, his small feet chiming with the fitful **gusts** of wind that came rich with the fragrance of **more** distant fields.

### 3.5.3 The poetic passages are just

This quotation **from** the story is a little long, but it serves to illustrate an **important point**. **Anand**, in his writing, rarely indulges in poetic **flights**. If he

does so here, it is with **the** specific object of establishing the authenticity of the child's world, the child's natural ability to absorb, entirely, the world around him. The child is enchanted by the dragonflies bustling to the fair. "Come, child, come" —this exhortation has to be repeated by his parents to drag him away from what engages him at the moment: a banyan tree, a shower of young flowers, cooing doves; **and** when the fair ground is reached: sweetmeat-sellers, flower-sellers, the balloon man, a juggler and finally the roundabout in full swing.

### 3.5.4 The shift in language further strengthens the authenticity

It is there that he loses his parents. At once, the world changes for him; panic-stricken, he ~~now~~ runs about in all directions, till defeated, 'his cries suppressed into sobs'. The bright, vibrant world of a moment before, now becomes a sinister one—heavy **men**, with flashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders knock him to and from with their brutal paws, until he starts shrieking for his father and mother. He is lifted up in the arms of a kindly man who, to soothe him, offers him each **delight** the child has craved for earlier. But now he wants none of these, he only asks for his mother and father; The story ends with the man offering his last allurements on the list—sweets. But the child now only wants his parents.

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## 3.6 SUMMING UP

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Authenticity and credibility are the most important norms of creative writing. A child accepts the incredible easily but not an adult. The child is able to do so because it has yet to develop a sense of reality. It is interested in knowing what is happening in the story and not in its import or implications—moral or otherwise. But the adult tries to measure what is presented in the story against what he has himself experienced.

Authenticity comprises not only emotions but also expression. To be able to make others feel what he wants to, he must feel it himself and achieve the right expression of it, which is not easy. The truth of facts is what gives rise to authenticity of feeling. Authentic feeling is not possible **without** an authentic object or background, or a truth of experience, which underlies it. Direct experience is, therefore, necessary to be able to achieve an authentic expression of the reality that is sought to be projected. That is why it may be said that there is an experience barrier which is dangerous to cross for any but the great writers. This is all more dangerous in the case of cross-cultural projections of experience. The **writer** attempting this will end up appearing to be superficial or offending. **Truthfulness** to experience is not enough; empathy, which comes of deep understanding, is **needed**. R.K. Narayan is noted for the authenticity of locale and culture which **characterises** his work. By establishing authenticity **skilfully** he is able to extend credibility towards a comic unreality which does not render the work concerned incredible, as in 'A Horse and Two Goats'. Raja **Rao** is able to build a highly imaginative narrative which is convincing by ensuring the authenticity of the material used, as in his story, 'The Cow of the Barricades'.

Mulk Raj **Anand's** analysis of his **story**, 'The Lost Child', brings out the authenticity of the experience embedded in it and the way in which it has been imaginatively rendered, so as to **exemplify** a universal experience—the child's first experience of separation, which is, perhaps, part of his initiation into life.

#### Activity 3

Discuss, in not more **than** 70 words, how an author can be fantastic without losing credibility.

(Check your answer **with** that given at the end of the Unit)

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### 3.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

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#### Activity 1

i) The child's imagination can take in the absurd or the improbable. The sense of reality develops only as the child grows up. The child is interested in knowing only what is happening, not in its implications, moral or otherwise.

ii) All people—adults as well as children—want to express themselves; hence the urge to write.

iii) Authenticity means the state of being true to one's experience. It is only through the act of writing that a writer comes to know whether his feelings are genuine or not. He can successfully express only those things which he has intensely felt himself. It is only when the writer is able to find the right expression for his emotion that it can be measured. Only then it is possible for the author to find his authentic voice.

#### Activity 2

i) Yes, it is true in most cases. But experience can also be lived vicariously, without the writer having actually undergone it.

ii) It makes the rendering of such experience, not intensely felt by the author, inauthentic or superficial. The given story illustrates it. The incidents may be true to one's experience, but the way they are projected may make them sound incredible to the reader.

iii) Though Muni and the red-faced American do not know each other's language, they still carry on an animated conversation which is unreal and comic at the same time. This is not the case of a breakdown of communication but an utter absence of communication. Still the dialogue or communication achieves a dramatic effect.

iv) No, this technique only contributes towards this effect. Detailed description and exposition are necessary. But unless they relate to the myth suggested by the cow's name, and the ethos which invests it with the aura of divinity, it will not be plausible.

#### Activity 3

##### Hints

Consider the story, 'The Cow of the **Barricades**', cited in this Unit, to illustrate this. **Gauri** is both a myth and a real cow, with the two merging in such a way that even her fantastic action in the end is acceptable.

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## 3.8 GLOSSARY

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You will find in the glossary a short list of the literary terms used in this Unit.

**Authenticity:** See **verisimilitude** (Unit 4)

**Comedy:** A story which ends happily is said to be a comedy. The characters are typical, they face typical **problems** and conflicts and these are resolved to their satisfaction.

**Credibility:** See **verisimilitude** (Unit 4)

**Improbability** results from internal logical, **organisational**, or **structural** weakness in a literary text.

**Parable** is a story **designed** to convey some religious principle, moral lesson or general truth by **comparison** with actual events.

**Realistic, fantastic, symbolic modes:** These are techniques which a writer uses to control problems of structure and **organisation** in his work. For 'realistic mode' read **Sense of reality** (below). In the **symbolical** mode the theme becomes clear through successive use of images **which** represent concepts, ideas or emotions. The image then is referred to as a **symbol**. It may be public or private, universal or local. A literary work is in the **fantastic** mode when its action takes place in a nonexistent and unreal world (such as **fairy** land); the characters are incredible. Science fiction and utopian stories are forms of fantasy.

**Sense of reality:** The **writer's** efforts to make his writing come close to life, as it is actually lived, give his **fiction** a sense of reality. The reader can test it on the pulse of his own experience.

**Situation** refers to **certain events** at a point of time which makes it a turning point in a drama or narrative. **The** initial situation from which the struggle springs, and the critical and climatic **situations** towards which the events drive, are most often referred to as 'situation'.

**Structure** is to be **distinguished** from form and genre (Block 2, Unit 2). It refers to the arrangement of parts of a work in relation to the whole—as, for instance, the arrangement of scenes in a novel or play. Structure controls the main story line of a narrative.

**Style** is how a particular writer says things—his tone and voice, his choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical and otherwise), the shape of his sentences (whether they **are** loose or periodic)—indeed, every possible aspect of the way in which he **uses** language.

**Theme:** The theme of a work is not its subject but rather its central idea, which may be stated directly or indirectly.

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# UNIT 4 AUTHORIAL VOICE

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## structure

- 4.0 Aims and Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Author's Voice—how to visualise it
- 4.3 Modes of Direct Address
  - 4.3.1 The Direct Method or the Autobiographical Mode
  - 4.3.2 The Author's Voice in diary-writing
  - 4.3.3 The Direct Mode used through an imaginary character
- 4.4 Author's Voice **with** partial omniscience
- 4.5 The all-knowing Author—his Voice
- 4.6 Summing up
- 4.7 Activities: aids to answers
- 4.8 Glossary
- 4.9 Additional Readings for Block 1

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## 4.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, you will learn to identify the author's voice without which it is never possible to plumb his deeper meaning. An author has several choices open to him.

- He may speak directly to the reader (the autobiographical or direct mode).
- He may **communicate** with his reader through an intermediary—an imaginary character.

He may also exercise his privilege as an **omniscient** creator who comments openly on his characters' thoughts and emotions, telling the reader all that has to be known about a situation, scene or character.

What is of basic importance is the need to listen carefully to an author's distinctive manner of speaking in order to understand the impulsion behind his writing.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous Unit, we discussed the importance of authenticity and **credibility** in creative writing. Unless a writer makes his story—characters and situations—life-like, he will not be able to establish any rapport with his **readers**. Often, story writers and novelists announce on the first page that all characters and scenes are purely imaginary, and any correspondence with persons, living or **dead**, is purely coincidental. But, in actuality, this is only a subterfuge because, as Somerset **Maugham** has rightly observed, no writer can project anything intensely **moving** out of his imagination alone. Most writing is, in fact, either veiled autobiography, or is based on the experience of someone very close to the writer. This is what lends an aura of verisimilitude to any successful writing.

It is, therefore, necessary for you to understand how an author's voice can **be** heard by the reader, even when he writes in the third person, using the **indirect** method of narration.

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## 4.2 THE AUTHOR'S VOICE—HOW TO PERSONALISE IT

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When you read a story, a feature-article, a poem, or a play, don't you feel as though you are hearing **the** author's voice? This is because every piece of writing is a sort of **utterance**. Herein the writer addresses his reader in the distinctive manner of his speech—directly in his own voice or indirectly through a person created by him. If you are imaginative enough you should be able to conjure up his voice in your mind's ear. You may then interpret this voice as being compassionate or bellicose, tender or abrasive.

The voice becomes immediately recognisable if the writing is done in the first person singular—in the autobiographical or confessional mode. There is, here, no intermediary **between** the writer and the reader. The writing then reads like an intimate dialogue between the two.

But even if a writer chooses the indirect method of narration, a sensitive reader should still be able to **recognise** the author's voice as it filters through his imaginary characters, **particularly** his protagonist. The art of narration may, therefore, be described as a triangular operation involving the teller, the reader and the tale. It is often said that we should trust the tale and not the teller. But then, isn't the story the creation of a writer who has his own predilections? How can one, therefore, ignore the element of subjectivity in any form of writing? The author's voice will come through in spite of his masked objectivity. So, as a writer, you shouldn't strain too hard to suppress your natural voice. Be your honest self; write freely and boldly, letting your heart speak out the truth, and nothing but the truth. If you are speaking **with** somebody else's voice, strutting about in borrowed plumes, you'll be found out soon, and your writing will never ring authentic.

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## 4.3 MODES OF DIRECT ADDRESS

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We will now analyse **the** diverse narrative strategies adopted by a writer to address his reader.

### 4.3.1 The Direct Method or the Autobiographical Mode

As mentioned above, **this** mode of writing enables the writer to speak directly to his reader, as though he is **talking** intimately to a confidant, in an informal, conversational **manner**. A writer may use this method as a therapeutic exercise—'to shed his sickness' (to quote D.H. Lawrence). In this form of writing, the author just wishes to unload his **agonies** or joys on his reader who, therefore, becomes his co-sharer. Haven't we **often** felt the irrepresible urge to unburden ourselves of something that lies like heavy lumber on our minds? I should advise you, at this point, to read the opening chapter of Tolstoy's famous novel **Kreutzer Sonata** to see how the protagonist (who is, in fact, the author's prototype) shares his personal agony with his fellow **passengers**.

But a beginner should be wary of speaking out in **his** own voice too often, even though this **kind** of writing seems to be much too easy and effortless. If not judiciously controlled **and skilfully organised**, an autobiographical form of writing may lapse into **maawkish** sentimentality. Such a writer often feels tempted to even fabricate characters **who** are only thinly-veiled extensions of his personal self. A **discerning** reader, however, should have no difficulty in perceiving a falsity of tone in the author's voice.

#### Activity 1

Given below is an **autobiographical** sketch by Kamala Das, a well-known poet and writer in both English and Malayalam. Read it closely and answer the questions, that follow.

(Check your answers **with** those given at **the** end of **the** Unit)

## A Writer's Predicament (a personal statement):

In the family that I was born into, all women behaved like bonded slaves in order to survive; and nobody seemed to **think** it funny.

I belonged to the matrilinear and matriarchal community of **Nayars** but there **was** not a single woman in my family who had the courage to take a decision **without** consulting the men. Obviously there was something wrong with all of **us**. Perhaps what was wrong was our admiration for Mahatma Gandhi who was then the national hero. **Gandhiji's** photographs were hung on every wall giving us the feeling that he was the head of the family, not the uncle who sat with his **books** on the patio or the father who sent the money necessary to keep the **establishment** going. **Gandhiji**, like every other North Indian, was not familiar **with** the psychological aspects of a matriarchal society. He was not interested in such things anyway for he was busy trying to get freedom for the country. The development of women's minds and the nurturing of their self-respect did **not** interest him. The advice he steadily gave to the Indian women was the sort of advice which only those of a patriarchal society would comprehend or **appreciate**, and, yet the women of my family obeyed his whims, gifting away **their** jewellery to his Harijan-fund and dressing themselves in austere white like Jain nuns. Almost **all** of them were sexually frigid and so could appreciate **his** stand on celibacy as a desirable way of life.

**Gandhiji** had made a cult out of their anaemic outlook, settling their dormant **guilt** in regard to their long-suffering husbands and had spiritually laundered them clean. They began more and more to behave like North Indian women. They refused to sit down in the presence of their uncles, brothers and sons. They **ate** only after their men had had their fill. They kept themselves to the **zenana**, never once raising their voices to express any opinion. They may have **become** excellent nuns but in that **rarefying** process they **lost** their identity and turned vague and colourless. Even the diseases that finally carried them away **were** vague and colourless. A breathlessness followed by fatigue and death. An **attack** of indigestion. Quick departures that underplayed the tragedy of their lives. The sick lay silent till death arrived with its own grand silence. The **mourners** **were** silent too. It was thought unbecoming to weep for the dead. We **heard** only the fall of the axe on the branches of the mango tree which had to be **chopped** to provide logs for the cremation. The Nayars were burnt on **mango-logs** in the southern wing of their estate. We seldom strayed into that region fearing the silence of our tightlipped ancestors. Our grandmother told us of **Sita** the favourite goddess of every patriarchal society. She was pregnant **when** taken out to the forest and abandoned. That had to be done because one of the **washermen** suspected her chastity. Sita's husband, Rama—the king, supposedly the epitome of courage, did not have the guts to ignore such **rumours** and to keep her by his side.

To a Nayar **woman** who was financially independent, inheritor of the **family-wealth**, poor Sita's predicament was incomprehensible. Nobody could **have** dared to treat a Nayar **woman** the way Rama treated his weak consort. If things **became** unpleasant at her husband's, she would return to her own home and its **perennial** security. My own great grandmother had done that. No eyebrow was raised when she returned home leaving the corpulent Raja of **Cheralayam** for reasons of her own.

**But** my **mother** was different. She had read enough books by European **authors** to lose her essential identity. Book-learning wears down the intuitive **powers** a woman is born with. Mother's ideal was the submissive wife of **Mahatma** Gandhi. Martyrdom, in tolerably small doses, was what people, **like** **my mother**, secretly aspired for. Her expectations were fulfilled, for my father **was** an **autocrat** who loved to shout at his wife and to impose his will on **everybody** who was maintained by his earnings. There was tension gripping us **when** he was in the house. Whenever I stayed with my parents in Calcutta I suffered from mysterious headaches that kept me awake at night. Father did **not** particularly care for the company of children. Very often we were sent away to our ancestral home in **Malabar** or to boarding schools where we **breathed** easy. Then some fine morning he would decide to take us back to the city saying that the savages needed some training. This continual shuttle

between the **city** and the **village** made us nervous wrecks. We did not or could not belong to either of the two worlds. Gradually we grew thin. We had the pale, pinched **look** of orphans. We were wanted only as a concept was wanted. Wanted only as long as we kept ourselves confined to the dark rooms beside the kitchen. **No** wonder then that we developed the cunning of the creatures that live **underground** and in the dark, like moles and other rodents. We learnt to move **about** noiselessly and to disappear when footsteps came our way. We were **volcanoes** waiting to explode. I took up writing, hoping that it would help the volcano within to erupt in a slow, orderly way. I knew that I had to turn **myself** inside out. In talking to my readers I found my private voice; and perhaps my peace.

Truth was the **only** medicine that I knew which could heal the diseases of the society that had nurtured me and afterwards had begun to strangle me. I was a part of it, a **raw** spot like an exposed nerve throbbing with pain, and because I was hurt, **hurting** came easy to me. I was bringing order into a disorder assembled over the years, the long decades that had converted the robust matriarchal **society** into the weak, hypocritical one that rendered each of its members faceless, sexless and rudderless. My writings brought forth enemies. My **relatives** shunned me. My father threatened to kill himself. My cook was bribed to **poison** me.

Miraculously I **survived**. At fifteen I had been married off to a son of the richest feudal **family** in our locality. At that time there were **fiftysix** members living within that sprawling house along with their children and retainers. For generations **they** had cultivated the habit of **taking** law into their own hands and being wealthy, none had dared to question their ways. They could get away with rape, **arson** and murder. They settled disputes in their own yard, flogging the **erring** ones and confiscating their property. A loud-mouthed **daughter-in-law** was the last thing they needed. Each **time** I published a story, changing only **the** names, I faced stony silences, pregnant with wrath. Was I planning to be a detective around the place? They were possessive about their secrets. **There was** yet another writer who belonged to the family — Aubrey **Menen**. **Whenever** I told them that Aubrey was planning to visit his father's house they **said** that they should be given advance warning so that they could get away to **Calicut** or some such place to hide. Writers were feared and shunned. **Everybody** had his or her dirty secrets to safeguard. Surely they could not have **writers** snooping around, ferreting out the details of discreetly accomplished **crimes**.

When I **preached** a new **kind** of morality and supposedly gave courage to the young to follow the dictates of their conscience I began to get letters from every part of **the** country. Rituals had no meaning for me. Religion was equally meaningless. Therefore, the orthodox and the traditional hurled obscenities at me. Their **attitude** brought **suffering** to my husband and children. And, yet not once has any son of mine told me that I was wrong to take the path I chose instead of the smooth self-pampering one that tradition had laid out for a woman like **me**. This, more than anything else, makes me smile when I update the balance **sheet** of my life.

Now answer the following questions

- i) What is **distinctive** about the author's style that makes it **suitable** to autobiographical **writing**? (50 words)
- ii) Can you identify **the** paragraph where the author's voice sounds most bitter and ironical? (50 words)
- iii) How did the **author** find her 'private voice'? (40 words)

(Check your answer with **those given** at the end of the Unit)

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### 4.3.2 The Author's Voice in diary-writing

There is a marked **difference** between the author's voice in a narrative sketch and a **diary**.

Read the **following excerpt** from a diary as **carefully as** possible:

Awoke this **morning** at **six**. Went for a walk. Had my **breakfast** at **8--an** egg omelette, a cup of **milk** and an apple. Went to office at ten, worked continuously **till** five, with an hour's break for lunch. The day would have ended blankly except for the evening party at **Pandey's**. It was a large crowd, and the **usual** din of gossip about weather, **taxes** and TV serials. And then she swung **in**, like a swan—dressed in a **translucent** sari, her ebony hair cascading **down** her sensuous **shoulders**. But it was her voice that held me—her mellifluous **and** husky voice with its **tempting** pauses and whispers. What's there about a woman that casts a **spell** over you—her dress, her hair or her voice? After I returned home, I couldn't help **thinking** of her—even dreamt about her.

If you compare this **diary** note with the autobiographical sketch by Kamala Das, **cited** above, you should be able to distinguish between the two voices. Whereas Kamala Das's voice **gives** the impression of a steady flow, the excerpt from the diary **sounds** like a stutter—jumbled and incoherent, **as** though the author is **blabbering** away. It's only towards the end that the diarist's voice seems to be controlled by a **dominant** emotion—love or infatuation.

### 4.3.3 The Direct Mode used through an imaginary character

If a writer wishes not to speak directly to his reader (so as not to let **him** in on his private feelings—or for any other reasons) he may, as a subterfuge, create an **imaginary** character and use him as his channel of expression. This mode **offers** the **writer** a double advantage—the security of privacy without the loss of the intimacy of direct speech. This is how Graham Greene uses this strategy in his story 'A Day Slaved':

I had stuck closely to him, as people say, like a shadow. But that's absurd. **I'm** no shadow. You **can** feel me, touch me, hear me, smell me, **Im Robinson**.

**Having** created this imaginary character, Graham Greene now lends him a writer's **traits** (his own)—close observation, curiosity and concern for exactitude.

**Presently** we came to a railway bridge and underneath it he met a friend. I am using **words** again very inexactly. Bear with me. **I try** to be exact. I pray to be exact.

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## 4.4 AUTHOR'S VOICE WITH PARTIAL OMNISCIENCE

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We may **also** now **consider** the voice of an author who feigns only partial omniscience. **This is obviously** a device to **win** the reader's **trust**. In this **form** of writing, the author **speaks** with humility, even ignorance, to seek the **reader's** help in resolving some **problem i.e.**, a character's inscrutable motivation. This is again only a strategy because the **writer** is otherwise **supposed** to know everything. He is the all-knowing **creator**.

To **understand this point**, let's examine the closing paragraph of Somerset **Maugham's** story, 'The Kite', in which the protagonist divorces **his** wife because she fails to share with her **husband** the joy of kite-flying. The story ends with the author's own reflections:

I don't know,' I **mused**. You see, I don't know a thing **about flying** a kite. Perhaps it gives **him** a sense of power as he watches it soaring towards the clouds and of **mastery** over the elements!

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## 4.5 THE ALL-KNOWING AUTHOR—HIS VOICE

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**As** I have explained **above**, every author is all-knowing, **even** when he **pretends to be** only partially so. **Every** writing is shaped and controlled **by** its creator's vision. No wonder, creative writing is often described as a sort of divine activity. But **even-if** an author prefers to remain invisible behind his work, the reader **can** still hear his voice, between the **lines**. This voice often carries **the** ring of absolute authority because **the** author knows his **character** like the back of his hand. His judgement is, therefore, **infallible**, his analysis of motivation is definitive. Note, for instance, the opening paragraph of Saul Bellow's story 'A **Father-to-be**'.

The strangest **notions** had a way of forcing themselves into **Rogin's** mind. Just **thirty-one and passable-looking**, with short black hair, open forehead, he was a **research chemist**, and his **mind** was generally **serious** and dependable.

What greater **evidence** of an author's omniscience is possible than such comments which are designed to let the reader into the innermost recesses of a character's **mind!**

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## 4.6 SUMMING UP

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In this Unit you will **have realised** that the art of narration is a triangular operation involving the **teller**, the reader and the tale. Therefore, it is **necessary** for you to listen intently to the **Author's** Voice to comprehend whether

- he **speaks directly** to the reader or
- through an **imaginary character**.

Direct address **can take** the **following forms**:

- the **autobiographical** mode (this mode may be used as a therapeutic exercise by the writer), and
- **diary writing**.

The Author's Voice, **in any mode**, may be

- partially **omniscient** or
- **all-knowing**.

**This last choice** the **writer** makes **keeping** in view the extent to which he **desires** the reader to **participate** in the creative process.

**Activity 2**

Read the following 'Letter to my Grandmother' by Kamala Das.

- i) Comment on the author's voice in terms of her skilful blending of fantasy and reality. (70 words)
- ii) What is the distinctive nature of the author's tone? Is it sentimental, ironical, romantic or rational? (40 words)
- iii) Write an imaginary letter to a deceased relative or friend sharing some personal problem. (150 words).

(Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit)

**A LETTER TO MY GRANDMOTHER**  
(Kamala Das)

This afternoon while I was alone in my Bombay flat I dreamt of rain. Little fairy-feet of rain **stampeding** up the street with a sound like kindergarten laughter. **Then** it swelled all of a sudden, wrapping the vacant lots between the sky-scrapers and the blue patches of the sea in a grey veil. The trees on both sides of our street looked humbled with their leaves, vertical and dripping, and from the pavements flowed rivulets of muddy water, **gurgling** as they filled the potholes and the crevices on the asphalt. And, every flower pot in our garden was waterlogged, the little **worms** surfacing to plop dead. At our **gate** stood, looking up at my verandah, **not** one of the numerous friends in the **city**, but you, attired in the dingy white of a widow and drenched like one of the trees, just a bit humble, just a bit wary, and when I called out to you, you smiled in instant recognition as though I had never changed at all **from** the arrogant young woman of twenty that I was when you left, to a **faded** woman, heavy in body and in mind. But before I could **run** down to bring you up to my drawing room with its blue drapes and the faded carpet, I woke up. Then there was nobody smiling at me. No **rain** either. Outside my window the sky was bright as stainless steel. The street lay dusty and stunned under the whiplash of the **sun**. The trees looked like thirsty mendicants **thrusting** out dirty palms of burnt leaves. So the rain **was** unreal; **as** unreal as your visit to Bank House in Bombay twenty-one years after you died, lying **paralysed** in our old ancestral house, which became mine a few years ago, only because my brothers and my sister, all rich and self-sufficient, did not want to live in such a house but preferred to build their own houses in cities, complete with commodes and geysers and bathtubs. Do you remember, long long ago, weeping beneath the **Bakul** tree one morning while my younger brother and I stopped our game of chess wondering why you were sad and your telling us that one of us should, when we become rich, rebuild the old house? Every afternoon while your mother slept in the cool middle room upstairs and the servants slept downstairs on the black floor or on the wooden garners, you prowled round the house, **filling** the cracks of its walls with lime. The lime-paste **burnt** the tips of your fingers **and discoloured** them. I looked at them with pity. In fact I looked at every part of you only with pity although even at sixty your hair was black, glossy and your face unlined and the contours of your body lovely. You were widowed in your **early thirties** and the husband, the impoverished Raja, left you nothing but a few **memories** of love and laughter. You lived austerely on the meagre earnings from the family-estate sharing your life with your mother, your aunts and your **brother** who **was really** only a cousin but whom you loved deeply and humbly. When my parents **sent** me from Calcutta to you, you rejoiced, for there was someone at last to lie near **you** on the three-sectioned mattress which you pulled down from the cot onto the cool floor at night fearing that **I might** fall down in sleep. You did not tell me any sad story. Least of all the sad story that was **your** biography. But once when a **neighbour** had come visiting, and the two of you were discussing the plight of women widowed early in life you said, not knowing that I was near enough to hear it, that a widow is a **mere** slave who must serve the lucky ones in the family until death. At that moment I **looked** at your clothes. The blouses made at home out of unbleached cotton, and the **choti**, dingier still, proclaiming to all the state of your destitution. That evening I asked you why you could not wear whiter clothes, softer linen. You only shook your **head** and turned your tear-filled eyes away. You wanted **your-life** to be shabby. But everyone adored you. Every relative who **fell** ill or was about to have a baby asked **for** your **soothing** presence. And for the touch of your hands. When I was a new **mother** and only **sixteen** and a half, staying in **Kerala**, away from my husband, a

could/coused to pester me for kisses each time he met me alone near a tree or a pillar. I was not averse to this game, being young and neglected by the legal mate. Once or twice he kissed me and gave me the unpleasant taste of his mouth. One day you asked me not to talk to him. How did you know that he was interested in me? Were you spying on my movements in those days? When you told me that a girl's chief asset was a good reputation? I laughed sarcastically. I hated you when you turned puritanical and stern. One day after a quarrel on similar lines I turned on you with anger and said, I wish you die, grandmother. You went pale. Afterwards you did not ever scold me or tell me to be restrained in my behaviour with boys. I wish I had told you all about myself before you died. You were afraid that I would develop into a lustful woman. You were so wrong. I hated sex. Getting only that in its crudest form, I was trying to find another kind of relationship between a man and woman. I wanted to be Juliet to some young Romeo. I associated love with tragedy and beauty. I chose the most undeserving of men to love, and to spoil with love. I knew how the respectable ones behaved. I was married to one. I wanted to know if the disreputable ones were gentler with women. Youth blazed like a summer-sun. But it set fast too. I loved my Sons to an unpardonable excess. I wanted them to fill the emptiness of my life, which strangely enough, began to be felt only after I read from my mother's letter that you had died. All the invisible shackles of love were removed from me, and poor death had set me free. I could kiss any man young or old, who wanted a kiss from me. I could even mate with them if I so chose. My husband was anyway too busy to care. But while my sons grew, growing with me into a mental maturity I experienced something akin to happiness. When you grow up take me to see the films, I told my first son and he promised me that he would. But adolescence comes burdened with inhibitions and secret complexes. It soon occurred to me that he did not wish to be seen out with his mother although I was young still and more cheerful in disposition than all his friends. At nineteen he started to work, being as proud as I was, and not wishing to be dependent on his father who was always a struggler with his accounts at the first of every month. I sold my stories to the Kerala journals for twenty-five rupees in order to remain financially independent. It is possible that I have written in all over five hundred stories, writing them at night at the kitchen table while my family slept soundly. Grandmother, I have tried my best to succeed. Just as you had to make the hundred rupee note go a long way each month I have had to make my meagre talent go a long way. Two of my sons are young men with beards on their chins. One is plotting to set up an institute to train up politicians and the other has stopped talking to me. You will wonder why. I asked him to study for his examination. What I felt twenty six years ago when you chastised me, he feels towards me now when I remind him of his duties as a student. Life comes a full circle, doesn't it, grandmother? It is perhaps his turn to wish a woman (dead in order to be free. It is perhaps my turn to get a paralytical stroke and lie in a dark corner wishing for death and early release. Or perhaps a heart attack that will settle my nerves forever and not for mere dribblets of time like the Valium I take to chase my loneliness away. The only fault the pill has is its capacity to strengthen your memory when you do not want it to be strengthened. For instance, when I do not want to turn sentimental like the old, I suddenly remember how my son cried for a green shirt when he was a chubby five year old and how good he looked in it when it was bought.

With all my love,

Bank House  
Bombay 20.

Kamala

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## 4.7 ACTIVITIES: AIDS TO ANSWERS

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### Activity 1

i) You **will** notice that she uses highly emotive language, and writes in the first **person** singular. This is what makes her writing particularly suitable to **autobiography**.

ii) Do you consider paragraph 5 or the last paragraph to be the most ironical? **Explain**.

iii) It is obvious that she writes **as** a rebel against society. In the process of **communicating** with her readers, she is able to sort out her own ideas.

### Activity 2

i) In this letter, the narration is in the form of diary-writing. Her intense self-involvement comes through in her narrative **voice** which is direct, informal and intense.

ii) You **will** notice that the tone in the letter is a blend of sentiment and irony.

iii) **Hint**

In your **answer** try to remove **some** misunderstanding that you had with the **deceased**.

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## 4.8 GLOSSARY

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You will find in the glossary a short list of the literary-terms used in this Unit.

**Autobiography:** An account of a man's life written by himself. **While** an **autobiography** belongs to the same **category** as writing in the **confessional** mode, it is more **organised** and its material is arranged in a well-defined **chronological** order.

**Persona** is the narrator in a work of fiction who speaks as if for the author, but is **distinct** from him. In different stories the author's persona can be different.

**Protagonist:** The principal actor in a play or a character in a novel, short story.

**Scene:** 1) the place where **some** act or event **occurs**; 2) an incident or situation in real life; 3) a division of an act or a play; 4) a unit of dramatic action in which a single **point** is **made** or an **effect** obtained.

**Subjectivity and objectivity:** When these terms refer to writing they refer to the perspective and the voice of the author. **Subjective** writing focuses on personal experience and feeling—as in autobiography or autobiographical fiction. When a writer practises **objectivity** he is 'outside' of, and detached from, what he is writing about—he is writing **about** other people, not himself.

**Verisimilitude:** A degree of likeness to truth in a fictional work which causes the reader to accept, temporarily, that the characters and actions are probable.

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## 4.9 ADDITIONAL READINGS FOR BLOCK 1

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5. **Thrall**, Hibbard, **Holman** 1960. *A Handbook to Literature* (revised), The Odyssey Press: New York.