

**READING FICTION & NON FICTION
COMMON COURSE IN ENGLISH**

**BA/BSC
IV SEMESTER**

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UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

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UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
School of Distance Education

Study Material

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**READING FICTION AND NON FICTION COMMON COURSE
IN ENGLISH**

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MODULE I

AN INDIAN ENGLISH POPULAR FICTION

Nampally Road

Meena Alexander's novel *Nampally Road* takes place in the city of Hyderabad amidst unrest and opposition to Chief Minister LimcaGowda, whose oppressive and violent rule has spurred the city's residents into protest. Set during India's fraught state of emergency from 1975-1977, enacted by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, where in the aftermath of war with Pakistan, elections were suspended and the government launched a massive crackdown on civil liberties and any forms of opposition. The book focuses on a young woman who has returned from England in order to both teach literature and make sense of herself and her own history. Mira Kannadical has returned after finishing her education in England. Arriving in a changed city, she becomes involved with Ramu, a passionate political activist. As her relationship with Ramu deepens, so too does her understanding of the political situation in Hyderabad. Mira struggles to reconcile her studies, her love of poetry and literature, with the violent reality of her city. The novel's vivid and poetic language traces Mira's burgeoning political awareness as she witnesses life on Nampally Road and grows more involved with the protests surrounding the brutal gang rape of a young Muslim woman, Rameeza Be, and the murder of her husband at the hands of police. In this two-part excerpt, Mira attempts to explain the beauty and relevance of Wordsworth to her students. As Mira searches for a way to make sense of what literature can mean when confronted with such bloodshed and to examine what Wordsworth can signify for a people terrorized by the state, Ramu arrives to take her to the police station where Rameeza is being held. What follows is a strange moment of clarity as Mira is pulled from the classroom, her space of abstract thought and poetic meditation, and into the middle of a fierce protest at the police station.

Nampally Road in the novel acts as a trope signifying the political and social turmoil the nation in the making has encountered and its bearings on each individual and the society at large. The slim novel depicts the inner world of Mira Kannadical, who after four years in England, getting her Wordsworth and the Romantics right, returns to teach in Hyderabad - the classroom is "a converted bedroom in what had once been the home of the poet Sarojini Naidu". But what's Wordsworth doing in Hyderabad? In Alexander's apocalyptic Hyderabad, the "whiffs of tear gas" never leave the air, sirens are never more than a heartbeat away, and Rameeza Be lies almost dead in the lock-up, gang raped by the police.

This is a city over which the Emergency Grande Dame, the lady with the iconic white streak, casts a big, if distant, shadow. Chief minister LimcaGowda casts a more menacing shadow with his "ever ready" securitymen and their "iron-tipped batons" coming down brutally on dissent, especially on the helpless orange sellers protesting taxes. Wordsworth comes up far short. Mira returned home, as the poet often did, to places he had loved. But for her, writing to "stitch" her life together - "my birth in India a few years after national Independence, my colonial education, my rebellion against the arranged marriage...my years of research in England" - became meaningless as fear gripped the city.

Here, the novel touches the raw core of those aware of state brutality yet do nothing about it. Mira's initial recourse to her inner world is contrasted sharply with her lover Ramu, who chooses the equally romantic call to arms: the active rebel for a cause.

Alexander's characters are vividly etched - the "Little Mother", the doctor who cares for patients through the turmoil and the marvellous portrait of LimcaGowda who tries to match his predecessor NGR, the screen idol. A cardboard city is erected for his birthday and his face replaces the wheel in the tricolour.

What makes Meena Alexander's debut novel a good read is her double vision. She is an outsider: Alexander grew up in India and North Africa and now teaches writing in New York. And, being an Indian, she can also effectively portray how the changes in the Indian social and political landscape affect the individual.

The Orange Seller's Protest

Ramu and Mira found a seat at the New Mysore Café, a spot that could offer a binocular vision to the bustling Nampally Road. Ramu is a person who has declined the prestigious Rhodes scholarship and is currently pursuing PhD at Jawaharlal Nehru University. The setting is during the time of Emergency and there is a wave of panic and anxiety in the air. Even though the story is set in the South, much distant from Delhi where the lady (Indira Gandhi) unleashes her power, Hyderabad has built a replica of Delhi there through its Chief Minister, LimcaGowda. His mercenaries, called the Ever Ready are ever ready to mutilate many innocent bodies. In this chapter there is the scene of an orange sellers' protest on Nampally Road which Mira and Rau witness from the café. Suddenly, a gang of Ever Ready goondas sprang up from nowhere beating up the orange sellers. There was blood everywhere and the scene looked so catastrophically. However, curiously, the streets were spick and span the next day even eerily smelling of perfume. Right away in the first chapter Meera Alexander brandishes at the space sponsored violence, suppressing individuals physically as well as ideologically.

Orange sellers stand here for every person in the country who is sidelined, whose voices are unheard. LimcaGowda is also the representative of many politicians and business tycoons who play games in disguise to continue in power. Ramu and Mira are in the first chapter mere spectators who at least have a sense of dissent in them against the state. Gradually these characters have the potential to develop into round figures with agency.

LittleMother:

Mira Kannadical was offered a job at Hyderabad Central University and Siddharth, her friend is drawing a map to his house in Hyderabad where his mother lives. Mira is offered a stay there by Siddharth. He also warns her not to say a word about his affair with the white woman, Vanessa. When Mira finally got there she was enamored by DurgabaiGokhale, Siddharth's mother. Her hospitality was utmost that she did not let Mira hunt for a room elsewhere. Mira had to go out of her ways for Durgabai to accept a small amount as rent. Thus started a beautiful friendship between Durgabai and Mira. She was gynecologist, pediatrician and obstetrician – all rolled into one. She considered her profession as a service and treated everyone who came to her with compassion. All her students have grown into sprawling doctors drawing lucrative salaries,

but she considered it as a mere farce. She was a staunch nationalist and would glisten with pride when she delivered babies. “A new India is being born,” she says. There is also a reference to Durgabai Gokhale where she treats a boy mauled by a leopard with concern, compassion and care. She had a wave of sympathy and admiration for everyone around who tried to offer the world their own space of compassion and generosity. She talks very endearingly about the bicycle man who picks up children out of the streets and treat them as well as he can with some rice and dhal. He represents the element of innate goodness in an individual. In the wake of impending problems of the Indian nation in the making, struck by the most basic yet lethal calamities like poverty, the bicycle man does an exceptional service to the society by adopting the boys. More information about Durgabai is spilled by her friend, Swami Chari who described a fierce and individualistic Durga fighting with her mother to marry the man she loved. One evening, when the house was hovering in silence, Durgabai opened the baggage of her memories, narrating the death of her husband washed away from a tempestuous ship. She has still kept the spectacles he wore safely.

The Terrace At Night

This chapter basically deals with the narrator’s own predilections and perplexities. She is facing lot many conflicts within herself. Firstly her education has been in Nottingham, really far away from the place she was born, India. She was not completely ready to have a solitary Nottingham sojourn, but she had to. There were instances where she had to free herself from the age old customs imposed on her by her culture. Hence to go against those she adopted certain symbolic ways of dissent like eating with her left hand. It was not to prove her dissent to anyone but herself. However, she was unable to completely frame her individuality there and when Sona Nivas College of Hyderabad offered her a job, she was quick to accept that.

However, even in Hyderabad, she was experiencing conflicts and a sense of belonginglessness pervaded her sensibilities. There is an instance where she tells Ramu that she is a twenty five year old woman aspiring to write her thoughts. But she is not able to take off from her mind the excess Wordsworth and Husserl that she had done in Nottingham. She becomes a prisoner to the vagaries of celebrated writers.

Countless number of times, she could relate herself to the poet Wordsworth, who was always the poet of the country, who wanted to travel to those lands where his heart laid. We also see the marital and sexual conflict of Indian womanhood, where Mira’s mother has been in the look out for prospective grooms. Mira evades all that deciding to have no strings attached with one man and be constantly on the move. However, she explores her sexuality with Ramu, when she disrobes herself of her sari. Though Mira is constantly apprehensive about whether Ramu would think of her to be a bourgeoisie writer, after their sexual unison, they both in general and Mira in particular takes a more mature view about the social issues .

Thus the chapter then quickly return to the social issues where Limca Gowda is spending a fortune for idolizing himself. There is so much criticism against Limca Gowda stemming from the students. But the liberal V.C does not try to stop the activists and the chapter ends with Ever Ready’s detour which is ever mysterious to the common people.

Laura Ribaldo

This small chapter talks about Laura, a Goan Christian lady settled in Hyderabad with her

husband and her aspirations to migrate to Canada, which according to her is a paradise, as constructed for her by her sisters working there. She is a woman of few means, who is constantly abused by her husband. She is a devotee of the virgin of Calangute now moved to the church of Bomjesus in Goa. Laura and Rani have a very intimate friendship bonded over Bollywood and gossips.

What is substantial in this chapter might be the description towards the end about Gandhi, who breathed life into the struggle for independence some thirty years ago. But now he stood lifeless as statues all over India and the world, being merely an icon. That in fact is greater iconization compared to that of the virgin of Calangute

Wordsworth in Hyderabad

This chapter talks about Mira's Wordsworth class in a makeshift classroom. Her mind was not completely stable and she was preoccupied with the issue of Rameeza. However, she was unsure of making glaring remarks about it in the class. But finally he resolved to speaking about the atrocities India is facing since British Raj. She could not however complete it when Ramu came running asking her to suspend the class. Ramu told her two things, Little Mother was ill and Rameeza Be is half dead and the latter was more important. Hence they rushed to Gowliguda police station to rescue her.

Rameeza Be

This is a short but intense chapter where Rameeza is rescued from the police station by a group of people. Rameeza and her husband was walking back home after watching a movie and she was gang raped by a group of drunk policemen. The mob who rescued her created a huge ruckus in the city. However since Limca's birthday was hurrying near, the fury was contained. Ever ready arrested many people. It is suspected that Ramu is also among the ones who are arrested.

Her Fever

Little mother was in great agony. The most striking aspect about this chapter is that her agony is being compared to the happenings in Hyderabad. She even gets nightmares and finds parallels in the stagnant and equally violent atmosphere of the city. Slowly she unravels her memory in one of those darkest nights to Mira over some boiling dal. She talked about Savitribai, her sister who had attended Fatima, the Nizam's wife in labour a long long time ago. Savitribai saved the kid and the mother and Nizam luxuriously showered her with gold coins. However the cruel ways of the Nizam are described in the chapter. The reader could not just dismiss the cruelties of the Nizam as a story, but would find parallels in the current situation of Hyderabad.

A Dark Room

The chapter starts with Laura packing her stuff and thus her world to go to a new land- Canada. Meanwhile the curfew is lifted and there is just twenty four hours to Limca's birthday celebration. Ramu and Mira go to meet Rameeza through dark alleys and winding ways. Curiously, when they met Rameeza, she drew a picture – almost in a déjà vu manner- where blocks and rectangles made a pyramid where flesh soared out. A replica of what Mira had dreamt about the other day.

The History Lesson

This chapter has its name due to the incident where Ramu and Mira drink at the bar and Ramu gets a high, spilling out the brutalities on people throughout historical time. Finally they make their way to the hotel where Ramu stays and make love with each other. However, ultimately Ramu announces his plans to engage in active agitation and Mira shudders. The chapter ends where she climbs down the steps of the hotel, before day break, all alone.

CardboardCity

A myth is an extended metaphor, where one could peg stories to suit one's convenience. In this chapter LimcaGowda is trying to make a saga out of his life, blowing himself out of proportion. This made up cardboard city has drained every essence that Hyderabad ever had. The streets were wiped out clean from beggars, everyone wore a mask of jubilation- a pseudo carnivalesque spectacle spearheaded by every modern governments, witnessed round the globe. But as a poet has once remarked, Blood would be shed like mist but people would conquer in the end, there is this frenzy of a violent mob against Limca. One can only guess the ramification of it. Parallely, Rameeza is at Little Mother's house almost starting a conversation with Mira Kannadical.

MODULE II

A SECTION FROM AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN INDIAN

Sunny Days

1.The First Step

In the starting of the chapter, Sunil Gavaskar gets the complete attention of the reader by narrating events just after his birth. He was born with a tiny hole on his ear and his uncle happened to notice it. However on the next day, baby Gavaskar was replaced by some other baby accidentally, and fortunately due to the tiny hole which the uncle had seen earlier, he reached in the arms of his mother. If fortune had not shone well Gavaskar would have been in that fisherman's family sailing beyond the horizons now.

Then he moves on to talk about the impending help his parents have been on shaping his career. How his mom used to bowl at him in their small alleyway and was once hit by his straight drive is heart rendering. He also talks about his school, St. Xaviers, which played a prominent role in nurturing his dreams.

9. My Finest Hour

Sunil Gavaskar went to Trinidad and Tobago for a cricket match with the West Indies and is narrating his experience there. Firstly, he describes the immensely scorching heat of the island. After net practice, his throat almost chapped that he gulped ice cold water into his throat. Unfortunately he had a hole in his tooth that one ice crystal got into it. It was an unbearable pain since then. The most horrifying part was that he had to play a test stretching upto six days, from the next day. The team doctor forbade Gavaskar to extract the tooth since it would engage a lot of analgesics, which would in turn make him drowsy and unfit to play the game. However the match against the Windies was a memorable one, where he scored double hundreds in both the innings. It was one of the best matches in his career, but all he could think of was getting relief from his pain.

15. The Windies Again

This chapter is when the West Indies was touring India. Gavaskar was appointed the Vice Captain, but he was asked to remain silent about it. Later when the captain, Tiger Pataudi could not make it into the next match, Gavaskar was promoted as captain of the side. It was indeed a great moment for him to lead India from the front. However that did not materialize because his finger broke in the first match at Nasik. Thus the Calcutta match was played without him. He was hoping things would be better in the Madras match but was the reverse. He could play the test in Bombay at the new stadium, Wankhade. Gavaskar has so much praise for the crowd at Wankhade. He says that they know the spirit of Cricket and cheers for any team or player who plays good cricket not caring whether it is the home team or not. Some good cricket was played at Bombay and Windies won the match.

Simultaneously the Ranji trophy was also going on, where Bombay played against Karnataka. He says "The new stadium at Bangalore had brought luck for Karnataka the precious year and with it the Ranji trophy. The new stadium at Bombay had been equally lucky for us, and the Ranji Trophy was back with us for the twenty fifth time in forty years." However he says that his track record at the Ranji was dismal, failing to score a century for two successive years.

MODULE III

A TRAVELOGUE BY A MALAYALI WRITER IN TRANSLATION

In the Land of the Kappiris

III In South Rhodesia

South Rhodesia was then seen as a place in Africa where acute racial discrimination was practiced. Much like South Africa, it was a self-governed country, ruled by white people. The degree of racial discrimination could be assessed by looking at Pottekkatt's train journey to Rhodesia. There was a bogey, dirtier than a cowshed where the Kappiris crammed themselves in. It was a claustrophobic dungeon where no sunlight could enter. However there was the white's coupe which was an abode of luxury. In addition to that, the bogey Pottekkatt sat in was informally reserved for Asians, and no White would even come there by chance even though there was a lot of room in the compartment since he was the lone Asian traveler.

On reaching Bulawayo, he looked around for a porter to help him with luggages. Incidentally, he met a Tamilian porter who was more than happy to see an Indian and particularly a Madrasi in Rhodesia. He expressed his desire to see India, the stories about it which he has heard luxuriously from his father, an indentured migrant. He refused to take any money for his work, but gifted Pottekkatt a large Gold-leaf cigarette packet. In return he requested for an eccentric favour asking the author to send a magical thread or amulet from a Kerala magician to ward off his evil enemies and make his life prosperous.

On detour in Rhodesia he also saw the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, which shows the might of the tribe Sabaeans who drove away the indigenous Bushmen tribe, thus owning the entire expanse of gold mines. The Portuguese had reached Rhodesia through the Zambesi River, but it was the British who held strong there. This is the story of Rhodesia, sandwiched between Zambesi and Limpopo rivers.

IV The Victoria Falls

As Lord Curzon remarked, Victoria Falls is more fascinating than even the Niagra waterfalls of America. The average height of the former being 347 feet whereas the latter is only 170 feet tall. Brushing aside the statistical facts about Victoria, it is a larger than life wonder. It could be described as boulder of snowy mist falling freely through a majestic crevice amidst the gorges. The Victoria falls stand out from the rest of the waterfalls when one looks at its point of origin. It interestingly originates in the plains in contrast to many others that originate from the hills and the mountains. From there it traverses a great distance and has many islands floating on it. These islands divide the one majestic Zambesi into four waterfalls – the Eastern Cataract, Rainbow Falls, the Main Falls and Devil's Cataract. The water droplets falling out from the falls get dispersed on to the evergreen forest beside the waterfall and is thus being rained over for millions of years.

Pottekatt also saw a footprint on a rock there named as Eve's footprint which he equated to Sree Rama padam at Ramakalmedu near the Pamba River. He goes on to describe various sights of interests across the river. There is the statue of Lord Livingstone, who is allegedly given the accolade as the first European to witness the falls. There is also a carving of the year 1885 on the bark of a tree, when he first saw the falls. There is also the mention of a tree called baobab which is described as ugly with a large trunk and a bulging pot belly. It is indigenous to the Africas and is revered very highly

V The Indians of East Africa

Pottekatt mentions time and again that the Indian population in Africa comprised mainly the Gujaratis who were affluent businessmen. The rest of them were Malayalis who occupied clerical jobs and Tamilians who did manual labour. However, the British were not favorable to the multitude of Indians in Africa. This stemmed out from various reasons. Mainly, the Indians knew the language very well and had a very friendly attitude towards the Africans. They had everything from meat to clothes at one single place which the English could never dream about. However, Pottekatt does not have very good things to say about these greedy Baniyas. He says that they are also of the same mold as the British are exploiting the Africans to make profit. Nevertheless, the British wants to drive out Indians from Africa so that they can have a monopoly in exploitation. In degree, the Indian exploitation is much less when compared to the Europeans. Pottekatt then brings on an excerpt from the speech of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru who constantly asked the Indians settled in Africa to work for the welfare of Africa, which is seconded by the author. Unlike other chapters, here we see a disappointed Pottekatt criticizing the Indians who are proud of their Indianness, but shy away from its essence.

VI From Blantyre to Dodoma

This is a long chapter describing Pottekatt's journey through the forests to Dar-es-Salam or Tanganyika. The usual route to Tanganyika is to go to Beira by train and then proceed by ship. Pottekatt travelled first to Lilongwe by bus, thinking to catch the train to Beira. On his way, one of his luggages went missing, and he informed the askaris (policemen) about it. Though the author did not have any hope in locating his bag, the askaris meticulously fetched it for him. Till date, he does not know how the askaris managed it. In Lilongwe, his Maharashtrian host Mr. Dharabe told Pottekatt about his acquaintance, Mr. Gokhale who is going to Dodoma in his lorry, which would traverse the forests, thus reducing the total distance considerably. Pottekatt was more than happy to take this offer. Mr. Gokhale had only two things to talk about: his wife's culinary skills and the efficiency of his truck. Unfortunately, his truck's radiator failed and they were travelling through a drought hit area. Hence they had to buy water which cost them more than petrol on their way.

At Mbeya, Pottekatt realized that the whites do not allow the natives to live within the city. They have separate space outside the city limits, called the Native Towns. The Whites are on a civilizing mission trying to make the Kappiris sophisticated, he remarks jeeringly. However he does not stereotype the entire white population like that and fondly remembers Mr.V, an Englishman who is critical of the English ways.

VII Looking back at Nyasaland

Unfortunately, Pottekkatt in this chapter has looked at Nyasaland with a stereotypical vision of Africa being a dark continent. Nyasaland is a “dark country, its plains burnt and blackened by forest fires, its black people draped in black clothes.” Pottekkatt looks at Nyasaland with an outsider’s eye as he is one. But he does not show a big heart which is accommodating enough of others’ customs and beliefs. Instead takes the tone of a self-aggrandizing mission of civilization which the Europeans fondly call as the white man’s burden.

Nyasaland is a protectorate of the British. However, they have not done any massive developmental activities there since their only intention is that of exploitation. For instance Nyasaland has huge mineral wealth, but The British does not want to indulge in long term projects since they do not know for how long they would be in Nyasaland. Hence they only concentrate on tobacco cultivation.

Nyasa lake is the third largest lake in Africa. He mentions about the Yao tribe who came from Portuguese Africa. They have a custom called unyongo, where the boys and girls are taught conjugal rites and the art of love making. The Ngrus are another tribe and have cannibalistic traits. They file their upper teeth and make them sharp and pointed. They do not even hesitate to feed on their own kith and kin. However cannibalism has reduced considerably since the advent of the British.

VIII Swahili

Swahili is the common language of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar. It means the language of the coastal land. The uniqueness of Swahili is that they start with tight consonant clusters like mtoni and msumku. Swahili has greatly borrowed from Arabic and even Hindi. It is a simple language with no script of its own and uses the English script. Pottekkatt later unfolds an interesting anecdote about his ‘mastery’ of Swahili where he becomes a translator of Swahili between a bus driver and a penniless English man who boarded the bus.

IX The Indian Bwana

Indians mostly occupy the jobs of clerks or employees in private Indian school, if we except Gujaratis and other north Indian businessmen. They do not draw lucrative salaries unlike popular conception. The Holmes Salaries Commission had recommended a hike in their salary, but this nowhere reached the salary of the whites. However, since Africa is much cheaper than India, they could afford a luxurious lifestyle with splendid living rooms and three to four servants. They were given four months leave and second class tickets to visit their homelands in every four years. After retirement these Indians were skeptical about returning to India since they are unsure about the way their motherland would treat them.

He also talks about the antagonism that people from different parts of India have for each other, which is revised and reinforced in Africa. North Indians slight the Madrasis, Goans revel in the colonial glory and the likewise. Pottekkatt is deeply bothered about the trajectory of such intolerance and muses over how this could hold a nation together.