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### Check Your Progress 1

1. Discuss the theme of 'the fall of Arcadia' in *The Tree of Man*.

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#### 4.4 INDUSTRIALIZATION AND ITS URBAN DISCONTENT: ALIENATION

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man, whose mind is capable of knowing the deeper mysteries of human life. He is part of the Australian landscape but simultaneously separate from it, one of the most alienated characters of Patrick White.

White aptly expresses man's alienation with self and society through the character of Ray Parker in the novel. He appears to establish that material comforts, capitalism and industrial advances cannot enable mankind to penetrate the mystery of Being but rather enlarge the rupture between the man and his world. Contrasting the lives of Stan Parker and his son Ray Parker, White criticizes the mounting mechanization of human life driven by materialist greed. Ray Parker exhibits the impact of escalating materialism and mechanization of life. Unlike his father, he could not experience the union of man with nature: He is only himself and isolated. When Stan says that he wanted to pass on the beauty that he had discovered to his son

Now I must speak to this boy, he felt and convey to him something of what I know; it will be easier if we do it like this; and already he had greater confidence, seeing the sandy bushland, in which stood only the essentials of tree and shrub, the absorbed mounds of anthills, and the black sticks pointing in different directions on the ground. (*The Tree of Man*221)

However, Ray Parker is totally disinterested in this knowledge. He longed for and wanted to discover the city. He refuses to read the symbols of the bushland.

Stan's inability to hand on what he knows to his son, Ray, is one of the chief signs in the novel of the breakdown of the organic community under the impact of a rootless modernity. Cut off from his origins, Ray becomes utterly fragmented, yet visited in spite of himself by moments of nostalgia for the golden-grained world of childhood. (*The Tree of Man*10)

Ultimately, Ray can neither discover the beauty nor divinity of nature. He comes to the city, is involved in a racing scandal, and finally murdered.

Through the character of Ray Parker, Patrick White shows a deep disdain for modern commercial culture and urban life which creates an unfathomable void. White portrays modern urban life as dreadful, repulsive, prosaic and meaningless. He denounces the superficial self-gratifying and hedonism, the spiritual sterility of suburban life, its relentless materialism, covert cruelty, and the utter incapacity to love, indicating White's powerful aversion for suburban life. Ray Parker represents the spiritual emptiness of modern Australia, a hollow man living an aimless rotten life. It is not the same mystical 'Great Australian Emptiness' which his father Stan Parker has felt rather a diseased consciousness corrupted by the cult of cupidity and mammon-worship. Ray Parker, driven solely by his greed and sexual desire cannot experience the spiritual communion of which Stan Parker was capable. He is both evil and sick, having no 'inner life' of his father. He has become so alienated he cannot see his own disintegration due to his separateness from nature. A modern man living without natural and human community, he has expelled himself from the possibility of fulfillment which his father was capable of. Ray Parker symbolizes the dehumanized man, the essentially alienated modern man, which was White's earnest anxiety.

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#### 4.5 DECLINE OF RELIGION & MARRIAGE

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White witnessed that industrial growth, technological advancement and material under capitalism was adversely affecting religious faith of humanity. He could perceive total indifference to religion which prevailed among the masses, signalling the decline of religion. In the novel, through the character of Stan Parker, White has shown how religious impulse and the relationship between the erring man and his God is essential for a meaningful life. Although Stan Parker is not religious in the conventional sense, Nature itself stands as the manifestation of God: "Each leaf or scroll of bark was heavy in its implications" (*The Tree of Man* 342). Stan comes to an understanding that God can be found in a gob of spittle (*The Tree of Man*476). Nature and its catastrophes reveal to Stan the transcendental mysteries of God: "Even nature's acts of terror did begin to illuminate the opposite goodness and serenity of the many faces of God"(*The Tree of Man* 247). Just before his death, Stan discovers that "One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums" (*The Tree of Man* 477). White has contrasted Stan Parker's belief in divine power and 'communion of soul with scene' with his son Ray Parker's indifference to religion which he appears to attribute to industrialization, urbanization, consumerism, materialism etc. Ray Parker is an atheist; he does not believe in God, and the absence of God forces human beings to find meaning in life outside religion, particularly in sexual love. This propels Ray Parker towards perversity and tragic death.

*The Tree of Man* is not a story of idealized marriages. Barring the marriage of O'Dowds who exhibit "a triumph of love in squalor, of unearned devotion, of a marriage that persists against all reasonable objections" (Marr 288), none of the marital relationships in the novel are romantic. Stan Parker's marriage with Amy, though not visibly romantic, is based on traditional foundation of goodness and simplicity. They do feel passion and desire for each other, have romantic yearnings, however, it lacks the greater fulfillment they are looking for. Still their shared lives of passionate involvement and eerie indifference provides them partial satisfaction: "Man and woman were flung against each other with the ease and simplicity of tossed wood.

They lay and looked at each other, into each other's eyes, as the dog licked their hands with slow, rough system, as if he had discovered a new state" (*The Tree of Man*48). They certainly have married love, if not romantic love, and it would be wrong to assume that their marriage was in decline. Even when Amy commits adultery with Leo in a fitful moment, she feels heavy bouts of guilt. In fact, they recognize their faults, but endure each other. The couple has a long, lasting, monotonous and complacent marriage. In contrast, Ray Parker's marriage is loveless, a clumsy and destructive liaison. He remains dissatisfied forging extra-marital liaisons and is finally murdered at his mistress's place. Thelma Parker's marriage to Dudley Frosdyke is conventional marriage. It elevates her social class. Perhaps she looks upon marriage as a profession, wherein she plays her role as faithful wife very well. However, it lacks the warmth of sexual passion, an understanding of the language of flesh, which was easily discernible in the marriage of her parents. Patrick White is not entirely opposed to marriage, portraying marriage neither as a wholly positive nor as a negative experience. He just shows how the meaning and function of marriage changed in subtle ways with the transformation of Australia from a pastoral country to an industrial nation.

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#### 4.6 LET US SUM UP

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*The Tree of Man* is a profound novel that marks the transition of Australia from preindustrial pastoral country to an industrial nation. The novel shows the decline of traditional pastoral values and cultural frameworks and how these were gradually replaced with modern values in the aftermath of industrialization, urbanization and technological progress, recording the profound changes it wrought in in people's daily experiences and prevailing worldviews.

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#### 4.6 QUESTIONS

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1. "*The Tree of Man* is a profound novel that marks the transition of Australia from preindustrial pastoral country to an industrial nation." Discuss.

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